Response of the Institute of Psychology to the
REPORT ON THE RESEARCH REVIEW OF PSYCHOLOGY OF NINE UNIVERSITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS
(Research Review Psychology 2023)

We would like to thank the committee for their constructive and positive assessment of our performance and development between 2017 and 2022. The committee has reviewed the Dutch Psychology on a national level and against an international benchmark, and our work at the Leiden University Institute of Psychology according to the latest Standard Evaluation Protocol. The committee concludes that "the quality of research in Dutch psychology remains very high, and Leiden's research quality is in line with other Dutch institutions".

The committee describes the research output and scientific impact of the Institute of Psychology at Leiden University as exemplary: "This is evidenced by the internationally visible academic reputation of many of the researchers, numerous prestigious national and international prizes, and the value of research grants and individual fellowships acquired. The unit's research is technologically and methodologically innovative, and it investigates topic areas and questions that are significant and cutting-edge in the field."

The committee also commends the Institute's "excellent relevance to society that is amply attested to by its articulated strategy of a 'two-way street' between researchers and societal partners. There is active outreach to the public, extensive connections with (inter)national societal organisations and research institutes, citizen science, and contract funding for applied research."

The committee notes that "the departments' viability can be excellent, based on the new approach to management, the steady flow of external funding, the high quality of the research staff, and the very impressive and well-resourced research facilities. …Overall, the institute has a strong outlook. It should be very strongly supported by the faculty and university." However, the Committee points out that the uncertain status of the MRI neuroimaging facility is a major threat to viability.

The Committee makes several recommendations for further improvements in the coming years. These recommendations align well with the Institute's Strategy (for 2023-2027), which has been developed in the past year, within the broader context of the University and Faculty's strategic goals. The five aims of our strategy are 1) One Institute - Efficient and effective organisation with core values, 2) Recognition, Rewards, and Inspiration - Shared responsibility and collaboration, 3) Open Science - An open, transparent academic culture, 4) Interdisciplinarity - With a strong discipline as the basis, and 5) Translational Research and Education - From fundamental knowledge to applications. With this strategy we aim to reinforce our identity, set clear priorities and make transparent choices to further strengthen our research community. In what follows, we will outline how we will integrate the Committee's recommendations in our strategic planning.

Recommendation 1: Maintain the balance between (a) research that aims for societal relevance with important local impact/recognition and (b) research that aims for internationally visible knowledge production and brings citation and recognition by international peers. This balance will have implications for the institute's reputation inside and outside the Netherlands, affecting resource competition in the broader field.

As noted by the Committee, a deliberate strategy is in place that emphasizes a 'two-way street' in which fundamental research findings are translated to societal applications, which in turn generate new questions for research. As stated in their report "some staff lean toward societally relevant research while others lean toward fundamental research, and this is working, in keeping with the emphasis on academic freedom that has long been a flagship strength of the Leiden Institute of Psychology."

We set clear priorities to safeguard this balance and made it one of our strategic aims. We support at least four centres that provide 'knowledge and expertise' in mental health treatment, adolescent stress, economic behaviour, and for a healthy society to facilitate knowledge utilisation and the development of science-based policies and interventions. At the same time, supported by the University's partial beta-funding, we continually invest in advanced research facilities that allow for curiosity-driven, innovative fundamental research and selected Advanced Methods for Behavioural Research as one of our four focal research areas. For instance, after commissioning our novel and advanced Social Sciences and Humanities Lab infrastructure, we are now developing ways to facilitate the recruitment of human research participants from the general population (e.g. research participants data base). Such initiatives will potentiate the generalizability of our fundamental research findings and their translational significance.

To better empower and support researchers we want to further strengthen our funding acquisition and project management procedures, in close collaboration with the Faculty's Grant Support Office. We want to increase awareness about existing procedures that are in place before, during and after externally funded research projects, and collect input from our staff on how we can better disseminate this knowledge and assist during funding acquisition and project management. One idea that we are currently exploring together with the other Institutes of our Faculty is a peer-feedback network for grant writing and interviews for the standard NWO and ERC funding schemes.

