

**Response by the Leiden Academic Centre for Drug Research (LACDR) and the Faculty of Science to the Research Evaluation report LACDR 2016-2021**

**10 juli 2023**

The Leiden Academic Centre for Drug Research (LACDR) and the Faculty of Science (hereafter: Faculty) are grateful to the evaluation committee for their insightful assessment of the research at LACDR. In this response, we would like to highlight a number of particularly relevant recommendations of the committee and offer some thoughts on how we will seek to further improve the institute in the coming evaluation period.

We largely understand and embrace the remarks, conclusions and recommendations presented in the evaluation report. Within LACDR, following the evaluation, both a LACDR brainstorm day and a meeting with the Scientific Advisory Board have taken place. With the outcomes of both sessions in mind, LACDR and the Faculty would jointly like to note the following.

- The committee recommended that LACDR organizes an institute-wide discussion on its unique selling points (USPs) and to translate them into a strategy in which LACDR explicitly profiles itself complementary to both industry and other academic institutions.

LACDR recognizes the dilemma that comes with having the ambition to be leading in both fundamental and translational research in the area of pharmaceutical sciences. The aim is to constantly develop novel concepts for drug discovery and development and explore new areas such as the implementation of AI, nanomedicines, stem cells or biophysics. The aim is not to compete with the pharmaceutical industry: LACDR works on therapeutical and diagnostic concepts (mostly characterizing anti-infectives and rare diseases) that are applicable in domains that the pharmaceutical industry doesn't serve sufficiently. Also LACDR works with (shared) infrastructure where new fundamental scientific concepts are validated in terms that are also used by industry and the regulatory authorities (EMA). LACDR will discuss the USP's in their next Strategy Day and will clarify their ambition and profile in their communications.

- The committee pointed out the flat, bottom-up PI-structure and suggested looking into more central guidance or steering to pursue a joint strategy. It noted chances for cross-divisional activities and a stronger corporate visibility. Further, the committee pointed out risks of creating low-critical mass in specific research topics.

The flat decision-making structure with a strong position of PI's and their academic departments (divisions) reflects the tradition of Leiden University. It also accommodates the large diversity of research topics. The strategy of the institute (including the creation of PI positions and content-related innovation) is actually decided upon collectively and the central management of LACDR facilitates the implementation of it. While top-down steering of PI's on contents is purposely limited, LACDR endorses the committee's suggestion to have a 'vlootshouw' and the advice to put a strong emphasis on the integral relation of research and education.

LACDR stimulates cross-divisional bottom-up scientific cooperation and sharing of (advanced) infrastructure. For instance, it organizes two annual symposia and highlights research developments in an internal newsletter. This is expected to add to its corporate identity and visibility and to prevent isolation of PI's. When it comes to external profiling LACDR is working on a Roadshow document, to be used for profiling of the institute as well as the individual divisions.

- The committee noted unclarity and differences between divisions regarding PI status. It stressed the importance of more transparency regarding career opportunities for academic staff, in particular in the education area. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of support by the faculty and university to allow for career development opportunities based on education and teaching performances.

The Faculty and LACDR agree that in hiring and promotion processes, clarity and transparency are key. How career development is foreseen, when evaluations for promotion may take place and against which criteria, will be explicitly addressed at the moment of appointment. Aligning with the national Recognition and Rewards movement, the Faculty will update their career policy for academic staff. Assessment criteria for achievements in research and education will be updated in accordance with current insights. The policy will be uniform throughout the Faculty. In addition, LACDR works on a 'vlootschouw' that will include this topic, in close consultation with the Faculty.

- The committee stressed the importance of continuing to take and evaluate measures with regard to the high teaching load. They stress it's important that differences in teaching load between different groups of staff are transparent and do not become too large. They specifically draw attention to PhD candidates.

The Faculty and LACDR embrace the notion of transparency and a fairer distribution of teaching load. LACDR is improving their quantitative instruments to this end and is looking into possibilities to differentiate in career paths with the aim of more customization to their PI's while maintaining a strong connection between research and teaching. This is in line with the Faculty's intentions on differentiation. The Sectorplan Pharmaceutical Sciences is expected to help decrease the individual work pressure because of the opportunity to fill in new positions. Further, while the number of BSc and MSc students is high in line with society's demands, LACDR will try to limit the involvement of PhD candidates particularly in Bachelor internships. The recent growth of the institute particularly due to the Sectorplan Pharmaceutical Sciences will allow LACDR to involve more scientific staff members and research technicians in the supervision of BSc internship students. However, since high quality education and internships are highly valued and in anticipation of the future increase of the BSc enrolment numbers (due to the removal of the numerus fixus), LACDR will continue look into other solutions as well, such as a more even distribution across divisions.

- The committee is positive about efforts in open science and would like to stimulate further implementation, specifically in some divisions.

The data stewards that are appointed by the Faculty offer support with regard to good data management and FAIR practices. With the appointment of a professor in Biosemantics who is one of the founders of the FAIR principles for Open Science, LACDR intends to give a new impulse to the implementation of FAIR across the divisions.

- The committee expresses the importance to convey knowledge of relevant regulatory guidelines to ensure that research results can be used in a later phase for regulatory assessments and decision making.

LACDR endorses the importance of the topic and is closely linked with regulatory organizations. However, LACDR does not currently see opportunities for research into regulatory sciences itself, while other universities in The Netherlands may be better equipped for relating pharmaceutical sciences to the Gamma-domain.

- The committee pointed out that the strong dependence of PhD candidates on their supervisor may be problematic if issues occur. They suggest to introduce safety measures so that PhD candidates can find support in case of issues. The committee is positive about the PhD Advisory Committee (PAC) but suggests to let the PhD candidate choose his/her own advisor and suggests to include career opportunities in their meetings.

The Faculty and LACDR fully agree with the importance of this topic. The existing support systems are communicated via several channels. Moreover, the LACDR has improved their onboarding procedure to help prevent issues from arising: expectations are discussed in a 3-day workshop and each PI communicates the criteria for PhD theses in a discipline-specific one-pager. The importance of this topic however, requires both the Faculty and LACDR to explore further possibilities to improve the safety system for all PhD candidates in the faculty.

The internal/external advisors are appointed at the start of each PhD trajectory, to offer support when issues arise. The PhD candidate has a say in the choice of the advisor, but LACDR recognizes that the system requires reviewing, partly due to the increase of the number of PhD students. The Faculty and LACDR will take up the topic further in dialogue with each other. With regard to career opportunities, LACDR endorses the importance of addressing these and has incorporated this in an annual PhD/postdoc event.

LACDR will draft a plan of approach in which the remarks in this letter will be addressed in more detail. This letter serves as a starting point for that. The institute aims to deal with these topics appropriately in the coming evaluation period.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hubertus Irth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'H'.

Hubertus Irth (Scientific Director, LACDR)

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jasper Knoester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Jasper Knoester (Dean, Faculty of Science)