

NWO institutes praised for quality, innovation and national role

The nine NWO institutes have been evaluated by panels of independent, international experts. The experts praise the innovative research, the global position and the national role of the institutes. The scientific quality, societal relevance and future viability were in all cases assessed as 'very good' or even 'world leading'.

Every six years, the NWO institutes are evaluated by a panel of independent international experts, according to the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP). In the past six months, the nine NWO institutes were visited by panels of international experts and evaluated according to three criteria: scientific quality, societal relevance and future viability. The evaluation committees graded these criteria on a four-point scale: *excellent/world-leading*, *very good*, *good*, and *unsatisfactory*. Of the 27 assessments, 19 were 'world leading' and 8 were 'very good'.

Response NWO executive board

NWO president Prof. Stan Gielen: 'The evaluations reveal a considerable appreciation for the innovative research, the national (facilitating) role of the institutes, and the global position within the scientific field. The NWO executive board was delighted to receive the evaluation reports and is very pleased with the outcome.'

'NWO sees the institutes as an important strategic instrument for the long-term support of specific disciplines with respect to their long-term missions and for maintaining and developing a vital research infrastructure at a high level. The institutes will therefore play an important role during the implementation of the new strategic plan that NWO will submit to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science this spring.'

Recommendations

The various SEP panels state that the recommendations from the previous evaluations had been fully acted upon by each of the institutes and they encouraged the institutes to continue to give their full attention to further recommendations. Three recommendations come back to several - but not all - institutes. For example, several panels advise to make more use of other sources of funding outside of the standard granting bodies such as NWO and the EU. A second ongoing recommendation is the further strengthening of the national role and international position through the development and provision of research facilities, the expansion of the platform role, scientific renewal, consolidating strengths, and collaborating with universities and within the top sectors, the Dutch National Research Agenda and the EU. The panels also encourage the institutes to further develop their societal relevance and to increase the economic and societal values of their research results.

No decisions yet

The NWO executive board has not yet taken any strategic or financial decisions based on these evaluations but is instead waiting for the conclusions of the portfolio evaluation at the end of 2018. This is a joint, periodic evaluation of the system of research institutes of NWO and KNAW at the request of the Dutch government (Vision for Science 2025, choices for the future). The portfolio evaluation will focus on the national and international role and added value of the institutes system and the institutes within the entire Dutch knowledge landscape, whereas the SEP evaluation concerns the quality of each individual institute. The SEP evaluation of the KNAW institutes will take place this spring.

In anticipation of the portfolio evaluation, NWO also asked the SEP evaluation committees to provide an assessment about the added value of the institutes at the national and international levels. From all of the reports, it is apparent that the institutes each play an important role in (co-)determining the agenda in their sector, and they are, without a doubt, regarded as the expertise centres in the Netherlands within their respective disciplines or research area. The institutes are also active players in their relevant international setting.

About SEP

The Standard Evaluation Protocol was drawn up by NWO, KNAW, and the Dutch universities and provides guidelines for evaluating research and research policy. The evaluations have been realised

on the basis of a self-evaluation report from the institute, a preparatory phase of the evaluation committee and a site visit over a period of several days. Unlike in the previous SEP evaluation, productivity is no longer an independent criterion in response to the criticism that the pressure to publish has gone too far in many disciplines.

About NWO

The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) ensures quality and innovation in science and facilitates its impact on society. NWO funds scientific research at Dutch knowledge institutions on the basis of quality and independent assessment and selection procedures. Via NWO-I, the institutes organisation of NWO, it manages nine national research institutes: AMOLF, ARCNL, ASTRON, CWI, DIFFER, Nikhef, NIOZ, NSCR and SRON. NWO institutes consolidate strengths around a certain research question and connect Dutch science with the international scientific community.

The evaluation reports have been made available here:

[Evaluation report 2011-2016 AMOLF](#)

[Evaluation report 2011-2016 ASTRON](#)

etc.