

The Strategy Evaluation Protocol

2027-2033

Universities of The Netherlands
KNAW
NWO

Colophon

The Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2027–2033 is a publication of UNL (Universities of the Netherlands), KNAW (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences) and NWO (Dutch Research Council).

Committee

Jacquelien Scherpen – Rector Magnificus, Board of the University of Groningen, representing UNL
Geert de Snoo – Director of Research Policy, representing KNAW
Wim van der Zande – Director of ARCNL, representing the Institutes Organisation of NWO (NWO-I)

Working group

Darco Jansen (chair) – UNL
Amber Heijboer – KNAW
Thecla van Wageningen – NWO-I
Anneke Hendriks – Leiden University
Claire Hoencamp – TU Delft
Els Swennen – Maastricht University Medical Centre
Meta van Diest-Links – University of Amsterdam
Raymond Schorno – NWO-I
Rianne van Eerd – Eindhoven University of Technology
Sharon Bijen-Groenberg – University of Twente
Stefan de Jong – Erasmus University Rotterdam
Network secretaries research visits

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The Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP) outlines the aims and methods through which to evaluate research across both Dutch universities and institutes affiliated with NWO and KNAW every six years[1]. Like its predecessors, the current SEP was both developed and approved by Universities of the Netherlands (UNL), the Dutch Research Council (NWO, and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). These organisations have committed to evaluating all of the research conducted within their organisations between 2027 and 2033 in accordance with this protocol.

In order to ensure the quality and Societal Relevance of research as well as the Viability of research units in the Netherlands, systematic evaluations have been conducted at universities and research institutes from the 1980s onwards. The universities began doing this in the 1990s based upon a general protocol (VSNU-protocol 1994 and VSNU protocol 1998). Since 2003, the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) – a national protocol for universities and NWO and KNAW institutions which is updated every six years – has been at the heart of the Research Quality assurance system. The system of comparative assessments at the national level was abandoned from the SEP 2003-2009 onwards, due to criticisms of discipline-wide assessments, namely the fact that research units were not genuinely comparable. Since 2021, the emphasis has shifted towards research units' own strategies, with a particular focus on formative and development-oriented evaluations. This shift has also prompted a change in the protocol's name from *Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015-2021* to *Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021-2027*. This approach will continue in the SEP 2027-2033. The principal changes in this version centre on clarifying the nature of the SEP and reducing redundancy, whilst, simultaneously, reflecting recent developments within science and society at large. Furthermore, the revised SEP reinforces the significance of the three criteria of the SEP in relation to the aspects while also providing clearer guidance concerning the flexible usage of the protocol.

1 Article 1.18 of the Higher Education and Research Act states that the board [...] shall ensure that [...] the quality of the institution's activities is regularly assessed. [...]. As such, various quality assurance processes and instruments are used, including this protocol. (Find an overview of these processes here)

Preface

Paying close attention to quality is essential when conducting any type of scientific research activity. Quality control, above all, requires self-reflection, assessments, open discussion, and follow-up systems to be in place. The government expects research institutions to regularly evaluate the quality of their research activities. UNL, KNAW, and NWO opted to have independent committees evaluate their research units' achievements every six years based on the Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP). The Committee implores all actors in this process to wholeheartedly embrace the process, whether they are university boards, NWO-I and KNAW, research units, scientific researchers, or experts from visiting committees.

All modern scientific organisations have a responsibility that extends beyond scientific outputs alone. The SEP helps in this process by virtue of its transparent evaluation processes that focus on three criteria: 1) Research Quality, 2) Societal Relevance, and 3) Viability. Given that research units have different strategies, the SEP does not explicitly prescribe how these criteria should be included, but rather encourages research units to make their own choices with respect to the criteria.

All of the different actors involved in the evaluation process should be in agreement prior to completing the self-assessment and formulate a robust supporting narrative that draws upon self-selected and well-substantiated indicators that i) reflect the research unit as a whole, rather than individual researchers, ii) clearly outlines the context of the chosen indicator and iii) and are in alignment with (inter)national agreements, such as, for example, the guidelines of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA).

To be clear, the SEP process is not about the quantitative comparison of different research units within a larger research structure. No marks are given at the end of the process. Nevertheless, the Committee does recommend discussing the SEP process, both with multiple other research units and the board of the research organisation itself, in order to establish a common reference point prior to writing the self-evaluation. The Committee also advises institutions to integrate the external evaluation committee's report within their own local quality assurance cycles, in order to ensure both that the recommendations are effectively followed up on and that there are ongoing discussions about the Quality, Societal Relevance and Viability of their research.

The Committee of the SEP 2027 - 2033

Introduction

The SEP is a flexible instrument for evaluating the quality and Societal Relevance of research as well as the Viability of research units themselves with respect to their own aims and strategies. The protocol allows for significant freedom in the interpretation and application of various evaluation criteria and supporting aspects, in order to account for different institutional contexts, different research disciplines, and the nature of the research units. We strongly recommend that research units take advantage of this flexibility by consciously considering their own quality standards and quality assurance processes. This will help them to optimise the benefits of the external evaluation for their research unit and minimise the workload.

This document is intended for everyone who works with the SEP: researchers, heads of research units, policy officers, board members, and members and secretaries of evaluation committees. Specifically, it provides all the information that is required to organise and carry out external research evaluations.

The SEP is a flexible instrument that facilitates productive conversations about the continuous development of research units' strategies and achievements, including research quality assurance processes.

The SEP 2027–2033 is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 describes the main goals, elements and principles of the SEP and visualises the different actions involved;

Chapter 2 describes the actions to be carried out by the responsible board;

Chapter 3 describes the actions to be carried out by the research unit;

Chapter 4 describes the actions to be carried out by the evaluation committee.

The appendices provide checklists relating to procedures and the correct formats for producing the documents during the external evaluation process.

We recommend that researchers, heads of research units and policy officers at the departmental or institute level should at the very least closely read Chapters 1 and 3 as well as Appendices A–D. Board members and policy officers at the central/board level will find Chapters 1 and 2 as well as Appendices D-E to be of particular relevance to their respective roles within the evaluation process. We recommend that members of the evaluation committees consult Chapters 1 and 4 along with Appendices A, D and E. Finally, secretaries of the committees will especially benefit from reading Chapters 1–4 and Appendices A and D.

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Summary in Dutch

Het Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP) voor 2027-2033 is vastgesteld door UNL, NWO en KNAW. Het SEP is een flexibel instrument voor het evalueren van de kwaliteit en maatschappelijke relevantie van onderzoek, evenals de levensvatbaarheid van onderzoekseenheden. De SEP-evaluaties geven besturen en onderzoekseenheden de gelegenheid de kwaliteit van het onderzoek te monitoren en te verbeteren in het kader van de doorlopende institutionele kwaliteitszorgcyclus. Er worden geen kwantitatieve beoordelingen gegeven aan onderzoekseenheden; de nadruk ligt op een formatieve en ontwikkelingsgerichte evaluatie.

Met het protocol worden onderzoekseenheden binnen publieke onderzoeksinstellingen in een zesjarige cyclus door een onafhankelijke externe commissie geëvalueerd. De evaluatie gebeurt op basis van de eigen doelstellingen en strategieën van de onderzoekseenheid en wordt uitgevoerd aan de hand van een zelfevaluatie, en werkbezoek.

Het SEP is een flexibel instrument dat productieve gesprekken mogelijk maakt over de continue ontwikkeling van de strategieën en resultaten van onderzoekseenheden, inclusief processen voor kwaliteitsborging van onderzoek.

Drie evaluatiecriteria

Bij de evaluatie volgens het SEP staan drie criteria centraal:

1. Kwaliteit van het onderzoek;
2. Maatschappelijke relevantie van het onderzoek;
3. Toekomstbestendigheid van de eenheid.

Deze criteria moeten worden toegepast op de strategieën en resultaten van de onderzoekseenheid. De criteria worden geëvalueerd over de afgelopen zes jaar binnen een disciplinaire, internationale, nationale en – waar van toepassing – regionale context. Met betrekking tot alle drie de criteria gaat het vooral om hoe beleid en intenties in de praktijk zijn gebracht en welke concrete resultaten daaruit zijn voortgekomen. Het protocol biedt aanzienlijke vrijheid in de selectie van ondersteunende indicatoren om de evaluatiecriteria te beschrijven. Dit biedt de mogelijkheid om rekening te houden met verschillen tussen instellingen, onderzoeksdisciplines en de aard van de onderzoekseenheden.

De criteria worden beïnvloed door minstens vier aspecten die voortvloeien uit het internationale en Nederlandse wetenschapsbeleid en die de academische verantwoordelijkheden van onderzoekseenheden benadrukken: i) PhD-beleid en -opleiding, ii) Open Science, iii) Verantwoorde Onderzoekspraktijken en iv) Academische Cultuur. De aspecten zijn nadrukkelijk geen afzonderlijke evaluatiecategorieën maar ondersteunend aan de drie criteria. Zij fungeren als randvoorwaarden, faciliterende thema's of beleidsonderwerpen die de prestaties van de onderzoekseenheid op het gebied van de criteria beïnvloeden en vormgeven. De eenheid wordt gevraagd focus te leggen op elementen uit de aspecten die in het verleden hebben bijgedragen aan hun prestaties op de

drie criteria, of welke potentieel zullen bijdragen aan hun toekomstige strategie. De elementen uit de verschillende aspecten kunnen flexibel worden ingezet om de prestaties en de verdere doorontwikkeling van de onderzoekseenheid te onderbouwen.

