

## **Position of the Academy Board on the Evaluation of the CBS Fungal Biodiversity Centre (CBS-KNAW)**

The Board of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) is very pleased with the outcome of the CBS Fungal Biodiversity Centre's external assessment. The assessment committee was chaired by Professor Stanley Brul. The Academy Board's position regarding the outcome of the assessment is elaborated below. Comments on the assessment report by the institute's director and the scientific advisory board have been taken into account.

### **1. General remarks**

The committee describes the CBS as a vital and vibrant institute that is highly regarded both in the Netherlands and internationally. The committee rates the institute as 'excellent', with a score of 5 for quality, productivity, and societal relevance, and 'very good', with a score of 4 for vitality and feasibility. The committee makes valuable recommendations concerning all aspects.

The assessment report notes that the CBS faces a considerable challenge: it must strike the right balance between more focus on the one hand and a broad (or broader) scope on the other. Whereas its research activities require more focus, its collection duties require broad (or broader) scope.

### **2. Recommendations**

The Academy Board agrees with the most of the committee's recommendations. The recommendations that it finds most relevant are discussed below.

*Recommendation 1. Renegotiate the direct funding with the Academy:* although the Academy Board understands the assessment committee's viewpoint, it will be extremely difficult to satisfy the financial wishes it has formulated. Indeed, due to massive budget cuts, the Academy has not had much leeway for structural budget increases. Nevertheless, the Academy has agreed to invest 4 million euros in a substantial expansion of the CBS's building.

*Recommendation 2. Adapt the CBS's financial management system to make it fit for purpose, i.e. to facilitate the sale of strains and books, which is one of the institute's core activities:* this issue has recently been discussed and the necessary actions have been undertaken, both by the CBS and by the Academy.

*Recommendation 3. Secure the broad knowledge base that is needed to handle the diversity of fungi:* we acknowledge this recommendation, but at the same time we see tension between the broad scope of this task and the focus required for the CBS's research activities. As noted above, finding the right balance between these two aspects is a genuine challenge for the CBS's directorate.

*Recommendation 5. Improve the CBS's visibility among stakeholders and society and marketing of the institute's activities:* the Academy Board wishes to stress this recommendation and welcomes the fact that the CBS directorate has already undertaken several actions in this regard. In the light of the new Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP 2015-2021), researchers and other staff members should be actively engaged in improving the visibility of the CBS.

*Recommendation 6. On the proposed establishment of a Novel Product Discovery unit: think through the required expertise, infrastructure, and the appropriate business model:* the Academy Board wishes to stress the importance of this recommendation. The CBS directorate and the relevant group leaders and external experts should elaborate these aspects together and draw up an action plan covering the next 5-10 years. It will be clear that the further development of this unit requires investment choices based on an appropriate business plan.

*Recommendation 7. Create an 'Open Access Biology' environment and aim to become a central hub:* although the Academy Board understands the relevance of such new initiatives, we are hesitant to encourage the CBS to follow up on this recommendation. As mentioned above, the CBS should maintain (and sharpen) its focus; moreover, resources are limited.

*Recommendation 9. Pursue activities aimed at generating funding through global philanthropic organisations:* we agree that the CBS should explore these possibilities. This recommendation is related to recommendation 5: greater visibility and good marketing will help the CBS to succeed at this.

*Recommendations 11, 12 and 16: Develop clear timelines for strategy implementation, think through the internal communication about new strategies and the internal reporting lines:* the Academy Board stresses the importance of these recommendations. Although matters generally appear to proceed smoothly at the CBS, clarity about future plans, internal procedures, organisational structure and responsibilities are a prerequisite for every well-functioning organisation.

*Recommendations 13, 14, 15 about PhD training, PhD mentors, and participation of PhDs in graduate schools:* the Board advises the CBS to take these recommendations seriously. If there are aspects of the guidance or supervision of PhD students which can be improved, the CBS should consider incorporating such improvements into its existing procedures.

### **3. Group assessments**

Most CBS groups are rated 'very good' to 'excellent'. Some groups have received lower scores, and the CBS should take the relevant criticisms very seriously. In most of these cases, plans have already been drawn up by the CBS directorate to tackle the observed weaknesses (for example by merging groups or finding means to appoint new researchers). The assessment report argues that additional changes might be necessary for the Bioinformatics Group. The Board asks the director of the CBS to carefully consider what measures should be taken to reach the goals as described by the assessment committee.

### **4. In conclusion**

We congratulate the CBS on the very positive outcome of this thorough and critical assessment. As the committee states, many changes for the better have taken place at the CBS since 2002. On the basis of the assessment report, we conclude that the CBS's director has done an excellent job of leading the institute in the past twelve years. We trust that the CBS directorate will take the necessary steps to follow up on the recommendations, and that this report will contribute to maintaining the institute's excellent position in the field of fungal biodiversity.

Amsterdam, October 2014