



K O N I N K L I J K E N E D E R L A N D S E A K A D E M I E V A N W E T E N S C H A P P E N

POSITION OF THE BOARD OF THE ROYAL NETHERLANDS ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES (KNAW) REGARDING THE 2018 SEP EVALUATION OF NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE FOR NEUROSCIENCE (NIN)

The board and management of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) are pleased to respond to the thorough assessment carried out by the evaluation committee that visited the NIN in March 2018. In formulating this position, the remarks by the NIN management and the Scientific Advisory Board have also been taken into account. The board and management of the KNAW would like to express their gratitude to the evaluation committee for their extensive and thoughtful assessment.

The board affirms the committee's conclusion that the NIN performs world-class research with substantial societal relevance, and that the NIN has a clear added value in the Dutch and international landscape due to its unique research profile and unparalleled combination of research facilities. We are encouraged to read that the committee expects the institute to retain its scientific excellence, highlighting the future potential of the group leaders. The committee raised several important concerns regarding the viability of the institute. These concerns are recognized by the board of the KNAW, the Scientific Advisory Board and the management of the institute, and for the most part, work is already ongoing to alleviate these issues. This position paper responds to the most urgent recommendations and main conclusions of the committee as they appear in the report.

Housing situation

The committee pointed out that the "housing situation has now become a problem of the highest priority" and provides several specific recommendations to improve the situation.

The concerns regarding the housing of the institute are justified and have the full attention of the KNAW board. The board shares the committee's sense of urgency, but in a matter this complicated and with substantial and long-lasting impact, all options need to be carefully investigated. In 2017, a housing strategy has been drafted in which four scenarios have been construed. In 2018, the KNAW anticipates to finalise feasibility studies for the two most plausible housing options at two distinct locations. In the vision of the KNAW board, the preferred option is to remain in the Amsterdam area because of the combined expertise and knowledge on neuroscience in this region. The board of the KNAW feels that a new, dedicated building as suggested by the committee has both advantages and disadvantages. While a dedicated building can boost the visibility of the institute, it can also be restrictive in space, making adaptations to growth or changing needs in facilities more problematic. While long-term solutions are being investigated, the board will work closely with the NIN management and the current landlord AMC, to see to it that short-term improvements to the current housing situation are implemented.

Mission and visibility

The committee concluded that the focus and cohesiveness of the NIN has improved since the previous evaluation and provided specific suggestions to further enhance the research focus and the visibility.

The board of the KNAW considers the NIN of great value to sustain high quality, fundamental neuroscientific research in the Netherlands, complementary to the research performed at the universities and university medical centres. The unique position of the NIN in the scientific landscape is not only appreciated by the committee, but by the Dutch neuroscience community in general. Considering the highly competitive international field of neuroscience, the board explicitly invites the management of the NIN to prioritise those recommendations that could lead to more international visibility and recognition. In particular, we encourage the management of the NIN to ensure that the international acclaim of the individual scientists optimally reflects on the institute as a whole. The KNAW board agrees with the suggestion by the committee that alignment with the institute's mission should remain an important aspect of the recruitment strategy and the evaluation procedures for current research staff.

Operational management

The committee suggested that, although the scientific leadership of the institute is excellent, the operational leadership should be improved.

The KNAW board agrees with the committee that sound operational management is essential to support the scientific excellence and societal relevance of the institute. The KNAW board will actively work with the directors of the NIN to put measures into effect to improve operational leadership.

Big data infrastructure and open science

The committee noted that the NIN lacks a proper IT support infrastructure to facilitate data-intensive research. It recommended to invest in shared computational services, data storage facilities and computational expertise within the institute.

The KNAW board agrees with the committee that in view of current and future developments towards more data-intensive research, basic IT infrastructure at the NIN needs to be improved and arranged more centrally and professionally. KNAW-ICT services is well-equipped to assist in this process at the strategic and executive level and can support implementation of solutions that take into account the specific nature of data acquired and the support needed for their scientific goals. The KNAW board urges the NIN management to see to the implementation and awareness of the institute's open science and open data policies, for instance by appointing a dedicated data-steward.

Spinoza Centre and Netherlands Brain Bank

The committee considered the studies that can be performed at the NIN due to the combination of a number of unique resources and facilities, including the Netherlands Brain Bank, and access to the Spinoza Centre to be 'unquestionably unique in the world'. The committee recommended continuing this relationship and affiliation.

The board of the KNAW recognises the value that all these facilities represent to the NIN. The Spinoza Centre is a partnership between the Amsterdam UMC, UvA, VU, and NIN and the partners share responsibility for this centre. Through ongoing discussions, the KNAW board seeks to keep the Spinoza Centre and its facilities accessible to the scientists of the NIN through the continuation of the partnership. The development of the Netherlands Brain Bank into a powerful (inter)national infrastructure is in line with the KNAW's vision on the (national) role of its institutes; the Board supports the continued affiliation of the Netherlands Brain Bank with the NIN.

PhD programme

The committee encourages the group leaders to prevent excessively long durations, but notes that the time to complete a task is not as important as the quality of the outcome.

The board of the KNAW agrees with the committee and the Scientific Advisory Board that excessively long durations of PhD-tracks should be prevented, and that carefully balancing out the quality and duration of PhD-tracks is primarily the responsibility of the group leaders. The NIN has already taken action to limit the duration of the PhD-tracks, which has made a positive impact. We encourage the NIN management to continue on this route.

Research integrity and diversity of staff

The committee advises to make the measures to assure research integrity more visible, and appoint an official confidentiality advisor. Regarding diversity of staff, the committee supports the NIN's efforts to increase the number of female group leaders.

The board of the KNAW wishes to state that the general principles for professional scientific conduct must be adhered to at all time. The KNAW has several measures in place to safeguard scientific integrity, including the Scientific Integrity Complaint Procedure and Scientific Integrity Counsellors. The effectiveness of these procedures is dependent on their visibility amongst staff, and the board of the KNAW strongly supports the NIN management in its efforts to increase awareness of issues related to research integrity. The KNAW board is of the opinion that gender diversity in research staff leads to more innovation in science, and is thus of great importance to sustain scientific excellence at the NIN. Similar to the committee, the board of the KNAW urges the NIN to set ambitious targets to increase the number of female group leaders. The board of the KNAW supports the suggestion by the Scientific Advisory Board, that the NIN should emphasize in its recruitment strategy how it supports work-life balance and young families. In addition, the KNAW board encourages the NIN management to stimulate diversity at all levels; e.g. by promoting the career development of young female researchers employed by the institute.

The board and the management of the KNAW trust that NIN will make efforts to successfully implement the recommendations and looks forward to working together with the management in this respect.

Amsterdam, July 2018