Het evaluatieproces

Het bestuur waaronder een eenheid valt – universiteit, NWO of KNAW – bepaalt wanneer de zesjaarlijkse evaluatie van elke onderzoekseenheid plaatsvindt. De evaluatie gebeurt op basis van de eigen strategische doelen van de onderzoekseenheid en wordt uitgevoerd aan de hand van een zelfevaluatie en een evaluatie door een onafhankelijke, externe commissie inclusief werkbezoek. In overleg met de eenheid stelt het bestuur een geschikte commissie samen en geeft deze de opdracht tot evaluatie.

De basis van de evaluatie wordt gevormd door een zelfevaluatierapport, te schrijven als een samenhangend betoog van maximaal 20 pagina's, exclusief bijlagen en casestudies. Het zelfevaluatierapport gaat in op eigen activiteiten en resultaten van de afgelopen zes jaar en op de doelstellingen en ambities voor de komende jaren, beide toegespitst op de drie criteria. Daarbij beschrijft de eenheid tevens hoe het onderzoek wordt georganiseerd en uitgevoerd om deze doelstellingen en ambities te realiseren, en welke concrete activiteiten en resultaten hebben bijdragen aan de drie criteria. De keuzes van de onderzoekseenheid zijn leidend zowel m.b.t. het narratief, de ondersteunende casestudies en de kwalitatieve en kwantitatieve onderbouwingen.

Het zelfevaluatierapport wordt beoordeeld door de externe commissie, waarbij zowel de ontwikkelingen en resultaten van de eenheid in de afgelopen zes jaar, als ook de onderzoeksplannen voor de komende jaren, worden bekeken. De commissie bezoekt tevens de eenheid en schrijft een concept-evaluatierapport met aanbevelingen voor verbeteringen, onder meer met betrekking tot de zelf geformuleerde doelstellingen en strategie van de eenheid.

De eenheid corrigeert eventuele feitelijke onjuistheden in het concept-evaluatierapport, daarna volgt het definitieve evaluatierapport met aanbevelingen. Het bestuur bespreekt het rapport met de eenheid en schrijft een reflectie waarin ook aan de orde komt wat er met de uitkomsten gebeurt. Het bestuur is verplicht binnen zes maanden na het bezoek van de evaluatiecommissie de volgende documenten openbaar te maken: de samenvatting van het zelfevaluatierapport inclusief casestudies, het rapport van de evaluatiecommissie en de reflectie van het bestuur daarop. In het jaarverslag van de universiteit, NWO of KNAW staat welke eenheden zijn geëvalueerd, wat de hoofdconclusies en aanbevelingen waren en welke actie is ondernomen voor de opvolging daarvan.

1. Overview of the SEP

This chapter presents an overview of the main elements involved in a SEP evaluation. The next chapters provide a more detailed description of the different actions required for the evaluation.

Main goals and principles of a SEP evaluation

In the Netherlands, research units are evaluated every six years by independent external evaluation committees. The **SEP** – developed by the Dutch knowledge institutions UNL, KNAW and NWO – outlines the principles, aims, and methods for primarily formative and development-oriented evaluations. There are challenges associated with objectively evaluating research units, as indicators and rankings provide an overly simplified measure of academic performance. Instead, the SEP promotes a more nuanced, contextualised approach that facilitates a structured and ongoing dialogue around quality assurance. From the perspective of the SEP, the evaluation process prioritises research units' own strategies and achievements, and strives for qualitative evaluation alongside the responsible use of specific quantitative indicators.[2] The SEP emphasises continuous development within a quality assurance cycle rather than, for example, carrying out a one-time external evaluation every six years. This is why the evaluation committee is asked to provide feedback to help improve the strategy and future achievements of research units. Alongside its primary aim of fostering internal improvement within research units, the SEP also has a secondary summative goal of ensuring accountability to the government and society at large, which is why the committee report itself and the board's position on it are made publicly available.

Self-evaluation report

As previously mentioned, the evaluation of research units is carried out in relation to their specific strategies and achievements. In order to support a development-oriented evaluation that provides valuable insights, research units prepare a self-evaluation report that takes the form of a coherent, narrative argument. Within this report, a research unit must critically reflect on their strategy, achievements and challenges over the previous six-year period, before proceeding to describe how this will inform their strategy for the next six-year period. This narrative should be supported by evidence drawn from self-selected and well-substantiated qualitative and quantitative indicators, and case studies. References to institutional and national policies can also be included as a means through which to clarify how the research unit is positioned within the prevailing institutional/national context. This should always be connected to the research unit's own actions as well as their implementation of these policies.

For additional information on the actions required from research units, see Chapter 3. For further information on case studies and indicators, please see Appendix D (Supporting the narrative).

2 The SEP aligns fully with CoARA's common vision, emphasising qualitative judgement, with peer review at its core and the responsible use of quantitative indicators. It also aligns with the Dutch national Rewards & Recognition programme and Open Science ambitions. The protocol follows the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) adopted by KNAW, UNL and NWO.

External evaluation committee & committee report

The evaluation is carried out by an external evaluation committee, comprising independent academic peers and, optionally, non-academic experts who are appointed by the responsible board (see Chapter 2). The evaluation committee bases its evaluation of the research unit on both the self-evaluation report and site visit, during which they interview representatives from the research unit and any other relevant stakeholders. The evaluation committee evaluates the research unit's achievements over the previous six-year period and its future strategic plans, focusing on the evaluation criteria outlined below. The findings and recommendations are presented in a committee report, which is submitted to the responsible board and subsequently serves to guide internal discussions and decision-making processes within the research unit. The research unit's responses to the committee report are periodically discussed as an integral component of the ongoing research quality assurance cycle. The committee report can thus be said to support both the research unit and responsible board in making well-informed strategic decisions over the ensuing six-year period.

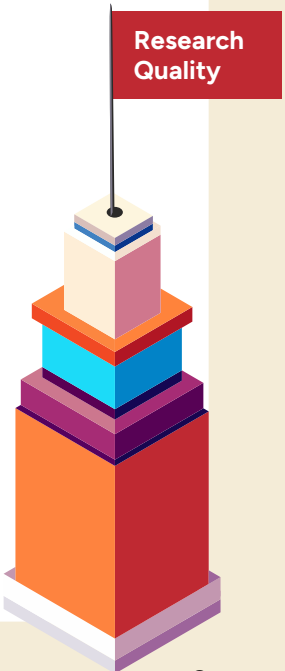
Evaluation criteria

Evaluations are based on three criteria: 1) **Research Quality**, 2) **Societal Relevance**, and 3) **Viability**, which are described below. These criteria must be applied to research units' strategies and achievements. They are applied across the previous six-year period within a disciplinary, international, national, and – where appropriate – regional context. In relation to all three criteria, it is not simply a question of the existence of policies or the intentions of research units, but primarily of how these have been put into practice and the tangible outcomes that have been generated as a result.

Research Quality

The evaluation considers an individual research unit's efforts to safeguard the quality of their research as well as illustrating the originality, inventiveness and scientific impact of their research and its contributions to scientific knowledge. In its self-evaluation report, the research unit must put forward a narrative about the quality of their research, using case studies and qualitative and quantitative indicators (see Appendix D). More specifically, the self-evaluation report should demonstrate how the research unit's activities have generated scientific impact and enhanced the quality of their research. For example, how do international collaborations or HR policy contribute to the unit's Research Quality, or, alternatively, how does the research unit apply proven scientific methodologies or contribute to metascience and science-of-science, and so on. This narrative could also include actions that have been taken to encourage both scientific risk-taking and theoretical innovation, such as proposing new questions and perspectives that can challenge established paradigms.

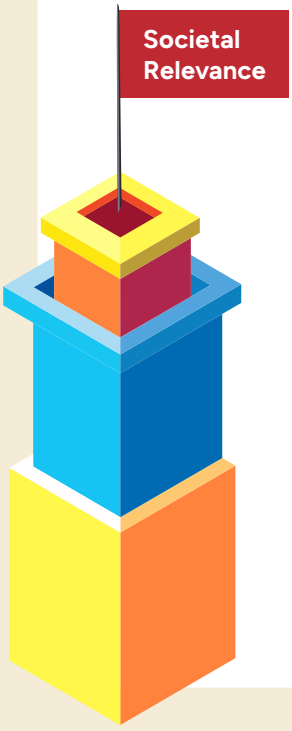
Key articles or other general indicators of scholarly output that support the narrative argument can also be included. When using indicators to support the qualitative narrative, firstly, their context must be well-described, and secondly, they must be shown to be in alignment with national and international agreements. Furthermore, it is important that indicators reflect the research unit as a whole, rather than individual researchers (see Appendix D). The



evaluation also addresses a research unit's actions with respect to the impact of its contributions within the scientific community or to quality assurance processes. This can be measured by, amongst other things, an uptake in reviews, the use of developed software or hardware and the use or reuse of FAIR datasets. Additionally, the research unit must reflect on their academic reputation and leadership within the field. This can be demonstrated by, amongst other things, secondary appointments, the number and prestige of the research grants they have been awarded, widespread implementation of research methods developed by the research unit, or increased interest in the institution from prospective researchers and PhD candidates.

Societal Relevance

Societal Relevance is evaluated based on of the research unit's broader societal impact, public engagement, and outreach. In the self-evaluation report, the research unit must outline the strategic choices that were made over the previous six-year period in order to prove their Societal Relevance. Once again, coherent narratives are central in this regard, although they must be substantiated wherever possible with evidence. These narrative arguments must be supported with quantitative and qualitative evidence of the research unit's impact and engagement (see Appendix D). The research unit must describe the methods and measures it has utilised to achieve and assess its Societal Relevance, and underscore their main accomplishments within this area.

