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To: prof. dr. ir. E. van der Giessen, chair UCW

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Handled by
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Date
3 May 2022

Our reference
BP/jd/22/00290

Subject
Faculty Board reaction to GRIP PRC Assessment Report

Dear Prof. Erik van der Giessen,

On behalf of the Faculty of Science and Engineering, enclosed you will find the Faculty Board reaction to the recent SEP evaluation of the Groningen Research Institute of Pharmacy (GRIP). GRIP underwent the SEP evaluation process in 2021 according to the new SEP protocol (2021-2027). The site visit of the Institute took place online on December 2nd, 2021. The resulting PRC assessment report was presented to the Executive Board of the University on April 19th by Prof. Guy Joos, chair of the committee.

If there are any further question, please contact Dr. Alicia Brandt (a.brandt@rug.nl).

With kind regards,


Prof. dr. B. Poolman
Interim dean and portfolio holder education

Response to the Peer Review Committee's comments and recommendations based on GRIP's research assessment held on 2 December 2021

The management of the Groningen Research Institute of Pharmacy (GRIP) has noted with great interest the assessment report of the Peer Review Committee (PRC) 2015-2020.

The committee was chaired by Prof. dr. Guy Joos (Ghent University, Belgium) and the members were Prof. dr. Kim Brouwer (University of North Carolina, USA), Prof. dr. med. Ulrich Förstermann (Johannes Gutenberg University Medical Center, Germany), Prof. dr. Frans Russel (Radboud University, The Netherlands), Prof. dr. Aletta Kraneveld (Utrecht University, The Netherlands) and Ms. Aline Engbers, MSc (University of Leiden, The Netherlands). The committee received official support from Dr. Jesseka Batteau.

GRIP wishes to express its sincere gratitude to all members of the committee for the exemplary work they have done in this assessment. The committee's positive approach during the interviews, despite the difficulties of an online assessment, led to a friendly and open discussion and the resulting constructive advice and recommendations will be instrumental in helping to devise a strategy to prepare and strengthen the institute for the future.

GRIP gratefully accepts the committee's very positive evaluation of our research quality, societal relevance and viability. Despite the many positive comments made by the committee, we also acknowledge the critical comments and recommendations. Below, we will address these valuable recommendations and discuss how GRIP plans to deal with them going forward.

The position of GRIP's research groups within GUIDE is enviable, allowing for a productive integration of basic and clinical research as well as innovations in diagnostics and therapies.

GRIP management wholeheartedly agrees with this observation in all respects. The embedding of GRIP's research groups within the GUIDE research institute allows GRIP to fulfil a remarkable bridging function that the pharmaceutical sciences have between the fundamental sciences on the one hand and the clinical application of medicines on the other. The assessment report shows unequivocally that the current organization of research groups results in an impressive mutual reinforcement of the research activities within both the UMCG and GRIP. The GRIP management therefore shares the committee's conviction that it is advisable to continue the current organization of the GUIDE and GRIP institutes, combining FSE and UMCG researchers in one Institute.

Research Quality

An important knowledge gap recognized by GRIP is expertise in pharmacokinetic-pharmacodynamic (PK-PD) modelling. Model-informed drug development is an emerging field that quantifies preclinical and clinical drug- and disease information and is therefore paramount to an effective drug research and development cycle. The committee recommends the establishment of a dedicated research group in this area within GRIP.

The management of GRIP fully shares the committee's observation. Even if GRIP has not been able to address this in the past review period, this subject is a high priority for GRIP management. In consultation with the FSE and in collaboration with GUIDE (UMCG), we have begun an investigation into the feasibility of creating a tenure-track assistant/associate professor position in PK-PD.

The committee recommends that GRIP aligns the research focus according to the research ambitions of 'Sectorplan' for Pharmaceutical Sciences. A focus on strategic areas will help to create critical mass.

GRIP fully agrees with the assessment committee. Already for some years, GRIP has focused on target and drug discovery, lab-on-a-chip, pharmaceutical production technology, translational models, and regenerative pharmacology. Together with GUIDE the -omics and real-world data are additional focus areas. Should the Sector Plan for Pharmaceutical Sciences be awarded, GRIP has already earmarked funding for both personnel and material reinforcements, which would ensure creating or improving critical mass in these areas.

