Evaluation report of IISH, NIOD, Meertens Institute and KITLV, November-December 2011

Management response of NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies

NIOD’s management team highly appreciates the efforts of both evaluation committees to present the results of their assessment of the four institutes in a single report. We are pleased to learn that the committees urge the Academy to “provide a clearly stated policy of support for the institutes so that they can formulate their strategic plans for the future.”(p. 33) We take this as an encouragement to the institutes to actively develop their own plans, while the Academy should build its future strategy on those of the institutes. We firmly believe that through such collaboration, the Academy will be able to take advantage of the fact that “these four institutes constitute a national and international asset.”(p. 32)

In a separate response the management teams of the institutes will respond to some of the more general observations and recommendations concerning all four institutes. In this response NIOD’s management team takes the opportunity to comment on the sections in the report that specifically discuss NIOD.

1. In general

With great pleasure we have read the very positive conclusions about the management, and the quality, productivity, viability and validity of NIOD’s research and collections activities. This was the first time the collections have been evaluated by an expert committee, so we are very pleased with the excellent outcome. In general, we feel supported in our choices and encouraged to continue the course set out in the 2010-2015 Strategic policy plan for the management of NIOD’s research and collections.

We are pleased with the support for how NIOD fulfills its dual commitment to scholarship and society, to research and public outreach. We are also happy with the support for our efforts to combine national and international ambitions in our mission. The extension of our reach in terms of time and geography, visible in the successful merger with the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, has been met with strong support from the committees. We particularly appreciate the fact that the committees acknowledge that NIOD’s independence from government and other special interest groups has enabled it to report on “issues relating to the Bosnian struggle, Iraq, and other wars as well as the recent genocide tragedies in Africa and elsewhere with a rare and impressive degree of authority and objectivity.”(p. 14) The committees’ confirmation of NIOD’s important public role which makes it a “valuable asset in international cultural relations for the Netherlands as well as a valuable vehicle for academic research of a kind that could not easily be replicated or carried out by any university department”(p. 14) encourages us to keep looking for new ways in which we can use our unique expertise in an increasingly international context. Although war, mass violence and persecution are global phenomena, the nation remains a very important reference point. This means that NIOD’s role in keeping the national collective memory of war-related phenomena alive will remain central. While sticking to our original commitment to Dutch society in traditional and innovative ways (e.g. by continuing and extending the activities of the National Network of War-Related Sources), we expect support from the Academy in our efforts to internationalise our social
and academic networks in order to successfully secure new funding for (large-scale) projects. Internationalisation is the key for NIOD’s future. In this we feel strengthened by the support from the committees for our long-term policy plans for research and collections. The committees’ support for our policy of collaboration with strategic partners in and outside the Netherlands to realise our goals is vitally important. Our ambition to be a central hub in a complex national and international system fits well into what the committees recommend, on page 31 and 32, as a more general strategy for the Dutch Humanities: the model for the institutes should be a nodal structure in which the institutes play a galvanising role for international and national networks. Ties with Dutch and foreign universities are increasingly important in these networks. Finally, we welcome the remarks concerning NIOD’s role in participating in the development of the e-Humanities in line with its potential and ambitions.

2. Recommendations

One of the recommendations in the report to which we would like to respond is to gradually shift staff from the collections to research, and to use the increased research capacity to appoint temporary junior researchers, e.g. PhD students, postdocs or temporary researchers with ties with Dutch and foreign universities. The committees also recommend NIOD to invite scholars from abroad to spend their sabbatical at the Institute.

We would like to point out that the figures in the appendix of the report show that NIOD has doubled its research capacity between 2006 and 2010, which means that the transition towards a research institute has already been made. The new FTEs have been almost entirely used to appoint temporary junior researchers. This enlargement of our research capacity was made possible by external funding. We think that it is vital for NIOD to keep investing in external fundraising, with a focus on EU funding. For all our purposes it is equally important and instrumental to maintain a critical mass of tenured senior researchers. They guide junior researchers, stimulate the development of new research projects, keep the expertise of the Institute at a high level and ensure that the Department of Research, and the Department of Collections & Services remain interconnected, thus securing the integral character of the institute which has always been an important reason behind its unique strength and appeal. With the forthcoming retirement of a number of senior researchers, tenured research staff is expected to be rejuvenated between 2012 and 2014.

Apart from an increase in NIOD’s research capacity thanks to external funding for research projects, research capacity has also been increased by the increasing demand for projects dedicated to the creation of research infrastructures. For projects like these, of which EHRI is an example, we hire staff with a mixed research and collections profile. As a result, the Department of Collections & Services contains ‘hidden’ FTEs dedicated to these kinds of research projects. It is our ambition to participate in more large-scale research infrastructure projects and we expect that this will strengthen our position as a research institute.

The committees’ suggestion to invite scholars from abroad to spend their sabbatical at NIOD will be taken into serious consideration. Collaboration with the NIAS may be fruitful in this respect.

Another important recommendation in the report to which we would like to respond is a recommendation to all four institutes to increase collaboration, especially in the field of the collections. We welcome this suggestion, as it fits well into our policy of creating a network of
strategic partners within and outside the Academy, to share knowledge, and tasks. Important partners at the national level are the National Archives, the Royal Library and the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision. At the international level NIOD enjoys a stimulating collaboration with partners in the EHRI project like the e-Humanities Department of Kings College, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and several institutes in Eastern Europe. NIOD will be happy to share these networks with its sister institutes in the Academy and to reflect on the possibilities of further collaboration with, for instance, the University Libraries. NIOD is also willing to share its own expertise and long-term collection policy with other institutes within the Academy, in order to cooperate more, for instance with regard to (international) fundraising. We believe it is important that the institutes come up with their own plans for collaboration. Support from the Academy is highly necessary, though, especially regarding extra funding for (joint) digitalisation projects.

3. **Conclusion**

The report of the evaluation committees clearly states that the “Institute’s course is right; it just needs to increase the size and breadth of what it is already doing so well”. (p. 16) In order to be able to do this, NIOD needs the Academy to take to heart the recommendation of the committees to acknowledge and support the four institutes “even more than they are at present”. One of NIOD’s strengths is its capacity to valorise the results of its research and collections activities. Its excellent access to the media enables NIOD to play a visible and authoritative role in public debates about war and violence. As such, it responds to the grand challenges facing today’s society. That is why we would be pleased if the Academy used its strategic funding for innovation as defined in the new EU frame programme Horizon 2020, where the main criterion for innovation is the capacity of research centers to respond to pressing issues in contemporary society. This would help us cover some of the extra costs we will have to incur to realise our ambitions. For instance, extra funding for translation/editing costs (for publications, website and PR texts etcetera) required to make the transition to a fully international institute would be more than welcome. The same is true for extra funding for the transition costs required to develop an Open Access Policy for the Humanities. Extra funding to digitise NIOD’s five top priority collections and make them available on the internet would be highly appreciated, just like extra funding for the preparation (possibly together with other institutes in the Academy) of applications for new large-scale EU-funded projects. Last but not least, extra funding for strategic staff rejuvenation would make it possible to follow up on one of the most important recommendations in the evaluation report.

Amsterdam, 19 April 2012

On behalf of NIOD’s management team

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