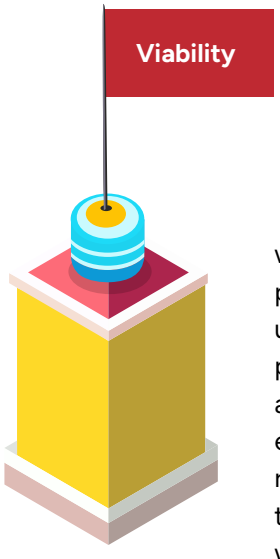


In practice, we see that Societal Relevance can be achieved in several ways. For example, it can be achieved through collaborations, citizen science, co-creation, and Open Science practices, contributions to regional or national policy, advisory work and science communication, or, alternatively, through education and teaching, or via start-ups and social ventures. Other examples include the use of databases or websites by non-academic audiences, publications or outreach activities that target the general public (such as books, book chapters, open education, lifelong learning programmes, collaborations with science museums, science-for-policy activities, media appearances), uptake of research in policy documents, and contribution to teaching (e.g. integration of research findings within educational materials across different levels).

When evaluating Societal Relevance, it is important to realise that such impact can often take longer than six years to properly manifest. Therefore, any societally relevant outcomes observed over the previous six-year period may in fact be the outcome of research that was conducted by the research unit long before that measurement period. Similarly, research focused on addressing current societal developments may only yield results in the long term, meaning that its outcomes cannot yet be fully known or measurable. Acknowledging this fact is therefore vitally important to ensure that the evaluation remains fair and properly contextualised with respect to this criterion.

Viability

Viability is evaluated based on the research unit's development over the previous six-year period, as



well as their future strategy's potential to strengthen the unit's scientific and societal position. This includes, amongst other things, evaluating the research unit's resilience and its capacity to adapt to emerging trends within the research field such as shifting their research focus and strategic partnerships to address current societal challenges including for example financial developments and political and geopolitical shifts. In their self-evaluation reports, research units must outline a strategic vision for the next six-year period. This should include key priorities and planned activities, and guidance on how the unit intends to adapt to anticipated external developments at the national and international level. The research unit also needs to describe how the structure of its leadership, governance, and internal management is capable of effectively implementing this strategy.

Aspects

In addition to the three aforementioned criteria, there are at least four aspects which derive from international and Dutch science policy and serve to underscore the academic responsibilities of research units: i) PhD Policy and Training, ii) Open Science, iii) Responsible Research Practices and iv) Academic Culture. These aspects may be supplemented with additional aspects to reflect the strategic priorities of the research unit and the specific context within which they are operating. These aspects can thus be said to serve as *enabling conditions, preconditions*, or *themes* that influence and shape the research unit's achievements with respect to the three aforementioned criteria. Allowing for the flexible application of these aspects enables research units to emphasise their distinctive approach and strategic direction, whilst referring to national and institutional policies where relevant.

The aspects should not be treated as separate evaluation categories but rather as **integrated elements** that affect a research unit's Research Quality, Societal Relevance and Viability (see also Appendix A). In the self-evaluation report, research units are therefore expected to demonstrate how these aspects – and the specific elements within them – have contributed to their performance with respect to the three criteria in the SEP, in terms of the past and how they will contribute to their future strategy. This requires research units to focus on the concrete actions that have been taken and the outcomes that were achieved, rather than on describing policy intentions or frameworks. The aim is to underscore exactly how policies have been implemented in practice, and their current and future impact. Open Science, for instance, can contribute to the strategy of the research unit with respect to all three criteria when it is implemented in practice. It does so by making the research unit's data and research findings publicly available as soon as possible, thereby increasing transparency and reducing biases (Research Quality), enabling societal actors to use the results (Societal Relevance) and strengthening the research unit's position through greater visibility and potential collaborations (Viability). Conversely, another research unit may place greater emphasis on the pre-registration of (all) essential steps during research (increasing reproducibility), thus positioning Open Science mainly as part of Research Quality. On the other hand, focusing on public engagement, such as with citizen science, would situate Open Science more in the realm of social relevance.

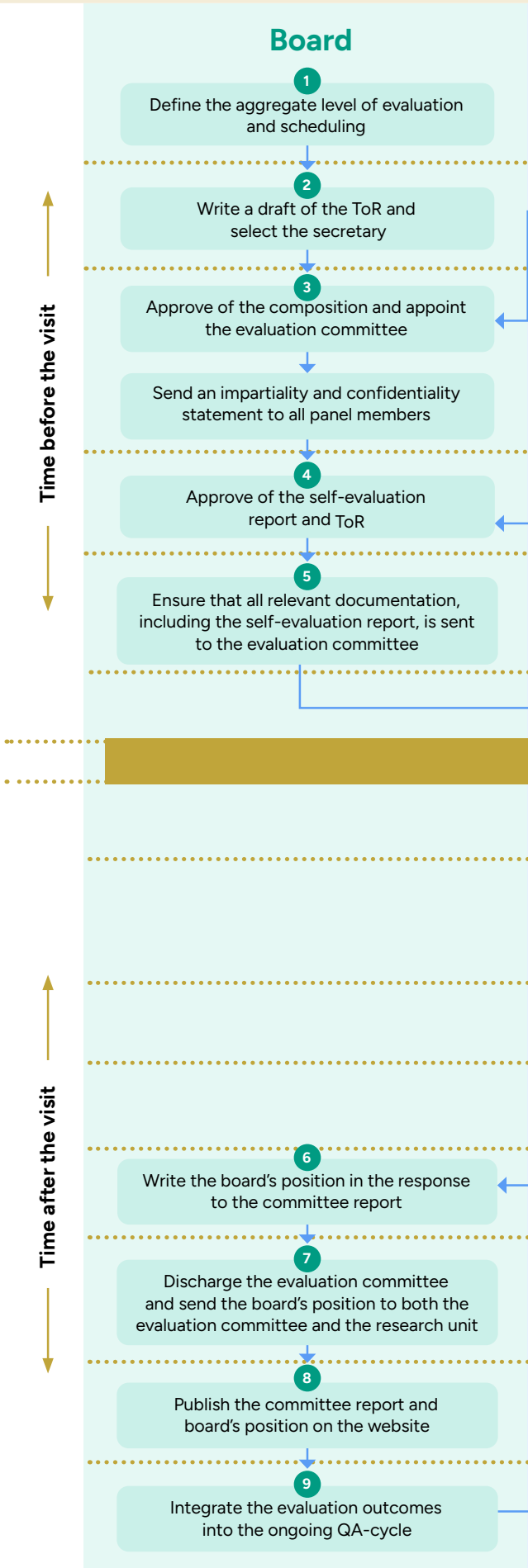
Evaluation process

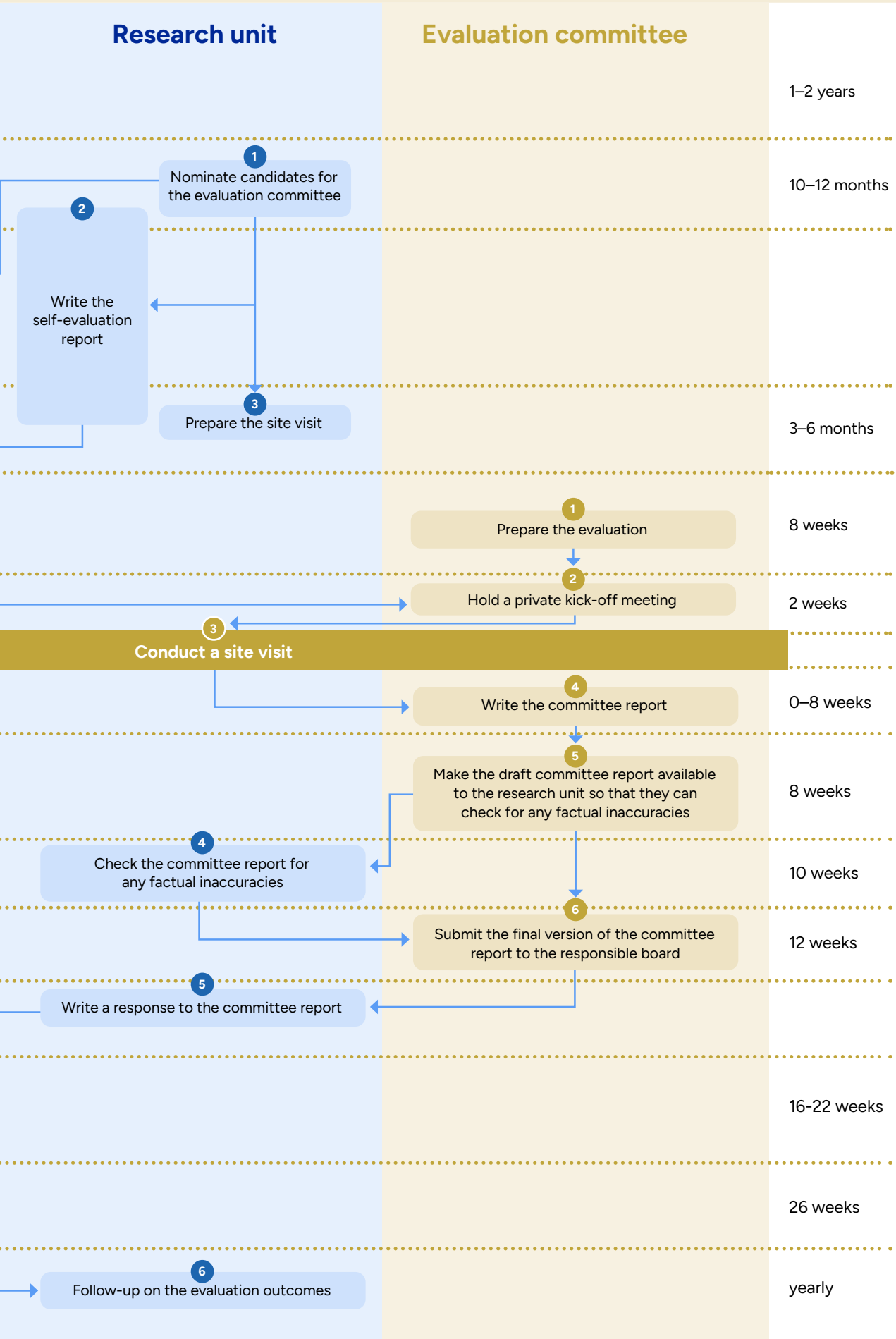
The diagram provides an overview of the evaluation process as it is outlined within this protocol. Specifically, it presents the key actions and interactions between the research unit, the responsible board and the evaluation committee, which are mapped against a general timeline.

