



internationaal instituut
voor sociale geschiedenis



Joint reaction of IISG, KITLV, NIOD and Meertens Institute regarding the general observations and recommendations to the KNAW made by the evaluation committee

While we have each submitted individual reactions to the report of the evaluation committee, we would like to add a joint reaction to some of the general observations and recommendations to the KNAW. We share the committee's concern about decreasing funding for the humanities and we welcome the request to the KNAW to take its responsibility in this respect. The committee concludes that our institutes 'constitute a national and international asset which should be acknowledged and supported even more than they are at present' (32/1) and calls upon the KNAW to support the institutes strongly, indicating that they are 'one of the most important pillars of the prestige of the Academy' (33/10). It goes without saying that we very much subscribe to this.

The committee states that the transition from documentation centers to institutes dedicated to both collections and research 'is not yet complete' (31). This begs the question what the optimal mix is, in the view of the committee, but also from the perspective of the KNAW. We need to seriously discuss this issue, and ways to attain synergy between the institutes. We agree with the committee (31, 32/3) that more cooperation between the KNAW institutes in the fields of research, collections and technology is necessary, and we are already preparing for this. We would like to discuss concrete plans in the coming months with the KNAW, including the committee's ideas about our institutes acting as a 'nodal structure' (32/5).

There are two sides to the issue of the optimal mix between collection management and research. Over the years, we have all been working to strengthen our research departments, and we intend to continue this policy. But on the other hand, collection management will remain a key element in our work. The committee is justified in stating that the KNAW has been 'passive' (31) in particular as regards the development of a broad policy for collection management with its institutes. The Academy has sometimes made the impression that the world-class collections of all four institutes are a liability rather than an asset. No funding has been made available for basic issues such as mass digitization. We appreciate that the committee repeatedly calls upon the Academy to take responsibility in this respect (e.g., 33/8).

Over the past years, the KNAW has strongly pushed research through the approach of the e-humanities. We all know that this is an important innovation and indeed we are engaged in this field. But we very much agree with the committee that 'the application of e-Humanities technologies should not be adopted as an overriding criterion for funding in the humanities' (32/2). Not everything outside of this field is just obsolete, old-fashioned scholarship. And we should remind the Academy that without large-scale digitization, an e-humanities approach to historical research is not feasible at all.

The recommendation to strengthen existing relations with Dutch universities (33/6) is very much in tune with our present policies, as well as the prevalent mood in The Hague. In this respect too, it is of utmost importance that the KNAW publicly

demonstrates a positive engagement with its institutes in the humanities. We deeply hope that the forthcoming policy paper of the board of the Academy expresses that attitude.

The committee has some good advice regarding a personnel policy which will make the research staff more flexible and more balanced in age and gender (32/5). Financial constraints are a major obstacle here, but even so this recommendation makes much sense and we will be happy to elaborate on this, internally and also jointly with our sister institutes and the Academy itself. The same goes for the recommendation to find out more about our users (33/7) and to improve the SEP and SEP-C (33/9). As for the latter, we would like to refer to the report 'Quality Indicators for Research in the Humanities' (2011). This report was written by a committee appointed by the KNAW and the Academy enthusiastically embraced its conclusions and recommendations. Yet the report did not play any role whatsoever in the evaluation process.

Presently the Board of the KNAW is formulating a new policy paper for its institutes in the humanities. We trust the Board will take both the committee's report and our reactions and further input very seriously in this process.

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