Recommendation 2: Carry out formal analyses to determine the actual and true costs of the institute's research activities, to inform appropriate budget requests in funding applications.

As described in our self-assessment, and as acknowledged by the Committee, behavioural research methodology has become increasingly advanced and thus more costly. In addition, facilities are increasingly shared among Institutes and even Faculties. These developments necessitate maintaining accurate budgeting overviews and close collaboration among all stakeholders. To better monitor research spending within the Institute and more adequately inform research-related budgeting and investment decisions, we will create a separate SAP number? for research-related expenses. In addition, we will more closely collaborate with the Faculty's Project Control to make sure that grant applications have realistic budgets that cover all foreseeable research expenses, and we will inform our researchers more regularly about specific requirements to this end (e.g., changing costs for medical ethics assessments, insurances, etc.). Researchers of our Institute moreover take part in the advisory committee that assesses the necessity and costs of investments in existing and novel shared research facilities and that informs the Faculty's spending decisions of the partial Beta funding and other resources allocated to research support.

Recommendation 3: Provide more formal guidance, training, and feedback to prepare PhD students for teaching.

Many of our PhD candidates have an interest in developing their teaching skills and like to contribute to teaching. To facilitate this, they can now obtain a modified teaching qualification as part of their training at the graduate school. As rightly noted by the Committee, their teaching assignments should not conflict with their research objectives or result in unrealistic work demands. Also, funding agencies differ in the degree to which teaching is allowed and often require that the teaching should directly inform the PhD candidates' projects. To safeguard all these conditions, we are currently developing teaching guidelines for PhD candidates to be uniformly applied by all units in PhD candidates' Training and Supervision plans. These will be evaluated during the annual development interviews and address the responsibilities of the PhD supervisors in the development of teaching-related skills as well as the balancing with tasks and duties for the PhD project.

Recommendation 4: Ensure, as far as is practically possible, that a PhD candidate's form of contract does not hinder opportunities and research outcomes.

We strongly agree with the Committee that a PhD candidate's form of contract should not come at the cost of opportunities and, as a result, outcomes. In the past year, in close collaboration with the faculty's graduate school, we have therefore developed several initiatives to make PhD policies more uniform. For instance, both internal, external and bursary PhD candidates now have annual development interviews. In addition, we are working towards standardizing go/no go and midway assessments for all candidates, to better monitor progress and potential issues. As of this year (2024), our PhD representatives network includes a bursary and external PhD candidate, and a postdoctoral researcher. They will be represented in the Institute Council to voice the community's specific needs and concerns and to be informed about all ongoing policy issues. In addition, all PhD candidates now participate in the mentoring program to ensure early signalling of conflicts and other issues. Finally, we recently raised an awareness campaign among staff and PhD candidates to apply the PhD Golden Rules to facilitate collaboration between supervisors and PhD candidates during the PhD trajectory.

Recommendation 5: Craft guidelines/definitions for policies and ensure that these are communicated to all staff and students as appropriate, to achieve a uniformly shared transparent understanding of the policies such as 'Recognition & Rewards' and career progression but also the limitations to the organisation's hiring possibilities.

We work together actively on shaping an open, safe, and inspiring learning and working environment where students and staff can develop in diverse ways that reflect everyone's possibilities and what people are willing and able to do. More room is needed for diverse career profiles relating to research, education, management, and knowledge utilisation, where each of these profiles is valued equally. These elements are at the heart of the Recognition and Rewards programme and as such are one of the priorities of our institute. A solid recognition and rewards strategy requires transparent guidelines for hiring and promotion. To this end, we are about to finalize an unambiguous policy document for the entire institute, which is transparent to all employees, and which provides managers and other stakeholders with tools for a uniform way of hiring and promoting staff. More generally, we are working towards an Institute Handbook, accessible to all staff, in which all policies regarding teaching, research and operations are described and that we also hope to finalize in the first half of the coming year. Finally, we regularly inform staff about existing and changing policies through newsletters and mailings, and important regulations and guidelines can be found on our Institute Page.

