

Research review Nieuwenhuis Institute 2018-2024

Reaction from the Faculty Board to the assessment report

Approved by the University Board, 15 October 2025

1. Introduction

On February 3rd, 2025, the committee reviewing the research programmes of Pedagogical and Educational Sciences in the Netherlands (2018-2024) discussed the research programme of the Nieuwenhuis Institute (NI) in Groningen with management and representatives of staff and PhD candidates. The committee has written a report, following the criteria of the Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021-2027 (SEP), with its evaluation of: I. scientific quality, II. relevance and utility to society of the research conducted, as well as its strategic targets and III. the extent to which the institute is equipped to achieve them (viability). In accordance with the SEP guidelines, the committee was also asked to take into account four specific aspects: 1. open science, 2. PhD policy and training, 3. academic culture and 4. human resources policy. The final report comprises an overall assessment of the research programmes of Pedagogical and Educational Sciences in the Netherlands and the separate assessment of the eight participating research institutes* including the NI in Groningen.

2. Overall assessment of the Nieuwenhuis Institute

Overall, the committee was highly positive about the accomplishments of the NI. The committee stated that 'the research is well-embedded within six strong and viable units, each addressing significant topics that are important both scientifically and societally. There is ample room for curiosity-driven research, which has proven successful, both in terms of publications and prestigious funding. Furthermore, collaboration with external societal partners to tackle urgent societal issues has become a key feature of the research at NI. The enthusiasm of the staff, both senior and junior, was evident during all meetings and is undoubtedly a significant asset to the Institute, fostering confidence in its future'. Furthermore, the committee expressed that they were impressed by the volume of the research output, that the public visibility and the related societal impact of the NI and its researchers is very high and the overview of applications, as illustrated in the case studies, was quite impressive.

The management of the NI and the board of the faculty are very content with these results and highly appreciate the work of the review committee, including the constructive joint discussion with all participating institutes at the end of the one-week site visit.

3. Response to the recommendations and suggestions of the committee

The review committee also made several suggestions to further improve the quality of the NI research programme and made several valuable recommendations. Additionally, it provided overarching recommendations aimed at all participating institutes including the NI. Our response below is in Italics.

Overarching recommendation

The committee states that 'A stronger, more coordinated collaboration across institutes could help reinforce their collective position and visibility towards policymakers',

*In addition to the Interuniversity Centre for Educational Sciences (ICO), institutes from the following universities participated in the assessment: the University of Amsterdam, University of Groningen, Leiden University, Maastricht University, the Open Universiteit of the Netherlands, Erasmus University Rotterdam, and Utrecht University.

We totally agree with this, and the first steps towards this coordinated collaboration are already taken. We recently published a collaborative position paper about pedagogical science as a connecting discipline (Luijk et al., 2025¹). Furthermore, several meetings have been scheduled with the leaders of the participating institutes to further explore possibilities to collaborate, including concrete actions.

Organisation, strategy and targets

The committee recommends developing a more focused 'Groningen profile' with an emphasis on forward-looking goals. While acknowledging that not all ambitions can be realised, the committee believes that the Nieuwenhuis Institute might benefit from developing a profile that is aligned with its future ambitions. The Committee further advises involving all researchers at the NI in shaping this future profile, in order to fully leverage the considerable enthusiasm for ongoing research among both senior and junior staff.

*The NI aims for excellent research in different areas and themes of pedagogical and educational research, with a very strong **combination of broadness as well as uniqueness**. This focus and unique profile of the NI is supported by the international bibliographic benchmark analysis providing insight into NI's research activity and its position within the international pedagogical and educational research community. Results reveal that the NI top 18 research topics account for roughly 30% of the output and an internationally excellent position. The strategic aim at both broadness and uniqueness is a necessity to facilitate the educational programmes, but also for the role of the institute as regional, national and international contact for pedagogical and educational research. These aims also align with the strategic aims at the faculty level.*

However, as addressed by the review committee, the quality of the research by the NI can be further increased by bringing an even more programmatic approach with common research priorities, in order to build a more coherent research programme and to intensify the collaboration between staff members within the Institute. To this end, the institute will organize several meetings in the coming year with project leaders and staff members to define, top down as well as bottom up, the most prolific research lines for the coming six years in terms of strategic importance, scientific and societal impact in the national and international context, and funding possibilities. In addition, these research lines will be linked to the overarching faculty wide themes to form strategic consortia with colleagues in the faculty, the university and the international research community (SSH themes for example), with the aim to apply for major (consortium) grants. Linking these lines with the research units within a matrix will allow us to identify key research areas for the NI. The director of research together with the faculty funding officer will discuss with all teams the strategies for obtaining sustainable funding.