It is clear that the process begins long before the site visit, when the evaluation committee visits the research unit, and ends with the integration of the evaluation outcomes within the institution's quality assurance cycle. Each phase involves specific responsibilities for the parties involved, thus ensuring a thorough and transparent evaluation.

The following chapters provide a detailed explanation of the tasks that each stakeholder group must carry out:

- Chapter 2 – the responsible board
- Chapter 3 – the research unit
- Chapter 4 – the evaluation committee




Research unit
Evaluation committee
1–2 years
1 Nominate candidates for the evaluation committee
10–12 months
2 Write the self-evaluation report
3 Prepare the site visit
3–6 months
1 Prepare the evaluation
8 weeks
2 Hold a private kick-off meeting
2 weeks
3 Conduct a site visit
4 Write the committee report
0–8 weeks
5 Make the draft committee report available to the research unit so that they can check for any factual inaccuracies
8 weeks
4 Check the committee report for any factual inaccuracies
10 weeks
6 Submit the final version of the committee report to the responsible board
12 weeks
5 Write a response to the committee report
16-22 weeks
26 weeks
6 Follow-up on the evaluation outcomes
yearly

2. Actions to be carried out by the responsible board

This chapter describes the evaluation process and related actions from the perspective of the responsible board:

1. **Define the aggregate level of evaluation and scheduling;**
2. **Write a draft of the Terms of Reference and select the secretary;**
3. **Approve of the composition and appoint the evaluation committee;**
4. **Approve of the self-evaluation report and the Terms of Reference;**
5. **Ensure that the relevant documentation, including the self-evaluation report, is sent to the evaluation committee;**
6. **Write the board's position in the response to the committee report;**
7. **Discharge the evaluation committee;**
8. **Publish the relevant documents on the website;**
9. **Integrate the evaluation outcomes within the quality assurance cycle.**



1 Define the aggregate level of evaluation and scheduling

The responsible board defines the aggregate level of the research unit(s) to be evaluated. It may choose to evaluate a research group, research department, research institute, research cluster, or the research activities within a particular faculty. Alternatively, it may implement a multi-layered evaluation across various units under a thematic organisation.[3]

The board defines the aggregate level of the research unit(s) to be evaluated based on the following conditions:

- The research unit must have at least ten research FTEs amongst their permanent academic staff (including tenure-track positions and excluding PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers).
- The research unit must have its own clearly defined strategy.
- The research unit must have existed for at least three years prior to the evaluation. If more recently established research units are being evaluated, their self-evaluation report must indicate their developmental stage, so that the evaluation committee can consider this within the evaluation.

The responsible board also determines the overall schedule of the research evaluation and ensures transparency by publishing this schedule online.

3 If an evaluation is organised within a national context, it may be useful to draw up a plan of action and/or a disciplinary protocol. The coordinating institution would then submit this plan of action or disciplinary protocol to the responsible boards involved in granting approval.

It decides when each research unit will be evaluated and informs all parties involved well in advance. The responsible board and the research unit jointly determine who holds financial and/or logistical responsibility for specific elements of the site visit (e.g. travel and accommodation, catering, etc.).

2 Write a draft of the Terms of Reference and select the secretary

The Terms of Reference outline the purpose of the SEP, placing particular emphasis on the central role of the research unit's own strategy and achievements within the evaluation process, while also granting the unit autonomy in choosing the most relevant qualitative and quantitative indicators aligned with this strategy. The Terms of Reference also provide background information on the research unit itself, as well as any additional questions that the evaluation committee needs to consider. Therefore, in consultation with the research unit, we recommend defining a draft of the Terms of Reference prior to selecting the evaluation committee members. When evaluating more recently established units, the Terms of Reference must stress their developmental stage.
The responsible board also ensures the appointment of an independent and qualified secretary to support the work of the evaluation committee. This secretary, who is familiar with the evaluation processes in the Netherlands, supports the committee in interpreting and applying the SEP, but does not serve as a member of the committee.

3 Approve of the composition and appoint the evaluation committee

Ultimately, the responsible board determines the procedure for establishing the evaluation committee. It may either ask the research unit to nominate a candidate chairperson and members for approval, or it may first appoint a nominated chairperson and subsequently consult with the chairperson over the selection of other members. The chairperson must have good knowledge of, and extensive experience working with and within the Dutch research system, including its funding mechanisms and PhD programmes.

The responsible board ensures that the evaluation committee is sufficiently diverse and capable of evaluating a research unit's Research Quality, Societal Relevance and Viability within its national and international context, and that all members have signed a statement confirming their impartiality. The specific requirements for the evaluation committee are listed in Appendix E.

Once the evaluation committee's composition has been approved, the responsible board formally appoints the evaluation committee prior to the site visit. The responsible board also ensures that the institution or research unit provides appropriate compensation to the evaluation committee members, in terms of their time and the expenses that they incurred during the evaluation.

4 Approve of the self-evaluation report and the Terms of Reference

The responsible board approves the self-evaluation report provided by the research unit. Taking into account any changes or clarifications to the draft version of the Terms of Reference that may have emerged during consultations with the research unit or the selection of evaluation committee members, the board then approves the Terms of Reference.

5 Ensure that all the relevant documentation, including the self-evaluation report, is sent to the evaluation committee

The responsible board ensures that the evaluation

committee receives the Terms of Reference, together with the Strategy Evaluation Protocol, the self-evaluation report and the logistical arrangements for the site visit at least six weeks (preferably eight weeks) prior to the visit.

6 Write the board's position in the response to the committee report

After receiving the final committee report and the research unit's response to that report, the responsible board then drafts the board's position reflecting on the outcomes of the evaluation and outlining how follow-up actions will be monitored as part of the research quality assurance cycle.

7 Discharge the evaluation committee

The responsible board formally discharge the evaluation committee and sends the boards position document to both the evaluation committee and the research unit.

8 Publish the relevant documents on the website

In order to promote public accountability, the responsible board must ensure that the following documents are published and easily accessible on the institution's website within six months of the site visit:

1. A summary of the self-evaluation report of the research unit (including case studies);
2. The committee report by the evaluation committee;
3. The board's position.

9 Integrate the evaluation results within the quality assurance cycle

The responsible board monitors follow-up actions based on the outcomes of the committee report at regular intervals as part of its internal quality assurance processes. Institutions and research units may choose to conduct mid-term reviews between two SEP evaluations if a research unit significantly changes its strategy, for example.

The SEP evaluations prompt the responsible board and research units to continuously discuss and refine the research unit's strategy and achievements as part of their ongoing research quality assurance processes.

The board's annual report, published each year, specifies which research units were evaluated, summarises the main conclusions and recommendations, outlines any follow-up actions and identifies which research units are scheduled for evaluation in the coming year.



3. Actions to be carried out by the research unit

This chapter describes the evaluation process and the related actions that the research unit needs to carry out:

1. **Nominate candidates for the evaluation committee;**
2. **Write the self-evaluation report;**
3. **Prepare the site visit;**
4. **Check the committee report for any factual inaccuracies;**
5. **Write a response to the committee report;**
6. **Follow-up on the evaluation outcomes.**

1 Nominate candidates for the evaluation committee

The responsible board establishes the evaluation committee based on the input from the research unit. The research unit nominates a candidate chairperson and candidate members. The responsible board and the research unit ensure that the evaluation committee is sufficiently composed to be able to adequately evaluate the research unit on its own merits.

2 Write the self-evaluation report

In preparation for the evaluation, the research unit writes a narrative self-evaluation report of no more than 20 pages (plain text), supplemented with appendices, one or more case studies and a summary. The self-evaluation report must present a coherent narrative argument about the research unit's strategy and achievements, and be supported by robust data. See Appendix B for a suggested table of contents and Appendix C for the mandatory tables (table C1-3) that should be included in the self-evaluation report itself or its appendices.

Strategy of the research unit

The self-evaluation report begins by outlining the research unit's **strategy** with respect to the Research Quality, Societal Relevance and Viability. The research unit must:

- Describe their **strategy over the previous six-year period**, including any strategic developments.
- Conduct a **SWOT analysis** (see Appendix B).
- Based on the SWOT analysis, describe their **position within the field**, by anticipating any relevant scientific, societal and institutional developments.
- Describe their **future strategy for the next six-year period**.

