

Terms of Reference

NWO Advisory Committee on Evaluation of Leading Research Schools

Having considered that

- in 1998, on the basis of recommendations by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), the Minister of Education, Culture and Science awarded six research schools a grant under the Incentive Bonus Scheme for Research Schools (see appendix 1 for a list of the six schools);
- that the evaluation in 2003 recommended that the funding of all schools be continued until the end of 2013;
- that the Minister of Education, Culture and Science asked NWO to perform a further evaluation in 2009-2010;
- that this evaluation must take place on the basis of the same protocol and the same criteria as in 2003 (enclosed);

NWO hereby establishes an advisory committee on the evaluation of leading research schools.

The commission

The advisory committee is requested to form an opinion on the question of the extent to which, using the grants awarded, and drawing on the talents of the researchers and the strength of the research programme, the schools have been able to grow into world-class research centres. The objective of the evaluation is to establish the degree to which the research schools have succeeded in achieving the goals of the Incentive Bonus Scheme for Leading Research Schools.

To this end, the committee will prioritise the research schools on the basis of the following criteria:

1. the quality of their research programme, as reflected among other things in their output, and the degree of coherence and focus achieved;
2. their position in the national knowledge infrastructure;
3. their international standing and any improvement since the grant was awarded;
4. the researchers' international status in their field, and their scientific potential in the longer term;
5. the organisational form adopted with a view to achieving the objective in an effective and efficient way, and the scope for adjustments to the programme;
6. the use and availability of the funding awarded, the balance between staff and materials, and the management of the resources by the universities concerned;
7. the degree to which the areas for improvement identified in the evaluation in 2002-2003 have been addressed;
8. the research school's potential to maintain its leading position over the coming years;
9. the degree to which the research school and the research it performs is associated with or integrated into the university/ies concerned, and their research, and its potential for operating on the basis of funding from regular sources in the future.

Procedures

The committee will define its own procedures, within the framework of NWO procedures for advisory committees and the protocol for the evaluation of the Incentive Bonus Scheme for Research Schools 2009-2010.

Notes

In 1998, in response to recommendations by NWO, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science awarded six research schools (or consortiums of research schools) funding under a special incentive bonus scheme (see appendix 1 for a list of these leading research schools). The key objective of the scheme is to raise the international profile of the research conducted in the existing system of research schools. The incentive bonus scheme has identified and fostered national focuses of excellence in scientific research at research schools. The bonuses were awarded for a period of fifteen years, with an evaluation planned for the fifth year and in 2009-2010. In response to the evaluation in 2002-2003, it was decided to continue the funding of all six schools. The Minister of Education, Culture and Science has now asked NWO to perform the 2009-2010 evaluation. At the same time, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) has been asked to make recommendations on the future of this funding instrument in its current form.

The process and the timeframe are roughly as follows. NWO will set up an international evaluation committee that will perform an independent external evaluation. The evaluation must be completed before summer 2010.

The external evaluation will be produced partly on the basis of a self-evaluation that each school will be required to draw up. Each of the schools has now set up an international peer review committee. The self-evaluation document and the peer review report, which will together constitute the research school's self-evaluation, must be submitted by 19 April 2010.

The Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) will perform a bibliometric analysis. The schools have been asked to submit details of their publications for this purpose by 3 December 2009. The schools will have the opportunity to respond to the results of this analysis, which will be ready by the end of March 2010.

The outcomes of the self-evaluations, the bibliometric analyses and presentations will be assessed by the evaluation committee. NWO will then inform the Minister of Education, Culture and Science of the results of the evaluation.

Timetable

Bearing in mind that the Minister of Education, Culture and Science wishes to receive the committee's recommendations before summer 2010, the following timetable has been drafted.

October – November 2009	Membership of peer review committee finalised
October 2009 – March 2010	Self-evaluation document drafted and peer review conducted
3 December 2009	Deadline for submission of electronic list of publications for bibliometric analysis
January – March 2010	Bibliometric analysis of research schools
31 March 2010	Report of bibliometric analysis sent to research schools for their response
19 April 2010	Deadline for submission of self-evaluation document, peer review report and response to bibliometric analysis
13, 14, and 15 June 2010	Meeting of evaluation committee and interaction with research schools
14 July 2010	Decision by NWO Governing Board, and recommendations to Minister

Members

The NWO Governing Board has decided to set up a new committee, most of whose members will not have served on the committee that performed the evaluation in 2002-2003. The committee will consist of an independent chair and six foreign members, each of whom will have expertise in the field of a least one of the research schools. The committee is listed in appendix 2.

The NWO Conflict of Interest Code will apply. For committee members, this implies that they may not be involved with any of the projects, certainly not as an applicant or co-applicant. In the event of other forms of involvement – which must be reported in advance – the NWO General Director will decide on whether the individual in question may sit on the committee. A budget is available to cover travel and accommodation expenses, and the NWO attendance fee scheme will apply.

The committee will receive support from a secretariat established by NWO.

The members of the committee will be appointed for the duration of this advisory procedure.

After the recommendations

The recommendations will be addressed to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, and submitted to the NWO Governing Board by the end of June. NWO will assess the procedure and decide on the presentation of the recommendations to the Minister.

Parallel to this evaluation, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences has been asked to make recommendations on the question: *'How can we ensure, based on the existing budget and adjustments to the incentive bonus scheme, that we achieve more variety and dynamism, so as to create new highpoints in the research landscape and maintaining existing ones?'*

The Minister of Education, Culture and Science is expected to take a decision based on both sets of recommendations in the third quarter of 2010.

Appendix 1: The six leading research schools

1. CBG, Centre for Biomedical Genetics, Utrecht University
2. Zernike Institute for Advanced Materials (formerly MSC) (University of Groningen)
3. COBRA, Communication Technology: Basic Research and Applications (TU/e)
4. NOVA, Netherlands Research School for Astronomy (Leiden University)
5. NRSCC, National Research School on Combination Catalysis (TU/e)
6. ISES, Netherlands Institute for Integrated Solid Earth Science (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Appendix 2: NWO Advisory Committee on Evaluation of Leading Research Schools

- Prof. Marnix van der Wiel (*chair*, Technical University of Eindhoven, NED)
- Prof. Paul Barbara (University of Texas, USA)
- Dr. Ken Dewar (McGill University and Genome Quebec Innovation Centre, CAN)
- Prof. Malcolm Longair (Cambridge University, GBR)
- Prof. Guust Nolet (Geosciences Azur, Universite de Nice, FRA)
- Prof. Roel Prins (ETH-Hönggerberg, SWI)
- Prof. John O'Reilly (Cranfield University, GBR)

Appendix 3: Draft committee procedures

This is only a draft; the committee will determine its own procedures. The chair will contact the members to finalise the committee's procedures.

Meetings

The committee will meet on one occasion.

- The meeting will last for two days.
 - Preceding evening
 - * arrival and introductions, briefing and criteria.
 - * background on CWTS analysis and discussion
 - Day 1:
 - * preparations for interviews; allocation of roles
 - * four interviews: presentation, questions, discussion
 - * discussion, draft conclusions of first day, dinner
 - Day 2:
 - * preparations for interviews; allocation of roles
 - * two interviews: presentation, questions, discussion
 - * prioritisation and outline report

After the meeting the chair will produce the final version of the recommendations, with the help of the secretariat. This version will be sent to the committee members for approval.