

## **Response of Huygens ING to the assessment report**

Huygens ING is grateful for the sincere, collegial and stimulating fashion in which the peer review committee has discussed the progress and prospects of our institute with our staff during your visit, and for the draft report, which is written in that same spirit.

The committee discussed and rated the institute on three counts prescribed by the SEP procedure and formulated eight explicit recommendations (and some implicit recommendations in the text). This also serves as a framework for our reaction.

### **Assessment**

#### ***Research quality***

The committee rates the institute's research quality as very good, but also points out a number of research lines that merit special mention, as a whole or for some researchers. This includes staff members that are involved in textual editing, preserving the cultural heritage of the Netherlands, the history of knowledge and exploring digital methods to enhance research. Taken together, this covers all areas in which the institute is active.

In the context of assessing research quality, the committee discusses the heterogeneity of the institute and sees this as hampering the formulation of a clear strategy for the institute. I agree with the committee that the institute's field of activities is heterogeneous. This makes it sometimes difficult to convey to outsiders what the institute's role is. Theoretically there are two ways to reduce the heterogeneity of the institute. One is to merge with one or more other groups or institutes, if the resulting whole is more coherent than the constituting parts. The other is shedding some of the present parts of the institute in such a way that the resulting institute is less heterogeneous.

The first strategy was proposed by the directors of Meertens Institute and Huygens ING in the spring of 2017. It met with mixed reactions from the staff of both institutes. The committee discusses this option on page 13, and writes that it cannot foresee the outcome. The second option would mean ending one of the research groups or approaches, all of which are explicitly mentioned as valuable by the committee. Furthermore, on page 11 the committee lists a number of products it wants to be increased, which we quote in the next paragraph. As these are all our products, implicitly this is another way of saying that the institute should not reduce the heterogeneity of its activity. The committee itself in this way underlines that there is no attractive way to make the institute's profile more homogenous. We return to the issue of a clearer formulation of the institute's strategy under the recommendations.

Regarding our targets, the committee remarks *"Increased publication should not be the only target. Given that there is already an increase, the committee recommends a partial focus on high-quality publications with strong visibility, as well as more proposals, public outreach, teaching, data management and curation, infrastructure quality, digitally-enhanced measures of coverage and consistency, and other methods. All of these are important. Working on all these targets should contribute to the strategic goals of the HuC, especially when the integration of the institutes grows."* We could not be more fully in agreement with the committee: all of these are already goals of the institute. Doing everything we do both more and better is a bit of a tall order. Within this list we will prioritize more proposals (as these are both a goal in themselves, and enable us to develop all kind

of other activities) and the focus on high-quality publications. Both are already part of our existing system of targets, where publications in high-quality outlets carry a heavier weight than others.

### **Relevance to society**

The committee applauds the fact that we make our digital products available in Open Access, and underlines that a number of our products have found their way to large audiences. It rates the institute's relevance to society as good, and advocates a more coherent strategy, a more exciting website and more emphasis on public appearances.

We agree with the committee that improvements are possible, and are grateful for the suggestions made. Over the period under review, the staff of the institute's communication department has twice changed completely. The present communication staff, hired only last year, are preparing a new policy paper, and a complete overhaul of the website is already under way. In increasing relevance to society, we will prioritize research that is central to the profile of the institute, like digital humanities research and our source publications and text editions.

### **Viability**

The committee rates the institute's viability as very good. The Committee expects our viability to improve further by the implementation of its recommendations, among them formulating a sharper profile. We discuss these below under recommendations.

The Committee also discusses staff size in this context. It points out that (after 2020) a relative large number of staff will retire, and recommends obtaining funding for personnel 'tiling' to make this change more gradual. We have already proposed this to the KNAW.

### **Recommendations**

*1. After the move, and within the context of the HuC, Huygens ING should now avail itself of the opportunity to formulate a clearly articulated strategic vision which includes a sharper profile of its own regarding the field of Dutch Culture and History and adopting a strong role in relation to its HuC partners regarding new methods in Digital Humanities.*

We have discussed above challenges to sharpening our profile. We are grateful to the committee for stressing that Huygens ING's track record in developing new methods in Digital Humanities warrants a strong role within HuC. Obviously, cooperation in the HuC aims at strengthening the role of all institutes involved. The challenges notwithstanding, we welcome the way we are being prodded by the committee and will continue to work towards making our strategic vision clearer and our profile sharper. We certainly aim at further strengthening our role in promoting new methods in Digital Humanities within the HuC, and will do so in friendly competition and collaboration with our HuC partners.