Whilst references to broader institutional and national policies may be included for the purposes of clarifying the research unit's positioning within the current institutional/national context, this should always be connected to the research unit's own actions and their specific implementation of these broader policies.

Achievements and factual evidence over the previous six-year period

After describing the strategy, the research unit then proceeds to outline the extent to which their previous strategy has contributed to achieving the research unit's own ambitions with respect to the Research Quality, Societal Relevance and Viability. The research unit can support its achievements with reference to case studies and factual evidence derived from qualitative and quantitative indicators.

When describing the achievements, the research unit should:

- Focus on the **strategy of the research unit itself** and only refer to general institutional strategy and/or (inter)national policies when it is necessary, for example, to clarify the framework that the research unit operates within. It is important to note that this should always be clearly connected to the research unit's own actions and how it has implemented these policies in practice.
- Support the research unit's strategy with respect to the three criteria of the SEP by reflecting on relevant elements from at least the **four aspects** derived from international and Dutch science policy and emphasise the academic responsibilities of research units (see Appendix A). Please note that these aspects are not separate evaluation categories, but should be understood as integrated elements that influence the research unit's Research Quality, Societal Relevance, and Viability.
- Include **one or more case studies** that illustrate and support the strategy and achievements outlined in the self-evaluation report. Further information about the case studies can be found in Appendix D. The case studies are made publicly available after the evaluation along with a summary of the self-evaluation report; see Chapter 2.
- Include a set of self-selected and well-substantiated **qualitative and quantitative indicators** in the self-evaluation report[4]. These indicators provide evidence that supports the strategy of the research unit with regard to the three criteria of the SEP and help to support the narrative argument being put forward. The indicators should reflect the research unit's overall output, rather than that of individual researchers. Further information about the use of qualitative and quantitative indicators can be found in Appendix D2. Additional sources of robust data may include benchmarking against peer research units, provided this aligns with the strategy of the research unit.

4 To see several best-practices for selecting indicators within the research field, please refer to the Quality and Relevance in the Humanities framework (https://www.qrih.nl/en/)

3 Prepare the site visit

The research unit organises a site visit to give the evaluation committee a first-hand impression of its activities. During this visit, the evaluation committee interviews delegates from the research unit and other relevant persons in an unsupervised setting. The site visit also provides an opportunity for the research unit to showcase any relevant information about the local research infrastructure to the evaluation committee. Further instructions and a suggested programme for the site visit can be found in Chapter 4. It is customary, but not mandatory, for the evaluation committee to provide a brief first impression of its findings to (a representative of) the research unit at the end of the site visit. Please note that the findings are not finalised at this initial stage. The research unit is strictly advised not to publish these provisional findings.

4 Check the committee report for any factual inaccuracies

After the site visit, the evaluation committee writes a draft committee report detailing its findings and recommendations for the future. The research unit will receive a draft version of the committee report to check for any factual inaccuracies.

5 Write a response to the committee report

After receiving the finalised committee report, the research unit is required to submit a written response to the responsible board. Based on the committee report and the research unit's response to the report, the responsible board then prepares the board's position.

6 Follow-up on the evaluation outcomes

The research unit engages in regular discussions with the responsible board about the evaluation outcomes and any follow-up actions that are required. These follow-up actions are monitored at regular intervals as part of the quality assurance cycle process and carried out in accordance with the institution's own internal procedures. In this way, the quality assurance cycle forms an integral part of preparing for the next SEP evaluation.

4. Actions to be carried out by the evaluation committee

This chapter describes the evaluation process and the related actions to be carried out by the evaluation committee:

1. **Prepare the evaluation;**
2. **Hold a private kick-off meeting;**
3. **Conduct a site visit;**
4. **Write the committee report;**
5. **Make the draft committee report available to the research unit so that they can check for any factual inaccuracies;**
6. **Submit the final version of the committee report to the responsible board.**



1 Prepare the evaluation

The research unit must submit the self-evaluation report and Terms of Reference to the evaluation committee no later than six weeks prior to the site visit. The evaluation committee then uses these documents to prepare questions for the kick-off meeting and the site visit.

2 Hold a private kick-off meeting

As part of the evaluation committee's preparation for the site visit, at least one (online) private kick-off meeting should be scheduled with the evaluation committee, including the secretary, between eight and two weeks in advance of the visit.

The private kick-off meeting serves four purposes:

- It allows the secretary to inform the evaluation committee about the SEP protocol, including its relation to international policy documents such as UNESCO Open Science recommendations, DORA, and CoARA, as well as national policy like the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the broader context of scientific research within the Netherlands.
- It enables the evaluation committee members and secretary to discuss the evaluation procedure, the Terms of Reference and the process of writing the committee report.
- It allows the evaluation committee members to discuss their preliminary findings based on the material they received prior to the site visit (i.e. the self-evaluation report and possibly other documents).
- It gives the evaluation committee the opportunity to decide whether they want to invite additional people for interviews.

Questions by email

The evaluation committee may send questions to the research unit prior to the site visit, thus enabling the research unit to prepare more efficiently.

3 Conduct a site visit

The evaluation committee visits the site of the research unit.[5] The research unit drafts the schedule for the site visit in consultation with the evaluation committee chair and secretary. A site visit usually lasts several days.

The site visit serves three purposes:

- To discuss and clarify the self-evaluation report;
- To conduct unsupervised interviews with a diverse subset of members from the research unit;
- To further evaluate the organisational and scientific infrastructures with respect to the three criteria and related aspects of the SEP. The evaluation committee may also raise certain points that the research unit has not put forward, but which the evaluation committee deems important.

Interviews

During the site visit, the evaluation committee conducts interviews with representatives from the research unit and other relevant stakeholders. The purpose of these interviews is to verify and supplement the information provided in the self-evaluation report. The evaluation committee may interview (a selection of) the following representatives/stakeholders:

- The management team of the research unit;
- The heads of the research groups within the research unit (if the research unit consists of multiple groups);
- A selection of tenured and non-tenured staff members and professional (services) staff;
- A selection of PhD candidates – it is important that interviews with PhD candidates are held without supervision from the research unit.
- The board(s) responsible for the relevant graduate school(s)/research school(s);
- Representatives from the scientific and/or societal advisory council, where applicable, and/or other stakeholders;
- If necessary, representatives from the responsible board or any other party with which the evaluation committee deems it necessary to speak to ensure a fair evaluation of the research unit;
- If possible and necessary, societal stakeholders and partners;
- Where relevant, the evaluation committee can also meet with the works council.

Private interim meeting(s)

In order to safeguard the quality of the evaluation, the evaluation committee must be given sufficient time to engage in private discussions. These meetings should also be included in the programme schedule.

Private final meeting

The evaluation committee holds a final private meeting prior to the conclusion of the site visit programme. During this last meeting, the evaluation committee discusses its findings, exchanges arguments and formulates a provisional judgement on the research unit based on the three criteria and the previously determined elements across the four aspects of the SEP. The evaluation committee also addresses any additional questions outlined in the Terms of Reference.

Tour (optional)

Where appropriate, the research unit can organise a

5 If an evaluation is organised within a national context (i.e., involving multiple institutions), the site visit can take place in a separate, central location.

tour of its premises for the evaluation committee as part of the site visit.

Presentation of provisional findings (optional)
It is customary, but not mandatory, for the evaluation committee to provide a brief first impression of its findings with (a representative of) the research unit at the end of the site visit. It is important to note that the findings are not finalised at this initial stage. The research unit is strictly advised not to publish the provisional findings.

4 Write the committee report

The evaluation committee prepares its report in response to the Terms of Reference and addresses it to the responsible board and research unit. In accordance with promoting public accountability, the responsible board ensures that the evaluation committee report is published and easily accessible on the institution's website within six months of the site visit.

The committee report is based on the results of the self-evaluation report and the meetings held during the site visit. It is important that the committee report is written in an accessible style with clear prose and arguments.

The committee report contains an evaluation of the research unit's Research Quality, Societal Relevance and Viability with respect to its own strategy, taking into account international trends within the scientific field and societal developments, as mentioned in Chapter 1. The committee report also evaluates the results with regard to the chosen aspects. It typically reflects on the respective strengths and weaknesses of the research unit and recommends improvements, including, for example, how the responsible board and research unit should incorporate these observations and recommendations over the following six-year period. The committee report outlines the key areas of focus and specific avenues for progress, and specifies precisely who holds responsibility for both.

In the conclusion of the committee report, the evaluation committee provides a qualitative judgement on the research unit as a whole, reflecting on the future strategic challenges and opportunities that the research unit needs to be prepared to address. The committee report also contains a summary.

The committee report should be completed within eight weeks of the site visit. Whilst the evaluation committee is responsible for the content of the report, the secretary supports the evaluation committee in the drafting of the report. The evaluation committee strives to reach a consensus on the report's findings. If a consensus cannot be achieved on specific points, this will be explicitly noted in the report.

5 Make the draft committee report available to the research unit so that they can check for any factual inaccuracies

A draft version of the committee report is then made available to the research unit so that they can check for any factual inaccuracies.

6 Submit the final version of the committee report to the responsible board

After receiving the finalised committee report, the research unit is required to submit a written response to the responsible board. Based on the committee report and the research unit's response, the responsible board then prepares its position and discharges the evaluation committee.

