

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Utrecht, June 1, 2022
Ons kenmerk: 20220742

Position paper of the board of Netherlands Heart Institute in response to international evaluation

In October 2021, the Netherlands Heart Institute was visited by an international assessment committee as part of a review according to the Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP). The assessment committee followed the SEP 2021-2027 for evaluations of research institutes as published by VSNU, KNAW and NWO. The committee consisted of prof. D.E. Grobbee (Julius Clinical Academic Research Organization, Netherlands, Chair), Prof. R. De Caterina (University of Pisa, Italy), Dr. D. Sanoudou (University of Athens, Greece), Prof. P. Sinnaeve (University of Leuven, Belgium), Prof. K. Sipido (University of Leuven, Belgium) and Prof. U. Zeymer (University Medical Center of Ludwigshafen, Germany). The committee was supported by dr. F. Meijer (KNAW), who acted as independent secretary.

Vision, mission and strategic goals

The committee praised our vision that, in light of the fact that cardiovascular disease puts an increasing burden on society, NLHI's mission is to develop excellent new strategies for prevention, diagnosis and cure of cardiovascular disease by promoting research cooperation between the cardiology departments of all University Medical Centers in the Netherlands.

The committee found that this well-defined mission is translated into two overarching strategic goals. First, NLHI aims to optimize cooperation between the academic cardiology departments and basic research groups that together build (multidisciplinary) research programmes from bench to bedside and improve patient care. Second, NLHI aims to coach talented researchers to the top of the cardiovascular field. NLHI has developed a number of corresponding strategies to achieve these goals.

The committee appreciates that NLHI's mission of fostering research cooperation across departmental borders is highly topical. Over the past decades, there has been a decisive shift away from individual-led research and towards inter-university collaborations. This is reflected by the grant climate that favors consortia of mutually reinforcing partners. As rightfully pointed out in NLHI's self-evaluation report, cooperation and networking are in the DNA of the institute. The committee is therefore convinced that NLHI has a major role to play in promoting the collaboration of academic cardiology departments across the Netherlands. The committee foresees opportunities for NLHI to broaden its central, coordinating role, for example in case of discussions amongst academic partners on promoting diversity, gender equality or the need for dedicated research time during medical specialty training.

Research quality societal relevance and viability

The committee concludes that NLHI has successfully served its two main goals over the past five years: fostering excellent research and coaching talented young researchers. In terms of research output the committee noticed an impressive volume and quality of research output, despite suboptimal internal rulings for recognizing NLHI in scientific publications. The committee encourages the board to evaluate the current bottom up, theme based strategy in terms of topics that NLHI covers. Furthermore the committee expects that more impact can be generated through collaboration with industry, policy makers and stakeholders. NLHI can reach this by promoting academic research through Dutch Cardiovascular Alliance (DCVA), which was co-initiated by NLHI.

According to the committee NLHI successfully makes an impact on society through the promotion of pioneering cardiovascular research, and its translation to clinical practice. The PLN programme is pointed out as an example for how clinicians, patients and basic scientists should work together to fight disease. The committee

feels that if NLHI wishes to have a broader societal impact, it has an advantageous strategic position in the Dutch cardiology arena as well as the network, to achieve this.

The committee positively assesses the institute's viability, when looking at NLHI's important contribution to nurturing young talents, establishing valuable infrastructure and promoting collaboration. Challenges as well as opportunities can be expected in the future area of funding. The committee points the attention of the board towards a clear business plan capitalizing the institute's neutral role in organizing cooperation in research as well as being an attractive one-stop-shop Dutch partner for large international consortia. To make more clear to the outside world what NLHI has to offer in terms of services and infrastructure the committee advises to reconsider the organizational structure and naming of some of the institutes programmes.

Talent development

The committee found that NLHI does not have specific policies regarding the training and supervision of its PhD candidates. Rather, the academic cardiology departments where these PhDs are embedded provide the framework for supervision and instruction. In the committee's opinion, this is a necessary consequence of the way in which PhD arrangements are set up. Avoiding duplication of efforts and saving valuable resources is a good strategy on the part of NLHI. By liaising with well-established initiatives such as Young@Heart, NLHI succeeds in providing its PhDs (and postdocs) all the benefits of a rich career development network. Junior staff were clearly enthusiastic about activities NLHI initiates and organizes for them. Especially through the NLHI-fellowship program, postdocs and young physicians have the chance to work abroad for up to a year.

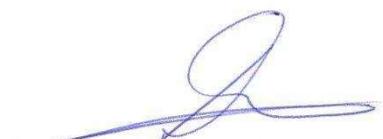
Above all, the appreciation for our strategy to pursue strong collaborations, internally and externally, and to stimulate talent, makes us proud and motivated to continue to improve ourselves. The board of NLHI will discuss the outcomes of the SEP with the collected heads of the cardiology departments, the team members of the servicecenter and stakeholders like KNAW, NWO, DVCA, Hartstichting and PLN foundation. After these discussions we will prioritize our approach to change within the Institute.

We agree with the committee that we have two obvious unique selling points, that is the co-developed PLN research program and the unique position to join international consortia as the Dutch one-stop-shop cardiovascular partner. Therefore we will aim our future steps in these directions.

We would like to express our gratitude to the international assessment committee for its great efforts and all who were involved for preparing the research strategy assessment. We congratulate all (former) staff for the excellent outcomes and outstanding performance as shown in this assessment report.

Sincerely ,

Netherlands Heart Institute
The Board



Prof. P.A.F.M. Doevendans



Prof. J.W. Jukema