

Position of the KNAW Board on the Evaluation of the Hubrecht Institute-KNAW

The Board of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) is pleased with the outcome of the external peer review of the Hubrecht Institute. The review committee was chaired by professor Carl Figdor. Below the position of the KNAW Board regarding the outcome of the review is formulated. The responses of the institute's director and the scientific advisory committee to the assessment report have been taken into account.

1. General remarks

During the presentation of the preliminary conclusions, just after the site visit, the committee was explicit in their opinion that the Hubrecht Institute "is even better than during the previous peer review six years ago". This opinion is clearly reflected in the assessment report. The committee argues that the Hubrecht Institute is excellent in various ways: the quality of its research, the new initiatives the director has taken in the past two years in order to reach a more interdisciplinary and collaborative research culture, and the dynamic academic atmosphere. Both the scientific output of the Hubrecht Institute and its impact scores are impressive. The Hubrecht Institute has a normalised impact score of about 2.9 over the past ten years. The committee states that in this respect the Hubrecht Institute is comparable to world-leading institutes, such as EMBL and MIT.

The Board of the KNAW agrees fully with the long-term goal of the institute's director to integrate the stem cell and developmental biology groups with more quantitative sciences, such as the physical and technical disciplines. Furthermore, the Board is pleased with the fact that the PhD students and postdocs described the Hubrecht Institute as a stimulating and inspiring environment, where the process of writing a PhD thesis is embedded in a solid supervisory structure.

Against this background the committee rates the institute as "excellent", with the score 5 on all aspects: quality, productivity, societal relevance, and vitality & feasibility. On several topics, the committee formulates valuable recommendations.

2. Recommendations

As specified below, the Board of the KNAW agrees with most of the recommendations.

Recommendation 1. The Hubrecht Institute should be funded at a level commensurate with its premier national and international standing.

The Board of the KNAW understands the viewpoint of the peer review committee. The Board takes this recommendation very seriously and is willing to work actively towards a solution.

Recommendation 2. The Hubrecht Institute should maintain focus on its basic research, particularly when connections with UMC Utrecht and other societal relevant parties intensify.

The KNAW Board agrees with this recommendation and has full confidence that the institute will find an optimal balance between the fundamental nature of its research and the more clinical and societal questions coming from the University Medical Center Utrecht.

Recommendation 3: With regard to the “buddy system”, the committee recommends that the Hubrecht Institute implement a system of more structured regular meetings of junior group leaders with their buddy, and to provide more structural assistance to postdocs in career development.

The KNAW Board agrees with this recommendation and is pleased to see that the institute already started to follow up the recommendation.

Recommendation 4: Technology transfer is poorly organised at the moment. The committee recommends the establishment of a technology transfer office with expertise in this area within the Hubrecht Institute.

The Board takes the view that the Hubrecht Institute (and even the KNAW *in toto*) is too small to establish a transfer technology office (TTO). Nonetheless the Board agrees that substantial improvement is still possible regarding the organisation of technology transfer. The establishment of a KNAW Holding with a set of clear rules and guidelines regarding spin-out activities is an important step in that direction.

Recommendation 5: The committee recommends more involvement of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) in matters such as giving advice on future research directions of the institute and that the SAC has more regular meetings with the senior leaders of the institute.

The Board agrees with this recommendation, which is fully in line with the basic thoughts behind the establishment of SAC's in the organisation of KNAW institutes.

3. To conclude

The Board congratulates the Hubrecht Institute with the excellent evaluation results. The Board is confident that the current director will be able to maintain this top position. The KNAW Board sees the continuation of cooperation between the Hubrecht Institute and University Medical Center Utrecht as a critical factor for the further development of the institute in the Utrecht area.

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