Appendix A: **Aspects influencing the three criteria**

About the aspects

There are various aspects that serve as *enabling conditions, preconditions* or *themes* that subsequently influence and shape a research unit's achievements with respect to Research Quality, Societal Relevance, and/or Viability. These aspects are, in turn, influenced and informed by overarching institutional and national science policies and articulate the academic responsibilities of research units.

The SEP prescribes at least four of the following aspects as being important in relation to the achievements of research units:

i. PhD Policy and Training;
ii. Open Science;
iii. Responsible Research Practices;
iv. Academic Culture.

As will be discussed below, each aspect comprises various elements. Some of these elements are already included as criteria for national and international calls of NWO, ZonMw and European commission (EC) funding. The aspects listed above may be supplemented with **additional aspects** in order to better reflect the specific context and strategic priorities of individual research units.

How to use these aspects

All four of the key aspects must be addressed in the evaluation, with research units expected to demonstrate –and the evaluation committee expected to evaluate – which specific elements within these aspects have contributed to the research unit's Research Quality, Societal Relevance and Viability. These aspects relate to how the research unit organises and conducts its research in practice, its composition in terms of leadership and personnel, the development of its personnel – including postdoctoral researchers, early career academics and professional staff – and the day-to-day management of the research unit. In this respect, the aspects should be viewed as the enabling conditions: the tools and prerequisites that support research units in refining their strategy with respect to the Research Quality, Societal Relevance and Viability. Whilst references to national and/or institutional policies can be included, these should always be clearly connected to the research unit's own actions and how it implements these policies in practice. The research unit should focus on the concrete actions they have taken to implement these policies, how these actions reflect the practical realities of putting policy into practice, and the outcomes achieved in relation to the three criteria of the SEP and the research unit's own strategy. This approach underscores not only the strategic intent of a research unit, but also the real-world execution and impact of its efforts.

Not all elements within each aspect are relevant to each criterium, or to an individual research unit, for that matter. In light of this, the research unit is encouraged to include only those elements of the key aspects that are most aligned with its strategy with respect to the three criteria of the SEP. Granting such flexibility in the selection of the relevant elements within each aspect enables individual research units to underscore their strategic choices. Consequently, not every element of each aspect must be applied to every criterion or research unit.

The aspects are elaborated on below, to illustrate how the potential elements within each aspect either foster or hinder the achievement of a research unit's strategic aims. Although these four aspects can be considered separately, there is considerable overlap between them in certain areas.

Description of each aspect

PhD Policy and Training:

Given the special position held by PhD candidates within research units, PhD policy, training, mentoring, and coaching deserves attention. This aspect includes the institutional context of the PhD programmes (including PhD education at relevant institutional graduate school(s) and (national) research schools), the PhD programme content and structure, quality assurance, the selection and admission procedures for PhD candidates, as well as the positioning of PhD candidates and PhD training within the research unit. In the self-evaluation report, the research unit reflects on the supervision of PhD candidates, the integration of Recognition & Rewards, Open Science and Responsible Research Practices within the PhD trajectory, the effectiveness of the Training and Supervision Plans, the guidance of PhD candidates towards the job market (both in and outside of academia), PhD duration, PhD success rates, exit numbers and career prospects for PhD candidates.



Open Science

Open Science is a more open and participatory approach to conducting, publishing and evaluating scientific research. Open Science encompasses a range of practices, including providing open access to publications, sharing research data and methods, and collaborating with other scientists and wider society at the earliest possible stage of the research process. The goal is to make science more inclusive, efficient and verifiable, thereby increasing the reliability and impact of research (see e.g. UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science). At the forefront of this is the pursuit of greater collaboration and transparency within all research phases and involving all stakeholders.

Open Science encompasses the following domains: (shared) open infrastructures, open hardware, FAIR data and software, open scholarly communication/open access, open education, societal engagement, citizen science and/or knowledge transfer. Stimulation activities (e.g. support and training), tailored reward and recognition mechanisms and/or supportive policies and regulations of the research unit itself might strengthen the uptake of Open Science. The strategy of the research unit may focus on some or all of these domains, depending on their disciplinary needs and organisational priorities. If a particular domain is not part of a research unit's strategy, the research unit should explain why this is the case.



Responsible Research Practices

Research units play a pivotal role in upholding research integrity and conducting responsible science. This aspect involves reflecting on the research unit's actions and measures that are or will be implemented in order to comply with the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and with national cybersecurity and knowledge security policies. It also encompasses safeguarding the independence of research in relation to funding, sponsorship, collaboration with third parties and public-private partnerships. Furthermore, it includes an increased focus on sustainable research, reflected in research practices that seek to do minimal harm to the environment and sustainability-based topics. It also involves the responsible development and use of large-scale research infrastructures and the responsible use of generative AI according to current norms, which are all essential for ensuring the long-term Viability and Societal Relevance of research. It may also involve reflecting on potential threats to the research unit's academic values – for instance, dependence on large infrastructures or other third-party services – which may necessitate policy development and appropriate training in alignment with the research unit's strategic decisions.



Academic Culture

This aspect entails the extent to which the research unit safeguards the academic freedom of its staff and values a multiplicity of perspectives and identities within the workplace, including how this responsibility is taken up by leadership and staff. The research unit outlines how it fosters an open and creative research environment that encourages intellectual risk-taking, interdisciplinary dialogue and the development of novel theoretical or methodological approaches. The research unit reflects on measures that need to be implemented to ensure openness and social safety, and to guide and select talent as well as maintaining a diverse research unit. In this context, diversity and inclusivity refer to a broadly defined set of characteristics, including gender, age, nationality, sexual orientation, neurodiversity, physical or cognitive disabilities, cultural background, religion or belief, socioeconomic status and other dimensions.

This aspect also includes reflecting on HR policies, such as inclusive selection and appraisal procedures, securing academic citizenship, (strategic) talent management, opportunities for training and development, coaching and mentoring, and long-term strategic HR development policies like training and career perspectives for all staff, explicitly including postdoctoral researchers, early career academics and professional (support/technical) staff. Other elements might include opportunities for diverse career paths and support for team science in line with the Dutch Rewards & Recognition ambitions and CoARA principles.



Appendix B: **Suggested table of contents for the self-evaluation report**

The strategy of the research unit regarding the Research Quality, Societal Relevance and Viability is a central element in the self-evaluation report. The goal, form and content of the self-evaluation report are described at length in Chapter 3.

Suggested table of contents for the self-evaluation report

1. Introduction
The self-evaluation report starts with a brief presentation of the research unit, which includes, amongst other things, information about the research unit's main characteristics, important organisational features or any changes it has undergone in recent years, and a reflection on the recommendations of the previous SEP evaluation. This chapter could therefore include the mandatory tables, see Appendix C.

2. Vision, mission and strategy
Next, the research unit describes its vision, mission, and strategy over the previous six-year period with respect to their contribution to scientific knowledge and societal impact. This discussion also includes the underlying strategic process. The vision, mission and strategy depend on the specific context of the individual research unit, such as the research discipline, its institutional context and the aggregation level or the recommendations of the previous evaluation committee. The research unit is also asked to reflect on its own Research Quality assurance system. Any relevant contextual information and developments should also be mentioned, insofar as these influence a research unit's strategy.

This chapter then presents a SWOT analysis, in which the research unit analyses relevant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Example

What's in a SWOT analysis?

	The good	The not-so-good
What we've got	**Strengths** Characteristics that give the business a competitive advantage over others.	**Weaknesses** Characteristics that give the business a disadvantage relative to its competitors.
What's out there	**Opportunities** Elements in the external environment that allow it to formulate and implement growth strategies.	**Threats** Elements in the external environment that can endanger the business and its ability to operate.

The strengths and weaknesses should relate to the properties and specific characteristics of the research unit, which also means that they can be influenced by the research unit itself. Conversely, the opportunities and threats relate to external developments, such as scientific, societal or other developments. Based on the SWOT analysis, the research unit then describes its positioning within the field, by anticipating relevant scientific, societal and institutional developments.

3. Research Quality

Research units should describe their efforts and achievements with respect to the **Research Quality** criterion. These efforts and achievements can be substantiated with reference to relevant qualitative or quantitative indicators. The choice of indicators is dependent on the aims and strategies of individual research units as well as on common practices within certain academic disciplines. See Appendix D for further information on how to support the narrative argument in this chapter.

4. Societal Relevance

Research units should describe their efforts and achievements with respect to the **Societal Relevance** criterion. These efforts and achievements can be substantiated by referencing relevant qualitative or quantitative indicators. The choice of indicators depends on the aims and strategies of individual research units as well as on common practices within certain academic disciplines. See Appendix D for further information on how to support the narrative argument in this chapter.

5. Viability

Research units should describe their efforts and achievements with respect to the **Viability** criterion. These efforts and achievements can be substantiated by referencing relevant qualitative or quantitative indicators. The choice of indicators depends on the aims and strategies of individual research units as well as on common practices within certain academic disciplines. See Appendix D for further information on how to support the narrative argument in this chapter.

