

## **Directorate's Reaction to the NIAS Evaluation Report "Creativity and Inspiration"**

The NIAS directorate is grateful to the committee for the way it has carried out its task in a thorough and precise way. We are pleased with the very positive results of the evaluation.

NIAS is a national institute that fulfills a unique niche in the academic landscape of the Netherlands and the NIAS directorate is glad that the committee endorses this national position in unequivocal terms. The directorate shares with the committee the view that NIAS is "a safe haven for curiosity-driven research in a day and age where this kinds of circumstances have become increasingly rare" and that NIAS is an excellent institute that belongs to the best institutes of advanced study in the world.

Alongside the extremely positive conclusions in its report, aptly titled "Creativity & Inspiration", the committee offered valuable suggestions for further improvement of NIAS policy and operational processes. One of the recommendations concerned the outreach of the institute. It was suggested to make more use of alumni as "active ambassadors" for NIAS than is currently the case. The recent revival of the Alumni Board can be seen as a first, concrete step in this direction.

The NIAS directorate sees the development of a professional communication strategy and new financial support policies (e.g. the creation of a fund *Friends of NIAS*) as one of the important issues for the coming years. The recently launched new website is an example of this aim which also addresses the recommendation to *cherish the alumni*. The 'follow up' strategy will be further professionalized such that the connection between NIAS and the alumni's publications, prizes and awards is made more visible.

The NIAS directorate fully agrees with the remarks of the committee concerning the international orientation of NIAS. For keeping its leading role as a *national* institute, an *international* outreach remains crucial.

The fellows-selection process is a crucial part of the operational processes within NIAS and has the full attention of the directorate. The evaluation committee recommends the installation of an additional committee 'in-between' the reviewers and the NIAS director in order to increase the transparency of the procedure. We agree with the committee that the selection process can be improved but we are not sure it will be necessary to install another separate scientific committee. Over the last few years, the NIAS Science Advisory Board (SAB) has been limited to overseeing processes but including a more substantive role in the selection process would enrich the task and ensure engagement.

In this perspective, we welcome the recommendation of the evaluation committee to extend the SAB. The board is currently small, which means it is limited in scope. More disciplines should be represented, to cover the wide range of Social Sciences and Humanities, and at least one of its members should be an international IAS-specialist who knows the specific problems and opportunities an IAS encounters. The expansion and broadening of the SAB would also strengthen the position of NIAS in relation to Dutch universities as well as the KNAW. The NIAS directorate welcomes this suggestion and, together with the chair of the SAB, will take steps to implement the expansion of this board. In case the SAB will get a more prominent substantive role, other options to guarantee a fair procedure have to be explored.

The NIAS directorate is hesitant about another suggestion by the committee to improve the selection process, namely to arrange pre-selection interviews with candidates. This would entail a significant administrative burden and NIAS does not have sufficient staff at the moment to ensure that this process can be carried out to the required standard.

Concerning the bridge to the (life) sciences, the directorate agrees with the committee that the humanities and the social sciences should remain the core business of NIAS. However, we would like to stress also that the presence of a number of scholars from the (life) sciences enriches debates between scholars.

We were pleased to see that the committee acknowledges and highlights the difficult financial situation of NIAS after the drastic budget cuts and the upheaval of moving from Wassenaar to Amsterdam. In order to ensure the institute's viability to realize the ambitions, it is vital that the financial situation improves. We see it as our responsibility to continue to set priorities within the existing budget to guarantee the primary functions of NIAS. However, without a substantial increase in the institute's budget, NIAS' ambitions – in terms of public visibility, summer schools, workshops, modern research support such as software and editing, et cetera – cannot be realized. Extra funds may be achieved by setting up new sponsored fellowships as well as by renegotiating contracts with existing sponsors, so that they fund a larger proportion of the real costs of a fellowship at NIAS. This policy has already been successfully implemented for a couple of fellowships.

However, our efforts in the short run alone will not be enough to ensure a sufficiently robust financial situation. Given the evaluation report's clear message about viability, we sincerely hope that the KNAW will be open to discuss a temporary increase in its financial support to NIAS, to alleviate the period of severe budget cuts. We hope that at least for the coming three years NIAS' budget can be increased, which would provide us with resources to realize NIAS' ambitions on the one hand, and to secure future, long-term external funding on the other hand.

To conclude, we would like to express our gratitude to the evaluation committee once again for its conscientious work and clear and incisive report and we look forward to a productive dialogue with the KNAW board about the committee's recommendations for the future of NIAS.