Societal relevance

Regarding outreach, the committee believes that the web pages of the NI and its six research units could be better utilised to maximise visibility and accessibility for all NI projects and researchers (including PhD candidates).

¹ Luijk, M. P. (2025). Opgroeien in een veranderende wereld: De pedagogiek als verbindende wetenschap: Growing up in a changing society: Pedagogical science as a connecting discipline. [Pedagogiek, 45\(2\), 192-213](#)

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The websites of the institutes at the faculty were indeed below par. Already at the time of the assessment, a new faculty wide website was being built and implemented. This website will also pay extra attention to the visibility of research, researchers and projects. So, we fully endorse this suggestion of the committee.

Viability & Human Resources Policy

Although the committee fully acknowledged that the available research time for staff and PhD candidates increased on average, the committee recommends establishing a support structure for junior staff members, as their workload appears to be particularly high. This could include a mentoring system, where senior staff are paired with juniors, or securing funding to provide additional time for grant writing, an important yet relatively new aspect of their role.

There are ample strategies to support (junior) staff members regarding fulfilling their tasks. In our Institute, each junior staff member is supervised by a senior staff member (also their line manager). The yearly 'Result and Development Interview' is a moment in time to formally monitor the work load of the junior staff member. Also, wishes and needs related to funding opportunities are discussed during this meeting. On faculty level, staff members (both junior and senior) can request support from one of the funding officers who arrange different kind of training and support options related to grant writing. The Faculty Training Budget, also available for both junior and senior staff, covers other costs for training as well – ranging from language to programming courses. On department level, average available research time for staff will still be monitored yearly by the director of research and discussed within the management and with the chairs of the basic units. Monthly, the management team meets the chairs of the units, and workload of (all) staff is structurally on the agenda by discussing the hiring of additional temporary educational staff and/or de-intensify the educational courses. In principle, the teaching load for assistant professors (UDs), associate professors (UHDs) and full professors, is the same. However, the chairs are also in the position, in consultation with the course coordinators, to divide the available time over the (junior) staff slightly differently, providing junior staff some 'extra' time and space in a course, until they are more experienced. This process is supported by a recently implemented digital tool (PLAN). At the moment, giving junior staff structural additional time for writing grant proposals, is not a realistic option because of budget cuts and financial challenges. However, it might be reconsidered in the near future. In collaboration with the funding officer, research director and chair of the unit, a plan will be made regarding talented staff and grant opportunities.

The Committee advises that, given the recent discontinuation of the Tenure-track system and the development of a new system yet to be implemented, it is crucial to communicate the new Recognition and Rewards system to junior staff and provide clear guidance on how they can develop their careers.

We agree, and recently, a faculty wide plan was developed in order to implement the new Recognition and Rewards system, including transparent promotion criteria that further prioritise quality over quantity. The first round of applications in this newly reward system has been executed and evaluated. Apart from some minor details that have been adjusted, this new personnel policy was evaluated positively. The faculty board regularly informs staff members of the latest developments in academic personnel policy.

PhD policy and programme

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Although the committee does not make explicit recommendations aimed at optimising PhD trajectories, it states in its review that the duration and discontinuation rate, especially among external PhD candidates, is notably long and high.

This pattern manifests itself throughout the faculty. Besides continued monitoring, we want to reduce delay and prevent discontinuation. To that end, several actions were undertaken recently and documented in 'Finishing in time', a guide of the faculty Graduate School, implemented by the faculty board early 2025. These actions include: Enhanced selection and admission procedures by an independent committee, comprising the director of the Graduate school, the director of research, and a senior staff member for external PhD candidates; More strictly enforced training in English language; Aligning the expectations of supervisors and PhD candidates annually; More and better informing of PhD candidates on topics such as introduction courses, mental health, and training options; Intervision meetings with other PhD candidates; Coaching and training sessions for supervisors. Furthermore, progress monitoring of PhD candidates will be further standardised, including the yearly monitoring by the Graduate School. We will consider the inclusion of external senior researchers in these processes to enrich them. In trajectories that are delayed in the last year, a meeting will be organised between the Graduate School and supervisor to discuss how to finish the project within time. Whether or not these new steps will lead to fewer and shorter delays, will be evaluated annually by the Graduate School.

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