

Position University Board and Board of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences (FMNS) concerning the external research assessment 2014 of the Energy and Sustainability Research Institute Groningen (ESRIG)

Parallel with a series of midterm reviews of FMNS' SEP institutes in 2014, ESRIG has been assessed by an external Peer Review Committee (PRC, chaired by Professor Martin Heimann of the Max Planck Institute of Biogeochemistry in Jena), following the procedures and requirements of the SEP 2009-2015. The University Board decided to accept the outcome of this procedure, initiated as an 'extended midterm review', as a full SEP assessment.

As ESRIG was founded in 2010, an extended midterm review was deemed appropriate four years later, allowing a timely and informed decision whether or not to adjust the new institute's course. In previous years, several ESRIG research groups had taken part in four different disciplinary research assessments (Environmental sciences, Chemistry, Physics and Biology). The goal of the 2014 'extended' midterm review was therefore to perform an assessment of the entire Institute (as a baseline measurement for the Institute) in order to assess its added value and to find out whether a tailored, local assessment could provide a good alternative to the previous fragmented disciplinary assessments.

The review has been received very well, both by ESRIG and the Faculty Board. The PRC has provided a thorough assessment of the quality, productivity, societal relevance and vitality of ESRIG and its six programmes. In addition, it has answered specific questions of the Faculty Board and ESRIG management and formulated a number of valuable recommendations, also based on its interviews with stakeholders, PhD students and postdocs.

The PRC's conclusions and recommendations have been discussed with the ESRIG management and Faculty Board, leading to the following measures, already set in motion.

- ESRIG will strengthen its top-down stimuli to create more coherence and focus within the Institute. The coherence of its research themes will play a vital role when filling upcoming vacancies. This will be set in motion by conducting interviews with the academic staff and by organizing 'away days'. The Institute's (public) profile will be defined more clearly along the lines suggested by the PRC. The research themes will be further strengthened when filling new vacancies. The appointments of a new group leader of the Centre for Energy and Environmental Sciences (IVEM) and a new scientific director of the Energy Academy will further strengthen and broaden the basis of ESRIG and improve the scope for more focussed research. The Director will formulate a strategic plan to be discussed in a meeting with the Faculty Board in the spring of 2016.
- In accordance with the PRC's recommendations, ESRIG will establish an advisory board that will include stakeholders; its proposal is expected October 2014.
- Neither the Director of ESRIG nor the Faculty Board are very enthusiastic about the PRC's suggestion to hire a Social Sciences researcher for the new position at the Science and Society Group (SSG) (part of IVEM). In their view, the research methods used in the social sciences differ too much from those in the natural sciences. Instead, an ancillary appointment of a researcher from the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences at FMNS will be seriously considered, since interfaculty collaboration matches the Groningen Energy and Sustainability Programme (GESP) concept quite well.
- As soon as the new IVEM leader has established himself (September 2014!), the future of SSG will get high priority on the agenda of the ESRIG Board.