

## **Position of the board of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences regarding the 2025 SEP evaluation of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS)**

The board and management of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (the Academy) is pleased with the positive outcome of the external assessment of the NIAS Institute. The committee, chaired by Professor Sally Wyatt, used the assessment criteria in the spirit of the Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP), but adjusted to the position and mission of NIAS, as the SEP mainly aims at research whereas NIAS' core business is "to offer an intellectual haven to (inter)national scholars, journalists and artists to devote themselves to an independent research project of their own design".

According to the assessment committee, NIAS "is an excellent institution that should be cherished by the KNAW and by the wider Dutch research community". The Academy is pleased with these laudatory words, and proud of the high quality of facilities NIAS offers to a wide range of fellows.

The Academy would like to express its gratitude to the members of the evaluation committee for their thoughtful work and their valuable recommendations. It is also thankful for the hospitality and openness with which NIAS approached the committee. Below the Academy will share its views on the central insights from the assessment.

### *Research quality*

In the Terms of Reference the committee was requested to "focus on academic merit and performance, not only in terms of research carried out by individual fellows but also as part of the fellows group". The Academy is pleased to learn that "the range and quality of publications produced at NIAS is impressive", and that "NIAS has good measures in place to allow for a productive research environment (...) that draw researchers out of their academic comfort zone".

The committee evaluated the research quality "by considering both the selection of individual fellows and NIAS's new research policy to work on meta-themes as part of the fellows' group". This focus addresses also one of the specific questions from the Terms of Reference about optimizing the recruiting process. It is encouraging to read that the committee is "very positive about the quality of the selection process". The report is laudatory on NIAS' approach to "build diverse and balanced year groups in terms of discipline, topical relevance, career stage, gender, cultural and geographical background". The Academy is pleased to learn that the committee was "impressed to see that NIAS staff members are engaged in constant critical self-evaluation so as to match its mission and actual operation, and pro-actively develop strategies to enhance the accessibility of NIAS for fellows beyond the more conventional target groups in institutions in the Global North". It acknowledges that ongoing evaluation is imperative to ensure the efficacy of the selection process, with adjustments being made as necessary in response to evolving circumstances within the Netherlands and globally.

With regard to contributing to the Forum function of the KNAW, the agenda and themes of public events are coordinated by the KNAW Bureau. NIAS is invited to share information about the expertise of its fellows with the Academy, so that they may more readily be considered and

approached as speakers. Naturally, NIAS fellows – as well as members of their networks – are very welcome to attend these events. In addition, the Academy and NIAS will continue to explore how they can make the most of each other's valuable knowledge and expertise in shaping and enriching the Forum function.

### *Societal relevance*

In the context of NIAS open science is interpreted in the Terms of Reference as “the involvement of societal stakeholders in its institutional performance”. According to the committee “NIAS demonstrates its social relevance through the diversity of fellows and their research coming from the Dutch context and internationally, and the welcoming intellectual space that is created for open science and academic freedoms.” The short statement of the committee on the prevailing culture within NIAS aligns with the Academy's expectations for the institute: “NIAS is an environment in which open science and interdisciplinary exchange are practised.”

The Academy agrees with the committee that “the Safe Haven fellowships enable NIAS to extend to social relevance of its work by giving urgent support to scholars, artists and journalists at risk, and thereby responding to the most urgent needs of contemporary scholars who cannot continue their work because of the consequences of war and conflict.”

The Academy supports the idea of further developing the meta-themes and considers suggestions such as broadening academic freedom to adjacent areas, such as the free press, an independent legal system, an active civil society and cultural experimentation, to be valuable, as “meta-themes may change over time”. The Academy recognises NIAS's significant function in disseminating these topics to a broader audience beyond the academic community, and anticipates their further exploration within the institute's forthcoming strategy.

### *Viability of the unit*

A strong national role is recognised as highly important for the viability of NIAS by both the committee and the Academy. We share the committee's “concern about the uneven representation of Dutch university-based fellows and the fewer number of places open to them in the Open Call”. In order to enhance its national role, it is imperative for NIAS to “strengthen communication with all Dutch universities, and consider how to approach them as an important stakeholder.” It may also offer collaborative opportunities in addressing meta-themes relevant to research.

The recommendation to acknowledge NIAS as a research institute and to appoint scientific staff, does not comply with the *raison d'être* of the institute, according to the Academy. It is also not in line with the associated government funding. The Academy would like to emphasize that NIAS is a highly relevant institute that excels in offering an intellectual haven to the NIAS Fellows and providing space and time to exchange ideas and to collectively reflect on relevant meta-themes. The current Academy's strategic fund to offer institutes financial support implementing new strategic directions is available for institutes that fulfil the criteria for funding application. The Academy endorses the recommendation to further increase the diversity of fellows, particularly within the arts, provided that additional funding is found, especially where this requires additional facilities that are not currently available. It is evident that the recommendations regarding extra staff, additional housing facilities and ICT support necessitates not only long-term additional financial resources, but also time and opportunities, and it is important to recognise that the latter are limited.

The Academy would like to conclude by emphasising the importance of the evaluation committee's work and by thanking them for their insightful recommendations. As part of the regular quality assurance cycle, the Academy and the NIAS-management will discuss how to incorporate the committee's recommendations into the institute's new strategic plans with the aim of maintaining its excellent level of performance.

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