POSITION OF THE BOARD OF THE ROYAL NETHERLANDS ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES (KNAW) REGARDING THE 2021 SEP EVALUATION OF THE HUBRECHT INSTITUTE

The board of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) is pleased to respond to the report of the committee - chaired by Professor Roel Nusse - that assessed the Hubrecht Institute in September 2021. The board of the KNAW would like to express their great appreciation and gratitude to the evaluation committee, for the time and effort needed to execute a thorough and detailed assessment under the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The committee considers the Hubrecht Institute a world leading Institute on stem cell and developmental biology and notes that the Institute has successfully made advances on all components of the overall strategy. The evaluation committee rated the institute’s research quality, relevance to society and viability all as excellent. The board is pleased with the positive outcome of the research assessment of the Hubrecht Institute.

Below the KNAW board will share its views on the committee’s main recommendations. In formulating its position the board also took into consideration the reactions of the Hubrecht Institute’s management and the Scientific Advisory Board to the research assessment report.

1. **Optimization of the interactions between the Institute and the UMCU researchers working in the Annex building, ideally by a role for Hubrecht management in the UMCU planning process for locating groups in the Annex.**

The committee received signals during the site visit – both from the Institute and the UMCU – that collaborations could and should be intensified. The committee suggests to put active mechanisms in place to promote further collaborations and integration. Furthermore, the committee suggests an advisory role of the Hubrecht leadership in appointing new researchers for the Annex Building. The board agrees with this recommendation and with the actions proposed by the institute’s management in response to this such as the organization of joint seminars. The board and the institute’s management will discuss this recommendation with the UMCU board. In addition the board will continue to encourage the Hubrecht Institute to further strengthen collaboration in research, both nationally and internationally, given the national role Academy institutes fulfil.

2. **Providing more opportunities for trainees (graduate students, postdoctoral fellows) to participate in conferences outside of the Institute, and other aspects of career development.**

The board acknowledges the importance of training, support and supervision of PhD-students and postdocs. The board trusts the institute will make full use of the committee’s valuable recommendations to further improve this, starting with a plan to increase attendance of conferences by the trainees.

3. **Awareness of work-stress related problems within the group of scientists, the group leaders in particular.**

The committee observed that junior group leaders perceive high pressure to perform at the top level, both regarding grant acquisition and publishing in high profile journals. Although pressure and competitive
spirit are not so much imposed by the leadership, it is strongly felt by some investigators and may negatively impact job satisfaction and well-being. The board is pleased that the Hubrecht Institute has already made a start addressing this issue by organizing regular meetings between PhD students and an external trustee as mentioned in the institute's response to this assessment. The board will ask the institute to make an action plan with additional measures to reduce work pressure focusing on junior group leaders in particular. As a member of the national program Recognition and Rewards, the board stimulates a transition to a broader recognition and rewarding of the work of academic staff. This includes putting quality over quantity, putting emphasis on impact rather than journal impact factors, and stimulating collaborative work with recognition of different talents and activities (including education). The board notes that in that context it is important that the management of institutes discuss with each staff member expectations and focus areas. Making sure criteria for tenure remain clear to all, is part of that.

4. Recruit and retain senior female group leaders, to balance the gender distribution among all ranks.
The committee notes that despite a good overall gender balance, the institute has difficulties attracting and retaining female researchers at the senior level. Also, recruiting minority group leaders is still an elusive goal. The board agrees that diversity and inclusion at the Hubrecht Institute needs further improvement. This issue has already received much attention in the communications between the board of the KNAW and the management of the institute and will continue to be an important topic. The Academy has recently formulated a vision on Diversity and Inclusions and is currently developing a Gender Equality Plan to support the Academy institutes in their efforts to improve on this. As the institute's management rightly points out, the recruitment of a new director provides again an opportunity to improve the gender balance at senior level.

5. Involve the Scientific Advisory Board in scouting for talent, in searches for new group leaders and in recruiting a new director.
The committee indicated that it was somewhat surprised that the Scientific Advisory Board is not involved in the recruitment of new researchers. The committee suggests that the Scientific Advisory Board will play a role in identifying new group leaders, recruitment and appointments, including suitable candidates as a new director. The board welcomes this recommendation and is pleased that both the institute's management and the Scientific Advisory Board embrace this recommendation as well. With regard to the recruitment of a new director, a member of the Scientific Advisory Board is part of the search committee for possible candidates. The chair of the Scientific Advisory Board has been added to the Appointment Advisory Committee and has asked all members of the Scientific Advisory Board to provide the search committee with suggestions for candidates. Moreover the board adopted the committee’s recommendation regarding the chair of the search committee by appointing an independent member as chair of this search committee.

6. Come to a transparent and consensus policy on open-access publication and adoption of DORA principles.
The committee recommends that the institute develops written guidelines regarding open data and promoting the implementation of the DORA-declaration among all research staff including PhD candidates. The board appreciates the pro-active attitude the institute’s managements has shown over the years on these topics. It supports the institute management in the follow-up on the actions that where proposed by the committee.

In sum, the board wishes to thank the committee for their analysis and congratulate the management of the Hubrecht Institute on this positive assessment of its past performance and optimistic vision of its future. It is confident that the Hubrecht Institute will use the evaluation committee's recommendations in order to help sustain the excellent level of performance.