Recommendation 6: Build in formal empirical valuation plans for new policies, practices, research endeavours, and initiatives, including 'Recognition & Rewards' and the institute's new governance structure. Collect data on the outcomes to anticipate unintended consequences and foster a culture of quantitative self-study evaluation.

To monitor progress towards our strategy aims, among which Recognition and Rewards and our new governance structure are of primary focus, we have developed a year planning with specific actions and terms within the Teaching, Research, and Personnel and Finance portfolios, that are the responsibility of the respective Institute Board members, and that are evaluated and updated every six months. In addition, we organize plenary Q&A sessions to update staff about current developments and gather input on these matters. Staff members are allocated hours to develop and pilot new policies, for example for improving Academic Culture and Recognition and Rewards, are encouraged to include an evaluation plan for their initiatives. In addition, these projects are evaluated in the respective workgroups. Finally, within the relevant committees, we regularly evaluate novel and existing research policies and operations, for example within the domains of ethics, data management, science communication, funding, and lab facilities, to see how these are implemented at the various units and to discuss what can be improved or better aligned.

We have developed several initiatives to foster a culture of quantitative self-study evaluation of research quality and performance. For instance, our data stewards monitor and encourage the timely compilations of publication packages to foster Open Science practices. Progress to this end is discussed regularly as a basis for further actions like more focused communication or training. As of 2024, we categorize our research output in Lucris according to our four central research areas. Together with our communication advisors, we have developed a novel format for research project pages that can be linked to staff members' profile pages. The template allows for linking research projects to the four research areas, but also to strategic aims such as Open Science or Interdisciplinarity and the SSH themes. In addition, one can indicate both internal and external collaborators, key publications, and funding sources. In the coming year, with the support of our communication team, we will encourage our staff to update their project pages with this new template, to monitor performance and discover novel crosslinks between researchers and topics more easily. Regarding the Sector Plan SSH we have indicated Key Performance Indicators for evaluating success in addressing the three SSH themes within each programme.

Recommendation 7: Address the uncertain status of the MRI scanning facility as soon as is feasible, due to its critical role in psychology at Leiden, impacting staff recruitment, retention, and funded research.

A potential threat to viability is that funding for the Leiden Institute for Brain and Cognition neuroimaging facilities is uncertain. The MRI scanner will need to be replaced in two to three years. At the same time, the quality standards in the neuroimaging field have shifted and require larger samples (i.e. more participants) than in the past as well as more advanced, but also more computationally intense (and thus costly) data-analytic strategies.

The committee rightly points out that "affordable scanning in a scanner that meets modern standards in the field is a critical resource for a large proportion of the researchers in the institute, and for Gravitation awards." And that "Delaying a resolution could potentially lead to researchers who rely on MRI technology placing their work at risk and considering the possibility of leaving Leiden." In addition, the scanning facilities are central to the Leiden Institute for Brain and Cognition, which has been co-founded by our Institute, and which is one of the oldest interdisciplinary strongholds of Leiden University, and as such align well with the University strategic aims.

To secure neuroimaging facilities for the future investment will include not only the MRI scanner but must maintain the essential expert neuroimaging staff of the facility as well. An important challenge will be to develop a cost-effective investment plan, for example through hour-based scanning rates, while keeping facilities accessible to most researchers and for piloting novel ideas. Together with the Leiden Institute for Brain and Cognition, and the faculties and institutes involved, we would like to start discussions with the University Board, about the importance of this facility for the University. Part of this will also involve exploring different financial models to make the neuroimaging facility future-proof and affordable.