



K O N I N K L I J K E N E D E R L A N D S E
A K A D E M I E V A N W E T E N S C H A P P E N

**POSITION OF THE BOARD OF THE ROYAL NETHERLANDS
ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES (KNAW)
REGARDING THE 2018 SEP EVALUATION OF THE ROYAL
NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN AND
CARIBBEAN STUDIES (KITLV)**

It is a pleasure for the board and management of the KNAW to respond to the report of the assessment committee that visited KITLV in April 2018. The board would like to thank the members of the committee for their extensive work, positive evaluation and constructive suggestions. In formulating its position with regard to the assessment report, the board also took into account the responses of the KITLV management and of its scientific advisory board.

According to the committee, KITLV performs ground-breaking interdisciplinary work and stands out compared to similar research groups worldwide. The committee was also impressed with the impact of the KITLV research on its diverse stakeholders. The committee therefore assessed KITLV's research quality and its relevance to society as 'excellent'. The KNAW board is very pleased with these conclusions and considers it to be an impressive achievement by the institute, especially since this evaluation took place after a fundamental reorganisation of the institute. The board takes the committee's assessment of the institute's viability as 'very good' to be appropriate for a small institute facing a number of challenges. The committee offered six recommendations concerning these challenges. Given that the management response already addressed all of these, this position paper of the KNAW board focuses on four in particular: recommendations 1, 3, 5 and 6. It also discusses the financial situation of the institute.

Mid-career and leadership actions

Because several senior researchers, including two members of the management team, will shortly retire, the committee advised hiring new mid-career staff and making an early appointment of a new director.

Fully aware of this issue, the KNAW board and KITLV management have already discussed the necessity of anticipating the upcoming retirements. Both agree that there is primarily a need to strengthen the group of mid-career scholars and are therefore already enabling four of them to advance their leadership skills. The recommendation of the committee to make an early director appointment can be generalised to applying 'personnel tiling': appointing new research staff before senior researchers retire. The board has recently taken the provisional decision that such a strategic investment is valuable and has invited the management to formulate a well-substantiated plan for personnel tiling in which acquisition potential, political acumen and diversity are described as hiring criteria.

Strengthen the relationship with Leiden

The committee recommended strengthening the ties with Leiden University.

The KNAW board agrees with the committee and the scientific advisory board that optimal use should be made of KITLV's location on the Leiden campus. Like the management, however, it maintains that the institute first and foremost has a national and international function. In the view of the board, its institutes have added value because their research and facilities benefit science and society at large. Strengthening the ties with Leiden University should therefore only be prioritised when it also strengthens KITLV's national and international position.

Strengthen digitisation

According to the committee, digitisation efforts for the collection should be strengthened, for instance by means of a catch-up investment in collaboration with the KNAW Humanities Cluster.

As the KITLV management underscored, it is no longer the owner of the historical collections, leaving the institute without specialised staff or external funding options for digitisation. However, when it comes to digitisation broadly conceived, the KNAW board concurs with the committee that collaboration with the KNAW Humanities Cluster and other KNAW institutes offers important opportunities. The funding that was recently awarded for a joint project on Indonesian decolonisation with, most notably, the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, indicates how fruitful such cooperation can be. Another

example of beneficial collaboration with the KNAW Humanities Cluster enabled the affiliated institutes to advance and innovate both operations, services and research.

The KNAW board has made the strategic decision to invest in a joint Humanities Cluster uniting three institutes to enable them to become leading, not only in the field of Dutch culture and history, but also in the field of digital humanities. The benefits of this clustering for research and innovation are now starting to show. The KNAW board therefore invites KITLV to see when and how it can join some of the innovative research and infrastructure projects developed by the Humanities Cluster and by NIOD and thereby make progress in digitisation.

Enhance diversity

The committee pointed out that an institute of Southeast Asian and the Caribbean studies should have a more ethnically diverse research staff and management.

Like the management, the KNAW board agrees that diversity in permanent research staff is especially important for an institute like KITLV, not only when it comes to age and gender but also when it comes to nationality and ethnicity. The board requests the management to explicitly implement diversity as one of the hiring criteria for the research position that will open up in 2019 and the director position that will be advertised in 2022. It also emphasises that diversity should be taken into account during the entire hiring process, including the composition of the selection committee, for instance.

Financial situation

The KNAW board is fully aware that a recent reorganisation is anticipated to lead to imminent and substantial reduction of the number of staff. *Ceteris paribus*, the board does not intend to further decrease the KITLV budget in the coming years. The KNAW board also welcomes the conclusion that, despite recent cutbacks, the research quality and its relevance to society is considered 'excellent'. Based on this conclusion, the KNAW board will take a constructive position in ongoing discussions with the KITLV management to improve the financial situation of the institute. The board favourably considers providing additional funding for continuing the international fellows programme and the KITLV-Leiden PhD programme. The management is invited to establish a strategic agenda containing a thorough multiannual financial substantiation, in order to enhance the long-term viability of the KITLV. In drawing up such an agenda, special attention could be given to attracting research staff with substantial funding potential and other strategic investments with significant leverage effect.

The KNAW board congratulates the management with the committee's finding that KITLV has more than successfully reinvented itself after the 2014 reorganisation. It is confident that the viability of the institute can be further improved with the help of the recommendations given in the assessment report.

Amsterdam, July 2018