

Response to Research Assessment 2010–2015: Kapteyn Astronomical Institute

We thank the Evaluation Board (EB) for their thorough, thoughtful, and helpful evaluation. We were especially proud to read that “the EB is of the overall opinion that Kapteyn is very well positioned for the future”. We are proud of our accomplishments in the past years and the recognition of the EB of these accomplishments. This evaluation strengthens our determination to continue on the same upwards trajectory, together with our partners in the Faculty of Science and Engineering at the University of Groningen, NOVA and the other NOVA institutes, ASTRON, and SRON. We react below to the EB’s recommendations.

In connection with the risks listed above, the EB advises the Kapteyn Institute be prepared to invest further in emerging fields where it already has programmatic strengths, and to avoid overextending the number of projects and fields of study, and spreading its expertise too thinly.

The staff and management team of the Kapteyn Institute regularly re-examine our strategic plans in light of internal and external developments on time scales of roughly every 18 months. We are well aware of the risks of spreading ourselves too thinly and the need to preserve Kapteyn’s core competences and critical mass in projects and fields. At the same time, we keep an eye on major developments to determine where we can make significant impact.

Given the fact that Groningen is relatively far from The Hague and government officials, the EB advises that the experienced and possibly emeritus Dutch scientists of the Institute mentor the younger, mostly foreign staff members, to help them play influential roles in policy, strategy, and decision making at the national level.

The Kapteyn management team is constantly looking for opportunities to introduce our younger staff to local, national, and international strategy, policy-, and decision-making. Key parts of this effort include increasing networking opportunities and ensuring a reasonable level of Dutch language fluency in the staff. Our senior, well connected staff regularly lobby decision makers in The Hague to involve our junior staff in national committees and other important policy events. For example, we are actively working to find key roles for our junior staff in the ongoing National Science Agenda process and in NOVA, NWO, and KNAW’s *ad-hoc* committees.

The Kapteyn Institute is advised to continue its strong efforts in outreach and valorization, and to transmit lessons from best practice to other nodes in the NOVA network (especially in valorization).

We have every intention of continuing these efforts. Our outreach lead, Marlies van de Weygaert, has recently taken up a staff position partly funded by Kapteyn and by an ERC grant to continue Kapteyn’s outreach efforts. Our valorization efforts are supported by continuing interaction with the broader University of Groningen community, the northern Dutch provinces, and industry – a process that will continue for the coming years. Of course, we always welcome discussion with our NOVA partner

institutes regarding best practice in valorization and outreach.

The Kapteyn Institute is advised to carefully monitor grant funding activity, and be prepared to work to diversify funding streams should the normal channels dry up due to demographic and other factors.

We continually monitor grant funding activity. Our contacts inside NWO are very helpful in this regard, as well as the Talent and Development Office at the University of Groningen.

The Kapteyn Institute is advised to continue current efforts to diversify its faculty in age and gender.

We are proud of having increased our female-male staff ratio to levels well above the national average in the past years. At the same time we are aware of the strongly peaked age distribution, a relic of an earlier epoch in Kapteyn's history that will continue to work its way through the system. Kapteyn management is in regular discussion with the Faculty of Science and Engineering regarding possibilities for future faculty hires. As a concrete example, we follow developments with the Rosalind Franklin Fellows program closely, having already recruited two excellent junior female staff through the program.

The Kapteyn Institute, with NOVA, should extend a separate career development set of activities to its postdocs, building on its highly successful program for its PhD students.

This is an excellent suggestion, and the Kapteyn management team and staff are starting to discuss ways to improve the development of our postdocs, perhaps through mechanisms like mentorship by non-supervisory staff. The Faculty of Science and Engineering at the University of Groningen is building a postdoc community, including a postdoc council. This community will focus on career development training and other opportunities to prepare postdocs for the next steps in their careers. We will of course also work with NOVA to find specific steps, including the annual career weekend, that improve the career perspectives of Kapteyn's postdoctoral community.

The Kapteyn Institute is advised to continue to monitor the ratio of PhD students to supervisory staff to ensure the quality of graduate education remains high.

This ratio is a continual challenge and opportunity for Kapteyn, as we are pulled between the current programmatic need to increase our PhD student population to fund our activities and the desire to keep our "excellent" PhD program "steadily improving". We have recently instituted a PhD recruitment process that has both streamlined and improved our recruitment efforts, and we are constantly looking for new ways to improve the quality of our PhD education. As an example, we believe that improving our intake of masters students has a positive impact on our PhD program: a short film, advertising our unique MSc program to international students, will be produced this summer and go online in the autumn.