6. Future strategy

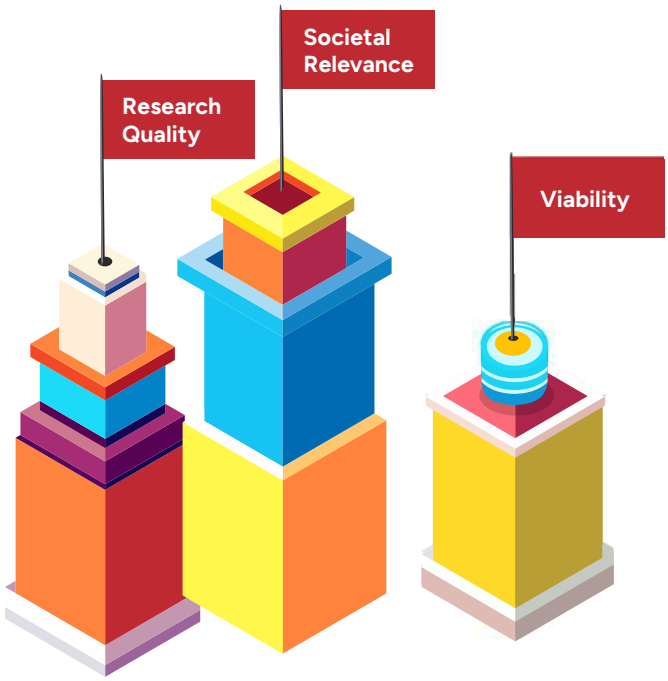
Describe the strategy or primary aims for the upcoming six-year period with respect to the research unit's Research Quality, Societal Relevance, and Viability. The SWOT analysis from Chapter 2 forms the basis of the strategic plans for the next six-year evaluation period. Other aspects can be discussed (see Appendix A) and included if these align with the vision, mission, and strategy for the upcoming six-year period.

7. Summary

The self-evaluation report also includes a one-page summary. This summary will be made publicly available along with the case studies, the committee report and the board's position.

8. Appendices

The appendices include case studies, additional tables, and any other supporting information.



Appendix C: **Mandatory tables**

The tables below visualise the general make-up of research units in a quantitative manner. As such, they can be used as examples of how to visualise this data. It is important to note that research units have the freedom to edit the contents and layout of the tables in order to better suit their needs and support their self-evaluation report and/or strategy. For example, whilst research units are encouraged to at least show gender-related data, they can choose whether they want to add additional parameters.

The following tables should be included in the self-evaluation report.

Table C1: Staff

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Research unit						
Scientific staff (1)						
Assistant professor	%(F/M/X)*/ # / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE
Associate professor	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE
Full professor	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE
Postdoctoral researcher (2)	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE
PhD candidates (3)	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE
Total research staff	**%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE**	**%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE**	**%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE**	**%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE**	**%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE**	**%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE**
Professional (services) staff	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE
Visiting fellows (4)	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE	%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE
Total staff	**%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE**	**%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE**	**%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE**	**%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE**	**%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE**	**%(F/M/X)*/# / FTE**

*%F/M/X = %woman/man/non-binary, or any other way of showing the gender identity distribution.

Note 1: Comparable with WOPI categories HGL, UHD and UD; tenured and non-tenured staff, or other relevant functions.
Note 2: Comparable with WOPI category Onderzoeker, or other relevant functions.
Note 3: All PhD candidates. The figures may be broken down into different categories of PhD candidates. For this purpose, research units can use the types of PhD candidates designated in the UNL categorisation of 2019 (see Annex I of 'Healthy practices in the Dutch PhD system 2.0').
Note 4: Other types of (temporary) staff members that are of importance for the chosen strategy of the research unit. This can include, for example, the number of visiting academics, professors by special appointments, honorary professors, or emeritus professors.

Table C2: Funding[6]

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %
Funding:						
Direct funding (1)	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %
Research grants (2)	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %
Contract research (3)	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %
Other (4)	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %	FTE / %
Total funding	**FTE / %**	**FTE / %**	**FTE / %**	**FTE / %**	**FTE / %**	**FTE / %**
Expenditure:						
Personnel costs	€ / %	€ / %	€ / %	€ / %	€ / %	€ / %
Material costs	€ / %	€ / %	€ / %	€ / %	€ / %	€ / %
Other costs	€ / %	€ / %	€ / %	€ / %	€ / %	€ / %
Total expenditure	**€ / %**	**€ / %**	**€ / %**	**€ / %**	**€ / %**	**€ / %**

Note 1: Direct funding (basisfinanciering/lump-sum budget).
Note 2: Research grants obtained in national scientific competitions (e.g. grants from NWO and KNAW).
Note 3: Research contracts for specific research projects obtained from external organisations, such as industry, governmental ministries, European organisations, and charitable organisations.
Note 4: Funds that do not fit into the other categories.

Table C3: PhD candidates[7]

Enrolment				Success rates					
Starting year	Enrolment (man)*	Enrolment (woman)*	Total (M+F)*	Graduated in 4.5 years or earlier (1)	Graduated in 5.5 years or earlier	Graduated in 6.5 years or earlier	Graduated in 7.5 years or earlier	Not yet finished	Discontinued (2)
T-8	#	#	#	# / %	# / %	# / %	# / %	# / %	# / %
T-7	#	#	#	# / %	# / %	# / %	# / %	# / %	# / %
T-6	#	#	#	# / %	# / %	# / %	# / %	# / %	# / %
T-5	#	#	#	# / %	# / %	# / %	-	# / %	# / %
T-4	#	#	#	# / %	# / %	-	-	# / %	# / %
Total	**#**	**#**	**#**	**# / %**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**# / %**	**# / %**

* or any other way of showing the gender identity distribution.

Note 1: The number of years until completion is determined by the thesis defence date. Figures may be corrected for maternity, sick leave or part-time contracts, for example. On average, the duration between handing in the thesis and the thesis defence is typically 3–6 months, hence the 4.5 years classification.
Note 2: It is possible to distinguish between 'discontinuation as a result of a go/no-go evaluation' and 'discontinuation in a later phase of the PhD trajectory (or after completion of the PhD contract)'.
Note 3: The research unit may include external PhD candidates in this table, but for these candidates neither the years to completion nor the success rates should be calculated."

6 Figures may be broken down into more detailed categories of funding.
7 Figures may be broken down into different categories of PhD candidates. For this purpose, research units can use the types of PhD candidates outlined in Annex I of 'Healthy practices in the Dutch PhD system 2.0.

Appendix D: **Supporting the narrative**

In the self-evaluation report, the research unit reflects on its strategy for the previous six-year period and the upcoming evaluation period in a coherent, narrative argument, substantiated wherever possible with evidence in the form of case studies and qualitative and quantitative indicators. This means that there should be a direct relationship between the described strategy and the type of robust data underpinning the self-evaluation report.

Where appropriate, the research unit can use qualitative or quantitative indicators of their research activity, progress, and impact. Some indicators may also be useful for underpinning the presented case studies. Given that the relevant context likely differs for each research unit, the SEP allows individual research units to choose the specific indicators that are relevant to them.

Appendix D1: Case studies

Case studies are excellent instruments that function both as illustrations and robust supporting elements of the self-evaluation report. Case studies have a narrative form and can be related to particular projects or programmes conducted by the research unit, as well as to certain aspects of their research activities, such as the interaction between research activities and society or between research and PhD programmes. In this respect, case studies can illustrate or shed light on specific parts or aspects of research, especially if it is deemed to be important for the picture that evaluators are forming about the research unit under evaluation. Indicators can also be used to support these case studies.

Case studies can be carried out at various aggregation levels: describing projects, programmes, or the research unit as a whole. Indeed, case studies are pre-eminently suited to indicate the connection between a research unit's academic and societal aims and output, a connection that is regarded as essential within many academic domains and disciplines. When relevant, case studies may also address the 'pathways to impact,' whether during the preparation of research projects or as part of long-term research policies. Given that case studies may include sensitive data or topics related to the research unit, the research unit may choose to only publish a summarised version of the case study and include the full version in the non-published self-evaluation report.

Appendix D2: Qualitative and quantitative indicators

The case studies and other narrative arguments in the self-evaluation report can be supported by well-chosen qualitative and quantitative indicators that reflect disciplinary standards and are relevant to the research unit's strategy. These indicators may reflect the vision for and the use of the relevant input.

Individual research units have the freedom to select those indicators that are relevant to their specific strategies, narrative arguments and research discipline. For example, if a key part of a research unit's strategy is to establish strong collaborations within or beyond the research unit, a network analysis of existing collaborations or shared publications could provide valuable insights to support this narrative. Alternatively, if a research unit aims to support PhD candidates

and postdoctoral researchers in taking the next steps in their careers, the research unit could point to the career trajectories of their former PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers. Finally, if the strategy of a research unit strongly emphasises valorisation, a list of public-private partnerships could be presented. If there is significant emphasis placed on furthering a specific research field, data on reproducibility studies, open datasets, number of peer reviews or other such measures could be presented.

Indicators: a dynamic field

The SEP aims to align as closely as possible with national and international developments in the field of research assessment, which is a highly dynamic research field in itself. In fact, there may never be a set of universally accepted indicators without any caveats, making it difficult to provide a clear list or all-encompassing overview of the indicators that are accepted in the SEP as they may become out-dated during the term of that particular SEP. Instead, the SEP asks research units, evaluation committees, and responsible boards to think critically about the indicators that are used and to ensure that they align with current best practices within their research field or those that are presented within national or international agreements. In order to help research units, the SEP provides three ground rules which can be used as a rudimentary test to evaluate whether a chosen indicator fits the aims and goal of the SEP.

Three ground rules for the use of indicators are presented below. These can be used to judge whether or not an indicator fits the aims and goals of the SEP.

1. Indicators should reflect the research unit as a whole, rather than individual researchers

The SEP evaluates the research unit's Research Quality, societal impact, and Viability. Indicators that describe individual achievements should be accompanied by the role that the research unit has played with respect to these achievements. For example, a research unit could describe how it fosters an environment that promotes Research Quality or societal impact. Moreover, it could describe the choices that were made, explain why they were made, and show how these choices are reflected within the subsequent achievements of groups or teams within the research unit.

