

Amsterdam, 12 June 2018

To:
Prof. W. van Saarloos, President of the KNAW
Board of the KNAW
Mr. M. Zaanen, general director of the KNAW

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for Neuroscience

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Dear President and board of the KNAW, dear director,

The board of the Netherlands Institute for Neuroscience (NIN) is pleased with the positive evaluation by the peer-review committee that visited the institute in March 2018. The committee rated that our research program is excellent. This judgement is based on the quality of the researchers, the impact of the publications and the unique research infrastructure, including the Netherlands Brain Bank, the non-human primate facility and the Netherlands Sleep Registry. Furthermore, the research program fits well in the National Research Agenda. The committee concluded that NIN, euro for euro, achieves significantly more than its competitors in the field.

The committee judged that the NIN's research program is of utmost relevance to society, because it addresses a large number of brain diseases and future therapeutic strategies. The committee also appreciated the outreach activities, the advisory role and stressed the importance of training a new generation of researchers.

The committee identified a number of concerns for the viability of the institute, and in particular the institute's housing situation. In this letter, we respond to the conclusions and recommendations of the committee.

Housing situation

The committee indicated that the institute's housing situation presents a serious, acute problem that urgently needs to be resolved. This issue presents a substantial threat to our viability. The committee noted that the building is in a relatively poor state of maintenance, does not encourage collaboration, does not have a prominent entrance, and lacks the architectural identity it deserves. In addition, construction work is often severely delayed as a result of the slow approval process of the AMC, the owner of the building in which the NIN is housed. Furthermore, the AMC wishes to renovate one of the buildings, which will dramatically affect various research lines. The committee was alarmed that the housing problem signaled by the previous peer review committee had not yet been resolved. The NIN concurs with the committee that immediate action is necessary and that a new, architecturally attractive NIN building at an accessible, central location is the preferred

solution. We have started to explore the possibilities to improve the institute's housing situation, in close collaboration with the KNAW. Furthermore, we expect that the entrance to the institute will be improved in 2018.

Visibility

The committee judged that the visibility of the institute is too low. Although this is difficult to quantify, our impression that the visibility has increased substantially in recent years because of targeted investments in outreach and communication, including investments in communication staff, increased presence in the social media and improvements to the website. For the scientific audience, the PIs of the institute are internationally highly visible, which is related to the excellent quality of the research program. Furthermore, the institute organizes a bi-yearly summer school, organizes the Art of Neuroscience competition and awards the Ariëns Kappers medal for a distinguished neuroscientist. Furthermore, we anticipate that our increased investments in public outreach will have a highly positive influence on the visibility of the NIN in society.

Non-human primate research

The committee considers research with non-human primates crucial to understanding higher cognitive functions. The committee stated that the research performed using the NIN's non-human primate facility is world-class and of substantial societal value. The committee members were particularly charmed by the project aiming to develop a neural implant to give blind individuals rudimentary vision. Furthermore, the committee judged that the non-human primate facility is an essential asset to neuroscience in the Netherlands and abroad. The NIN is pleased with this strong support for non-human primate research taking place at the institute.

Management and big data infrastructure

The committee made a number of recommendations about the operational management, which deserve attention of the NIN management. The NIN aims to improve the transparency and internal communication between researchers and the service departments by filling the positions that have become vacant. To enhance the transparency of the decision-making process, the board of the institute publishes its decision internally on intranet and discusses all possible issues in the monthly group leader meeting. Furthermore, the budget and expenses of the institute are accessible to all group leaders.

The committee remarked that the NIN seems to lack a proper IT support infrastructure to facilitate data-intensive research, including computing power, storage facilities, and computational expertise. The institute is actively exploring the best way for storing data, making research data accessible for the scientific community according the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) data principles and new policies for sharing computational services and computational expertise between the groups.

Other recommendations

The committee made the following recommendations (not addressed above):

1. *Spinoza Centre*: We agree with the committee that the combination of the Spinoza Centre with the Netherlands Brain Bank and the non-human primate facility enables the NIN to perform studies that are unquestionably unique in the world. The NIN will maintain its strong support for the Spinoza Centre.
2. *Netherlands Brain Bank*: We agree with the committee that the Netherlands Brain Bank is a major international asset and we will ensure that the Brain Bank will remain affiliated with the NIN.
3. *Research integrity*: In accordance with the recommendations of the committee, the NIN has an active policy to increase the awareness of researchers of issues related to research integrity. The NIN is satisfied with the placement of the integrity officer at the KNAW, which is expected to lower the threshold for reporting possible integrity issues compared to employing an integrity officer at the NIN itself.
4. *Diversity and inclusiveness*: We appreciated the supportive comments of the committee regarding our policies to increase diversity by attracting female group leaders and inviting diverse external speakers.

The NIN board looks forward to the future interactions with the KNAW about the peer-review report and the implementation of the committee's recommendations.

Cordially yours,



Pieter Roelfsema
Director NIN