*2. Articulate the Huygens ING model of doing research by domain researchers with co-development of digitally-enhanced methodology by IT specialists.*

We regard the strong endorsement of our approach by the committee (pages 11 and 12) as very important support. We especially welcomed the praise for our department of Digital Data Management during the site visit. We appreciate the positive assessment of the committee of our model and will certainly follow up this recommendation. We heartily agree with the committee that innovative software projects should count as research (p. 12). The format prescribed for the SEP evaluation can be misleading in this.

*3. Develop systematic and professionally recognized models for evaluating the quality of research.*

We are already working on improving the assessment procedures of projects before we decide to start them. The size of the Institute still allows for evaluating the quality of research results by the most traditional of methods: reading the publications and use the other products. We are grateful to the committee for stressing the scholarly importance of work done in text editing, IT and Digital Data Management, which are sometimes not recognized as scientific. We do already employ a model which takes into account other results beside publications, and we do already strive for greater quality, not just greater quantity of results. When we have to evaluate the quality of our research in other ways, we prefer to use existing models, especially those now developed specifically for the Humanities, which we can share with others, over developing our own model. We also rely on the advice of our Wetenschapscommissie.

*4. Develop a strategy and allocate corresponding resources for Huygens ING's outreach activities.*

This is already under way, and we will implement the suggestions made by the committee.

*5. Articulate a focus for Dutch culture and history research and organize that within an overarching narrative.*

We have done so in the debates leading up to the institute research programme for the 2018-2023 period, which was made available to the committee. We will take the committee's suggestion to heart and continue this debate both within the institute and with our partners in the HuC.

*6. Develop funding strategies, incl. personnel 'tiling', to maintain the level of researchers.*

We have already started to debate this with the KNAW. A stimulus of this kind, if directed towards themes like Digital Humanities and Dutch Identity, will also serve to sharpen our profile (and that of the HuC).

*7. Adopt an explicit PhD policy—and more general an education policy—to educate the next (international) generation of scholars.*

We will do so, both where we can with Dutch BA, MA and PhD students, and internationally whenever programmes like the successful European DiXiT programme for PhD training or Marie Curie-funding brings us in a position to do so.

*8. Seek various ways to strengthen the relations with the universities.*

On the whole we have the feeling that our relations with the universities, both through shared research and infrastructure projects, and through our staff members holding eight professorships, are already very strong. We are developing a shared Digital Humanities minor with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. We nevertheless welcome opportunities to further develop them.

The committee suggests establishing temporary positions for university staff. We already offer these as unpaid positions. We would love to have funds to enable university staff to free them from teaching commitments, but this will have to wait until our financial position has improved.

The committee has also proposed to enlarge the *Intervisie* programme. We will investigate whether this is feasible. We will also investigate the possibility of a summer school in cooperation with one or more research schools.

(9) On p. 12 the committee suggests *“systematisation of the collaborative process of designing, building, and testing infrastructure and support. The committee strongly encourages the group to design a clear scheme showing workflows, templates, and roles that capture their experience in this digitisation/‘infrastructuring’.”* We feel that we are well on our way in developing such internal procedures, but we will take to heart the recommendation to articulate this better.

(10) On p. 13, the committee suggests to *“facilitate insights and suggestions of younger researchers based on their experiences and possibly different (and more digital) methodologies”* when it comes to new hires. We do stimulate innovative methodologies when hiring staff. We want to stress that different and more digital methodologies do not only originate with younger researchers. We employ transparent and open procedures when hiring new staff, and will take up this suggestion within the context of existing procedures.

As the Committee has recognized, the institute went through several significant changes recently. The evaluation period started just after the merger between Huygens Institute and ING. It was characterized by a tight budget, a time-consuming process of discussing the formation of the Humanities Cluster, the move to Amsterdam and the ongoing change associated with the formation within the HuC of a shared business office, supporting and research groups. We are grateful toward the committee for supporting our move towards digital humanities while at the same time stressing the value of our traditional work. We also are grateful for its suggestions for improvement. We are also grateful to the KNAW board for ongoing support for these policies. These, but above all to the effort of our staff, make it possible for the institute to strive to be a magnet for talent. Thanks to these we are confident that by the time of the next mid-term review we will already see a sharpening of focus, a growth in external funding, more high quality products and increased societal relevance.