

## **Reaction to the comments/advice by the GUIDE research institute**

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### ***General remarks***

The management team of GUIDE highly appreciates the assessment, conclusions and recommendations given by the assessment committee. The committee's evaluation is in line with the self-assessment and reflection GUIDE has published in their own self-evaluation. In general, the committee concludes that the science is of excellent quality and most programs show alignment with the UMCG-focus. The position of the research groups within GRIP (the Groningen Research Institute of Pharmacy) is 'enviable', allowing for a productive integration of basic and clinical research as well as innovation in diagnostics and therapies. It furthermore allows a bridging function to the Faculty of Science and Engineering and its research strategy. This is a major strength of GUIDE and will be one of the important strategic pillars for the future. As already mentioned by the committee, this feature can further be strengthened by developing "creative (interfaculty?) hubs" for joint strategic thinking and providing a platform for working with other institutes and schools within the UMCG and University of Groningen.

In general, we will adopt the recommendations and briefly comment on them below, with the general remark that some of the recommendations in our opinion are meant for the UMCG management. Nevertheless, we support them and align our contribution with the future structure and governance of the UMCG.

### ***Research quality***

1. *The committee fully supports the efforts that have been and will be made and planned to strengthen and centralize immunology research, which is a key research area for many diseases and recognized as a domain that needs to expand.*

Comment GUIDE: We fully agree and support this. Considerable steps have already been taken in the last few years (including the appointment of 2 immunologists and seething up a central facility for the UMCG immunologists), but additional efforts are necessary at the UMCG level. This has also been mentioned explicitly in GUIDE's strategy for the coming years, but how to set this up, aligned with Koers25, needs to be formulated together with UMCG management.

2. *• The committee appreciates that GUIDE actively invests in talent management and encourages the Institute to continue to improve its management of talent and the nurturing of careers of junior researchers (PhD's as well as postdocs) by supporting them in identifying possible career paths that are available, whether this be in academia, industry or other domains in society.*

Concerning the support of junior researchers, GUIDE will, together with other institutes and departments in the UMCG, organize opportunities to help junior researchers develop their talent in science (e.g. workshops on career opportunities, invite researchers and professionals from the different fields, facilitate junior researchers to be able to work for a certain period of time abroad). Additionally, GUIDE will discuss the research organization with departments, supporting the creation of teams comprised of staff with different roles in the research (e.g. post-doc, research coordinator, project managers), and not solely of academic staff (assistant professor (UD), associate professor (UHD), full professor (HL)). This would result in a more effective organization. In the current governance model GUIDE does not have mandate yet to hire or recruit for such specific positions, and can only fulfill an advisory role in the creation of diverse research teams. Our request to come to a more balanced role is currently a point of discussion as part of the Koers25 governance model.

3. ● *GUIDE would benefit from overarching, coherent guidelines for PhD recruitment, support and career guidance that match with the Institute's research strategy.*

Recruitment and hiring of PhD candidates in the current governance model occurs within the departments. Because of this, it is difficult for GUIDE to make overarching, coherent guidelines on PhD recruitment and hiring. The graduate schools of the faculties of Medical Sciences and Science and Engineering are responsible for the education of PhD candidates. However, GUIDE accommodates further support and supervision of PhD candidates amongst others through supervision via a 3rd independent supervisor participating in the project and career development meetings.

4. ● *Changes in legislation are making grant applications more and more complex and time-consuming. Additional support from GUIDE could help investigators in applying for grants and navigate compliance and other requirements more efficiently.*

Researchers already receive support from various teams at the UMCG (and the University of Groningen) (i.e. Grant Support Hub, Service Desk CRO, Talent Development Editing team, Digital Competence Centre). GUIDE will continue to bring these supportive services to the attention of its member investigators and connect researchers to the support they need. GUIDE will additionally support researchers in grant applications by presenting best practices and successful applications.

