

ASCL PLAN OF ACTION IN RESPONSE TO THE EVALUATION REPORT

11 September 2024

Background

In 2023 the ASCL held its research evaluation. This evaluation followed the Standard Evaluation Protocol and was based on the ASCL self-evaluation report (2017-2022) and a site visit in November 2023. The evaluation committee delivered an evaluation report in spring 2024.

The ASCL prides itself with the recognition of both the academic quality and relevance of its research, documentation and societal engagement. The evaluation report signals important organizational developments that have been initiated and may be further strengthened and provides a number of recommendations in line with the main evaluation criteria.

The evaluation report has been discussed in general terms in the ASCL Executive Board (EB), the Staff Council and the ASCL board in Q1 of 2024 and in more detail during the ASCL Strategic Day in April 2024.

In response to the evaluation report and recommendations, the ASCL EB has developed this plan of action document (PoA). The PoA outlines the main recommendations of the evaluation (section 1) identifies four main lines of action (section 2) and outlines the process and timeline (section 3), including the deliverables, who is responsible and involved .

NOTE: Since the evaluation, funding for higher education and international development has come under threat. Full repercussions for the ASCL future funding position is not yet known at the time of writing this plan of action, budget cuts are to be expected.

1. Recommendations from the evaluation report

This plan of action document organizes the recommendations from the evaluation along three lines¹:

- (re) define identity and role of ASCL
- Partnerships, funding and positioning
- Organization and community

Identity and Role

In the context of the current global and political context, the committee recommends the ASCL to (re) define the identity and role of the ASCL as an interfaculty, externally funded institute of Leiden University. The definition of this identity and role should be based on the ASCL's strength as a key convening platform in Dutch scholarly and policy discussions on Africa and African studies that contributes to reshaping the narrative about 'Africa', and is actively working with Africa in research and documentation. The upcoming research program (2025) effectively functions as a strategic agenda that clearly defines links of research to teaching and collections, and supports the expansion of external funding and research collaborations in Leiden, the Netherlands, Europe, Africa and beyond.

Partnerships, funding and positioning

- Develop a strategy for strategic partnerships and funding: reduce dependence on core subsidy
- Enhancing visibility of societal and academic relevance of research and documentation
 - o Knowledge dissemination activities and partnerships should be diversified and a strong outreach position should be created.
- Positioning within Leiden University
 - o Broaden/strengthen networks, participation in consortia, and research and collection/documentation synergies

Organization and community

- o Develop career trajectories for all staff in line with rewards and recognition policies
- o Diversity and rejuvenation of staff, incl. opportunities for post-docs
- o Anchoring and strengthening the Graduate Programme African Studies (GPAS) in terms of training program/supervision as well as continued intake of salaried PhDs (co-funding/matching)
- o Visiting fellows and self-funded scholars
- o Internal communication
- o Ethics and data management

¹ For a full overview and appreciation of the recommendations we refer to the report.

2. Proposed actions

In response to these recommendations and partly in line with institutional rhythms (new research program and revised communication strategy), ASCL is planning the following responses/actions.

A. Development of new research program

- ASCL Identity and Strategic Function of Research Programme
- Bottom-up consultative process on the thematic foci of research
 - o Organization of research
 - Individual vs collaborative (incl. partnerships)
 - Reinforcing links research and teaching
 - Reinforcing links library, documentation and information
 - Positioning RESMA and PhD students and visiting fellows
 - o Visibility of academic and societal relevance of research (link to communications strategy)
 - o Resources available for research: budget, data management and ethics
- Consultation process with Societal and Academic Stakeholders in the Netherlands

People and Organization

- Reinforcing and strengthening GPAS (policy development ongoing, implementation starting 1 September 2024)
- Human resources
 - o Career development paths (second half 2024)
 - o Hiring opportunities (second half 2024)
 - New head of the library, documentation and information section (BDI)
 - New communications officer
 - New post-doc position
 - o Decision making on replacement of retiring staff (starting 2025)
- Organization, coordination and visibility support staff (first half 2025)

Development Funding Strategy (first half of 2025)

- External research funding: develop individual/collaborative/potential institutional targets and peer support mechanisms
- Consolidate and strengthen GPAS, continuous inflow of 2-4 salaried PhD students per year
- Increase (professional) teaching
- Explore philanthropy/foundations/bequests/legates/crowd funding

Section 3. Timeline, deliverables and responsibilities

	Research program	Communication strategy	Organization and staff	Anchoring GPAS	Funding Strategy
Timeline	First internal phase: September-December Second phase: external consultation	October-December (tbc)	2025	May-August 2024, with new cohort of PhDs starting in September 2024	2025
Deliverable	Draft research program + Final research program	Revised communication strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Career development paths - Updated personnel plan - Vlootschouw 	ASCL PhD policy, including bench fee policy and welcome pack	First edition of the ASCL Funding Strategy
Who	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Process lead by chair Researchers Assembly (RA) and director - Requires full participation of all scientific staff and selected BDI and support staff - Drafts to be discussed in PV, with the board, with the ASCL scientific and societal advisory council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communications advisor in collaboration with new communications officer and website committee. - To be discussed in EB, RA, BDI and board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EB in consultation with HR department - Staff council - To be discussed in Staff meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Head and coordinator GPAS, in consultation with the GPAS committee - Approval by the EB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EB in consultation with RA, BDI, Staff meeting and ASCL board. - Possible advise from LURIS and Research Support - Staff council