

Response to the Research Review NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies 2012-2017

June 15th 2018

Preamble

In this brief document the NIOD presents its preliminary response to the main conclusions and recommendations of the international peer review of the institute, as laid down in its *Research Review NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies 2012-2017*.¹ The assessment was carried out in April-May 2018.

The review was based on a self-assessment report provided by NIOD, additional documentation, and information gathered during a site visit on April 5th and 6th 2018, at which occasion the committee met tens of staff members, as well as PhD-students.

In this document we respond to the assessment and recommendations made by the committee, following the main structure of its report. During the months to come, NIOD will discuss the outcomes with the staff, the Academic Advisory Board and other advisers, to draw up a more in-depth analysis and plan of action.

General remarks

First of all, NIOD would like to express its gratitude to the committee: both the conversations during the site visit and the final report and recommendations testify of a genuine interest as well as a sharp eye for the position and activities of NIOD. The institute welcomes the generally positive judgements in the assessment and considers the report to be an important encouragement and support for the actual policy of the institute and its plans for the near future. At the same time the management and staff are well aware of the pitfalls and potential dangers and will take seriously the

¹ The committee was appointed by the Board of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (KNAW) and chaired by prof. dr Martin Stokhof, with members prof. dr ir Thea Hilhorst, prof. dr Pieter Lagrou, prof. dr Mary Fulbrook and prof. dr Stephan Parmentier, supported by dr Floor Meijer as independent secretary to the committee.

advice of the committee to see the institute more through the eyes of the outside world.

Particularly satisfying are the committee's conclusions that:

- (1) NIOD occupies a unique position, both nationally and internationally, in and outside academia, because of the intricate ties between research, collections and services;
- (2) NIOD would most likely have a slim chance of survival as an independent research institute without its own collection.

Research Quality

Having established that the quality of the research is very good, and its relevance excellent, the committee tends to signal differences in focus, output and international orientation between the two main research programs, Holocaust & Genocide Studies (HGS) and War & Society. These differences do exist but it remains important to understand their historic institutional roots. HGS has been established as a specialized program from the very outset, resulting from the merger with the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. War & Society used to be, until a few years ago, a loosely organized field of research. We are convinced that the current reorientation, which has been initiated about three years ago and has been positively noted by the committee, will work out well in the near future.

Another issue is the assessment of publications in Dutch. Although the committee clearly appreciates the value, particularly in the humanities, of *hybrid* publications – aimed at both peers and the general public, according to the QRiH definitions – it is suggested that publications in Dutch have intrinsically less value than publications in English. We would argue that this doesn't do justice to publications of which the subject as well as its audience is primarily national, and are part of a national scholarly debate. At the same time, we agree that it's important to bring the results of this research to international fora, in translation, or in articles in journals or edited volumes. NIOD has already adopted this policy but will seek to enhance this practice.

We would like to thank the committee for its proposal to rename the societal research program into Public History; we will seriously think it over. It may be added that this program is actually working on a portfolio, based on deliberate choices related to the institute's research policy and its societal goals.

NIOD fully acknowledges the fact that over the last years the number of national and European personal grants and the NWO's open competition

subsidies has been relatively low, despite a series of efforts in this field. In the self-assessment report it was argued that, because of the shrinking humanities funds and poor success rates, NIOD deliberately pursued grants in the third-stream. With success, considering the percentage of externally financed projects - 45% of the total NIOD budget, being an estimated 65% of its research budget – being very high for a humanities institute. The committee advises that NIOD should be more ambitious with regard to more competitive second-stream funds, implicitly suggesting that the third-stream money is easier to get. We would like to stress that third-stream funding does not roll on its own to the institute, but may demand huge efforts as well, often over many years, as the public funding for the large-scale programme on the Decolonization of Indonesia demonstrates.

Nevertheless, NIOD intends to intensify its efforts to get grants and subsidies to create more room for innovative programs and, particularly, research by postdocs and PhD's. In this respect cooperation with IXA should have a positive impact.

Relevance to Society

With regard to the chapter Relevance to Society NIOD has few comments, as the institute is delighted with the committee's very positive assessment. We happily agree with the comment that NIOD should regard its activities on societal impact from a more dynamic perspective, in the sense that it already actively engages the public in its activities.

Viability

With regard to the recommendation that the institute should expand, we think we should be cautious. For research institutes like NIOD, heavily dependent on external financial funds, sustainability is a tough and continuing challenge. The key is to find a balance between the fixed lump sum budget and temporary financing, which also pertains to HR-policy and academic and societal positioning. From that perspective it is, first of all, important to enhance the institute's absorbing capacity when it comes to financial and HR fluctuations.

A complementary strategy for strengthening NIOD's position may also be pursued by intensifying collaboration with academic partners, in national and international networks, by scholarly innovation and focusing even more on international debate and cooperation. Furthermore, NIOD might also pursue cooperation with other archival institutes as well as managerial cooperation within the KNAW.

As the committee rightly states, one of the biggest long-term challenges concerns the fact that the collection by and large remains tied to a specific period and specific geographical areas (the Netherlands and its overseas empire), while the institute is engaged in research that is not thus localized in space and time, and that therefore is less tied to the collection and, thereby, to its traditional societal impact. This issue is not a new: it dates from the 1990's when the institute chose to position itself as an institute for contemporary history of war and genocide. In reality, however, these tensions, if existent, appeared to be rather mild. First of all, the scholarly and societal interest for the Second World War is still vivid and intense, and this is not going to change soon, according to memory studies theory. The cases of EHRI and NOB may well illustrate the viability of this historical field, in a double meaning: it testifies of the lasting, wide-spread interest as well as the opportunities it offers for innovation.

Even more important, however, is that there is a kind of 'natural continuum', where NIOD's research in the broader fields of War & Society and Genocide Studies may build upon its deep knowledge and expertise with regard to the Second World War, the Holocaust, modern colonial and post-colonial history and contemporary history of West- and Eastern Europe and Asia. Knowledge and expertise appear to be, in other words, transposable to other themes and periods. This may even apply to collection management, as the common project with the Rwanda Genocide archives demonstrates.

PhD Programme

With regard to the section relating to the PhD programme we would like to stress that the institute and its staff is hosting and supervising a variety of PhD-students, who, in general, also participate in a variety of national and local university programmes. Although the committee judges generally favorably of the way PhD's are functioning, it advises that, in order to successfully sustain an increased PhD population, the institute should have to professionalize its PhD programme. Although we think that we may create more procedural clarity about the system of training and supervision, and even be more active towards the national and international community of PhD students working in the field of war and genocide, the NIOD should only offer specialized and complementary training related to our fields of research, and not build a full-blown programme of its own.

Recommendations and closing remarks

The previous sections should indicate that we are already dealing with many recommendations of the committee. In the months to come NIOD will draw up a more in-depth analysis and plan of action, doing so in conjunction with the Scientific Advisory Board.

One specific issue remains to be raised here, which concerns the developing of targets and procedures for performance, feedback and assessment at various levels of the organization (recommendations 1-3). NIOD considers these recommendations as an important mission for the years to come and want to stress their interconnectedness: profiling the programs, the developments of indicators, the choice of various publication channels (including the publication language), grant policy, outreach activities, assessment of the performance of the program team as well as individual researchers, career development and – above all – the institute’s financial and HR policy.

To elaborate a coherent policy clearly is the key to enhance the viability of NIOD, to keep up - or even raise – the level of research quality and societal impact.

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