2. The context of the chosen indicator is more important than the indicator itself

Whenever indicators are used, their context must be well-described, as this is what allows the evaluation committee to conduct a well-informed evaluation of the evidence presented. For example, when using a field-weighted type of indicator, it is important to mention the method of normalisation.

Wherever possible, research units should not only describe the indicator they used, but also the specific environment to which it refers. Furthermore, raw output should be contrasted with other relevant output; for example, combining citation numbers with the number of peer reviews and the number of open datasets by the same group or research unit. Doing so gives the evaluation committee a broader overview of how much time the research unit or a particular group within the unit has spent on research activities.

3. Indicators should align with (inter)national agreements

Particularly with respect to the indicators, it is vitally important to explicitly follow the guidelines of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) adopted by KNAW, UNL and NWO. DORA emphasises the responsible use of research metrics, and advocates for assessing research based on its own qualities and merits, rather than uncritically relying on bibliometric metrics.

In addition, whenever possible, indicators should be based on Open Science principles (see Appendix A), such as using data from open sources, in line with the Barcelona Declaration on Open Research Information signed by UNL and NWO. Doing so ensures that indicators are transparent and reproducible. Publication-based indicators can, for instance, be based on data from open sources such as OpenAlex and OpenAIRE rather than proprietary sources such as Web of Science/InCites and Scopus/SciVal.

Moreover, knowledge institutions in the Netherlands have agreed to work towards more inclusive forms of recognition and rewards for their staff, working towards a team science-based approach in which individual efforts are appreciated irrespective of whether they are captured by (standard) metrics. This approach also aligns with the CoARA agreement, which most knowledge institutions in the Netherlands are signees of. The SEP assumes that indicators referred to in the self-evaluation report reflect these agreements.

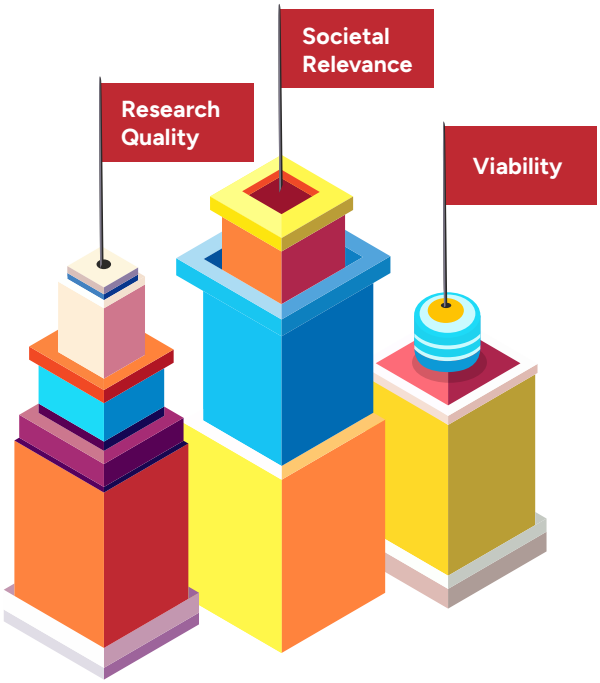


Appendix E: **Requirements for the evaluation committee**

The evaluation committee must be equipped to appreciate the research unit's Research Quality, Societal Relevance and Viability within its national and international context. The evaluation committee must be able to remain impartial and maintain confidentiality throughout this process. Several requirements must be met with respect to the composition of the evaluation committee.

Specifically, the evaluation committee should:

- Have no direct relationship with or connection to the research unit under evaluation;
- Work with an independent, qualified secretary who is familiar with evaluation processes within the Dutch research context;
- Be appropriately diverse. This should be understood in a broad sense, by focusing on relevant dimensions of diversity, such as, gender, culture, nationality and discipline.
- Include at least one PhD candidate and one early-/mid-career researcher. If relevant, the committee could also include a non-academic expert;



- Be familiar with contemporary trends and developments within the relevant research fields, and be capable of evaluating the research within its current (inter)national context;
- Be capable of appreciating the applicability of the research unit's research and its relevance to society;
- Cover the breadth of the research area;
- Have a strategic understanding of the relevant research field;
- Be capable of evaluating the research unit's management operations;
- Have good knowledge of, and experience working with, the Dutch research system, including funding mechanisms and PhD programmes. If this is not the case, a specific introduction to the Dutch system must be provided by either the secretary of the evaluation committee or the responsible board of the research unit;
- Be capable of commenting on the four aspects (i.e. themes, topics) that are important preconditions for the performance of the research unit: i) PhD Policy and Training, ii) Open Science, iii) Responsible Science and iv) Academic Culture;
- Be able to divide tasks transparently amongst the evaluation committee members.

Please note that these requirements apply to the evaluation committee as a whole, not necessarily to each individual member of the committee.

Appendix F: **Definition list**

Aspects: factors that emphasise the academic responsibilities of a research unit. These aspects are derived from either national and international scientific policy documents or specific agreements that Dutch research institutions adhere to. These aspects serve as enabling conditions, preconditions, or themes that influence and shape a research unit's achievement of the three criteria of the SEP.

Board's position: a position taken by the responsible board in response to the outcome of the evaluation of the research unit. It contains a reflection on the outcomes of the evaluation and an outline of how follow-up actions will be monitored as part of the research quality assurance cycle.

Committee report: the final report written by the evaluation committee that presents their findings and recommendations. The committee report supports the research unit and the responsible board in making well-informed strategic decisions for the subsequent six-year period.

Criteria: the principles or standards on which a research unit is ultimately evaluated. With respect to the SEP, these criteria are Research Quality, Societal Relevance and Viability. Here, the emphasis lies not on the existence of policies or intentions, but rather on how these have been put into practice and the tangible outcomes that they have subsequently generated.

Evaluation committee: a group of peers and potentially external experts who are equipped to evaluate the research unit within its (inter) national context based on the three main criteria of the SEP and relevant aspects. The evaluation committee must be able to remain impartial and maintain confidentiality (for further information, see Appendix E).

Indicators: these provide evidence that supports the narrative argument put forward by research units and reflects what a research unit ultimately aims to achieve. In other words, these indicators should be capable of measuring the performance of the research unit with respect to its own stated ambitions and objectives. The SEP promotes the use of responsible quantitative and qualitative indicators. The different types of indicators can relate to the context, input, process, activity of the research unit (which can be in collaboration with other partners), output by the research unit (which can be together or in collaboration with other partners), short-term outcomes (changes in thinking within the research unit itself or on behalf of others), long-term outcomes (changes in actions within the research unit or on behalf of others) and impact (changes in being of the unit or others).

Professional (services) staff: employees of research units who carry out specialised, operational, administrative, or technical duties within a research unit and thereby facilitate education, research and knowledge exchange. Although they are not academic staff, they can publish scholarly work and contribute to publications. They were previously referred to as support staff (Dutch: OBP/OWP).

Research quality assurance cycle: a continuous process of planning, implementing, reviewing, and improving a research unit's achievements with respect to the three criteria of the SEP. It ensures that the outcomes of the SEP, as presented in the committee report, are regularly revisited.

Research unit: an institute, department, research group, multidisciplinary cluster, or other type of research unit with sufficient autonomy – such as control over budget or HR policy – and the ability to define its own strategy. The responsible board may choose to have a research group, research department, research institute, research cluster,

research activities within a faculty evaluated, or implement a multi-layered evaluation across various research units under a thematic organisation.

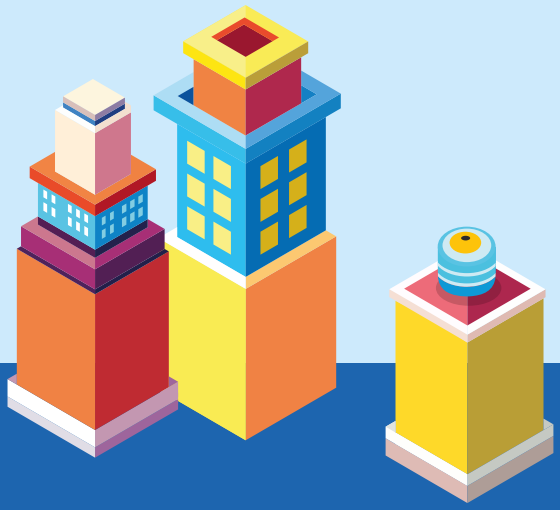
Responsible board(s): relevant governance levels of the institution that are tasked/mandated with a) defining which research units are to be evaluated and when and b) following up on the SEP outcomes in the quality assurance cycle.

Self-evaluation report: a coherent, narrative argument in which a research unit critically reflects on its strategy, challenges and achievements over the previous six-year period and describes how these inform the research unit's strategy for the upcoming evaluation period. This narrative account is supported by evidence drawn from case studies and self-selected and well-substantiated qualitative and quantitative indicators (for further information, see Appendix D).

Site visit: this provides an opportunity for the evaluation committee to visit the site of the research unit. The site visit can take place at a single location or can be spread over various (relevant) locations, and typically lasts one to two days. A site visit has three purposes: firstly, to discuss and clarify the self-evaluation report; secondly, to conduct unsupervised interviews with a diverse subset of members of the research unit; and thirdly, to further evaluate the organisational and scientific infrastructures within the research unit.

Terms of Reference: a document that contains an explanation of the SEP, background information on the research unit, and any additional questions that the evaluation committee should consider.





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