5. ● *The interplay between the 12 research programs within GUIDE could be further strengthened and improved. There is a shared desire and need for more structural interaction and cross-fertilization, which should be organized at the Institute level. Thoughtfully designed meetings engaging all levels of staff are needed to further enhance shared ownership of the research directions and collaborative enterprise.*

GUIDE will continue to organize regular meetings to help researchers and programs get to know each other better. These meetings will cover broad themes or specific scientific topics. The GUIDE research programs will be stimulated and supported to organize joint meetings on similar themes. Additionally, GUIDE will have regular brainstorming meetings with the program leaders to define a joint theme suitable for a GUIDE-wide grant applications.

### **Societal relevance**

6. ● *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.*

Research within GUIDE ranges from drug discovery and development to real world data analysis. This broad range of research activities makes it very difficult to define a specific, shared goal on societal impact. Instead, GUIDE would like to see each program developing its own societal impact strategy and define which goals are most important and relevant. Together with the impact team, GUIDE will aid programs in developing their specific impact strategies by connecting programs to the UMCG Impact Team and organizing horizon scanning events. GUIDE will ask each program to present its vision and goals for societal impact for the next years. Additionally, GUIDE will (in collaboration with the impact team) organize workshops for researchers to learn how to define and measure impact and aid in writing societal impact narratives.

GUIDE aims also to increase interaction of the research programs with stakeholders such as the Federation for Innovative Drug Research Netherlands (FIGON), the European Commission and private partners (patient organizations, societal groups, and foundations).

## **Viability**

7. ● *The committee recommends that GUIDE considers long-term support of the Institute's critical assets of biobanks and patient data as well as of centralized, state-of-the-art technical facilities which contribute towards innovation and collaboration.*

Long-term support of centralized facilities such as biobanks and state-of-the-art technologies is provided at the UMCG level. Examples are the CBCH (Cohort and Biobank Coordination Hub) and technical facilities (e.g. the microscopy center). To create more impact, GUIDE and other institutes should be better represented in the strategic boards of the facilities. This is a point of discussion in the new strategy plan of UMCG, called Koers25.

8. ● *A point of concern with regard to the financial viability of GUIDE is a reduction in funding from industry and other external sources over the last two years. According to the committee this does not pose a threat to the viability of the Institute in the short term but advises that consideration should be given to identifying specific areas of expertise among GUIDE staff, both in research and education, that might meet the needs of industry.*

The last two years were unique to the funding landscape due to Covid. The drop in funding from industry and other external sources will likely only be temporary. GUIDE will assess how its researchers acquire grant funds more frequently than only via the SEP cycle.

Although GUIDE researchers already collaborate extensively with industry, other unique opportunities will also be explored (e.g. participation in NWO's Knowledge and Innovation Covenant, co-organizing local/Northern Netherlands public-private matchmaking events with the UMCG Center for Innovation).

Additionally, GUIDE, in collaboration with the UMCG Grant Support Hub, can support its researchers to make optimal use of emerging funding possibilities, e.g. from or in relation to the Netherlands National Research Agenda (Nationale Wetenschapsagenda), EU grants, and IMI grants.

9. ● *The committee emphasizes the importance of succession planning. Staff composition shows a relatively large fraction of senior researchers and many of these PI's will be retiring in the near future. The committee supports the measures taken to ensure continuity of leadership and encourages proactive succession planning and mission-driven change management.*

Currently, GUIDE is involved in succession planning of staff at a very late stage and only has an advisory role. The departments of the UMCG are in the lead. In the context of Koers25, this may change and it may be possible for GUIDE to influence hiring staff and succession planning in a broader context. If this is the case, GUIDE will have an opportunity to assess what is needed for research, in general for the UMCG or the institute.

## **Conclusion:**

The committee's recommendations support GUIDE's aims and goals for the upcoming period. Many of the recommendations given by the committee have already been identified by GUIDE and are part of its "Strategy for the next six years" in the SEP report. This strategy will be evaluated annually, and monitored and evaluated via GUIDE's PDCA cycle and management reviews.