The committee recommends the management of GRIP to set up a strategy aligned with the Pharmaceutical Sciences sector plan ambitions to profit better from funding from independent public granting agencies.

Together with a number of colleagues from within GRIP and the other Pharmaceutical Institutes in the Netherlands, GRIP's scientific director has recently written a first version of the 'Sectorplan'. This plan is fully in line with the nationally agreed distribution of the focus areas and calls for 12 new positions and around 3 million euros in new investments. This plan was presented to the ministry on the third of March 2022. With GRIP's current and prospective staff, we hope to be better able to attract funding on today's relevant topics.

Societal relevance

To further strengthen the structural and durable societal relevance of its research, the committee advises ensuring a clear vision and shared reflection on societal impact, making clear what the Institute aspires to, and setting clear goals and making explicit expectations.

So far, the institute's societal relevance policy has comprised the societal impact strategy of individual research groups within GRIP or the GUIDE programs in which GRIP participates. To align these policies into a coherent vision on societal relevance that is shared by all members of the institute, and further meets the expectations and aspirations of the Institute, an in-depth discussion on this topic among research staff will be required. A retreat on this topic will be organized.

The committee recommends focusing on transdisciplinary research beyond industrial partners, including other societal stakeholders such as patient advocacy organizations, prescribers, health insurance companies and policy makers.

GRIP agrees that it is certainly worthwhile to diversify its collaborations beyond industry. Current activities with charities, patient boards and advocacy organizations should be intensified. Moreover, the Institute hopes that with some of the recent appointments new collaborations will be initiated or intensified. With the appointment of Prof. Feenstra, a closer link with policymakers (RIVM) is already established, whereas the appointment of Honorary Professor Jansman (April 2021) could intensify contacts with patient organizations. Furthermore, GRIP plans to increase its activities through the Fair Medicine initiative, which aims to improve general access to medicine by offering a new model to complement the existing development method of pharmaceuticals.

Viability

Although no major issues with research integrity have been noted in the past 6 years, we strongly encourage continued attention to the awareness of research integrity issues, particularly among staff members beyond PhD students.

The Institute fully agrees with the assessment committee that continuous/refreshment training activities on research integrity of all scientific staff are a necessity to remain up-to-date on this subject and remain a reliable partner in GRIP's many collaborations. As an immediate measure this subject will become a standard point of discussion in all R&D interviews with the research staff members, irrespective of their position. Moreover, GRIP management will initiate an action to find or organize (probably in conjunction with other FSE institutes and/or GUIDE) courses and refreshment courses for senior staff on this topic, which will become obligatory for all.

There is high pressure on younger staff, due to heavy teaching responsibilities, grant expectations, and mentoring PhD students. The committee encourages the hiring of tenure track staff members with an educational profile to help address the high teaching load.

Indeed, our young staff are under a lot of pressure. To a significant extent this is caused by the high overall teaching load within GRIP, as well as the criteria for promotion as defined in the faculty's 'Career paths in science' programme. Although GRIP tries to limit the teaching load, particularly for its younger staff, it has only a limited number of options to mitigate this and the high number of first year BSc students has necessitated distributing the teaching load among GRIP's academic staff. However, in order to reduce the teaching load, GRIP has already appointed one TT with an educational profile under this new FSE-initiative and three additional educational TT positions have recently been approved by the faculty board. Moreover, the FSE board has further approved the opening of three TT vacancies with a research profile in various fields.

The further development of a strong mentoring programme that provides coaching and guidance in career development and grantsmanship would further increase the success of younger staff, and help attract and retain talented academic staff.

As was also recognized by the assessment committee, the Institute already has an extensive number of support measures for its younger staff, both financial and in-kind. We agree that a formalized mentoring/coaching could further strengthen the chances of the younger staff and make us more attractive as employer. Furthermore, the 'grant-week' initiative should be revived after the COVID pandemic.