Leiden protocol for research assessments

2015-2021

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Introduction

The Netherlands has a long standing tradition of research assessment through peer review. According to the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW), universities are responsible for the quality assurance of their own research. Since 1994 universities have evaluated the quality of their research using a common protocol, the core of which is the assessment of the quality of the research by a committee of scientific peers. In 2014 the Association of Universities (VSNU), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) have drawn up the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) for the period 2015-2021.

All research assessments at Leiden University will be conducted in line with the SEP 2015 – 2021. This Leiden University protocol functions as an internal instruction for these research assessments and for the internal mid-term assessments that take place three years after each external assessment. This protocol describes the procedures, deadlines and division of roles between the University Executive Board, the Faculty Executive Board and the research unit. The information is arranged according to the eight chapters of the SEP.

Please note that the information in the SEP is leading: this protocol is meant as a manual to the SEP to explain how the rules of the SEP are put into practice at Leiden University. An exception to this rule is the mid-term assessment: the SEP does not provide any specifications as to how a mid-term assessment should be performed.

There are several important changes in the SEP 2015-2021 compared to the SEP 2009-2015:

1. There are three assessment criteria: research quality, relevance to society, and viability. Productivity, which was a separate criterion in the SEP 2009-2015, now forms part of research quality.
2. The quantitative assessment scale ranges from 1-4, with 1 being the highest score. The meaning of the scores has also changed.
3. In addition to the three criteria named above, two further aspects of the research are evaluated: research integrity and the PhD programme. The research unit should address both topics in the self-assessment report and the assessment committee comments on this and makes suggestions for improvement.
4. There is a stronger emphasis on the impact of the research on society. The research unit has to provide 'output indicators' and write a narrative to explain the societal relevance of the research. In addition, an overview of all publications has to be provided in the self-assessment: not only scientific publications (refereed/non-refereed, conference papers, book chapters, etc), but also professional publications and publications aimed at the general public.
5. Under the SEP 2009-2015 two aggregate levels were reviewed in the assessment: that of the institute and that of the research programmes. Under the SEP 2015-2021 the minimum size of a research unit is defined as at least 10 research FTE permanent academic staff (excluding PhD students and post-docs). This minimum is not met by many of our current research programmes. However, the University Executive Board has decided that *in principle* all research programmes will be evaluated in addition to the research institutes. For each research evaluation the level(s) of assessment will be decided upon in consultation with the Faculty Executive Board (see p.4).

EXTERNAL RESEARCH ASSESSMENT ACCORDING TO SEP

1. SEP 2015 – 2021

- At Leiden University the aims of the research assessment are:
  - external accountability for the research activities and -output of the research unit under review;
  - offering feedback on the standing of the research, measured against national and international standards of quality, impact, and viability, taking into account the position of the unit within the faculty, within the university as a whole and within the national and international context;
  - offering a reflection on the strategy and ambitions of the research unit;
  - evaluating the management of the research unit in terms of academic leadership, tasks and responsibilities;
  - evaluating the PhD programme within the research unit, within the Graduate School and/or within the national research school.

- The responsibility for external research assessments rests with the University Executive Board (hereinafter: University). This is in line with the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW), where quality assurance is a function of the Board of the University. This does not, however, affect the responsibilities and competences of the Faculty Executive Board (hereinafter: Faculty) in terms of the organisation of the research.

- The University carries out its formal role in research quality assurance in close consultation with the Faculty. In certain cases it may be necessary to hold consultations with the research unit concerned. These consultations always take place in agreement with or through the intervention of the Faculty.

2. Assessment criteria and categories

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3. The research units

- The Faculty proposes to the University which research units are to be assessed. According to the SEP a research unit can be a research programme, a research institute, or the total of the research within a faculty.

- The SEP defines the minimum size of a research unit as 10 research FTE permanent academic staff (excluding PhD students and post-docs). Many of the current research programmes within the university do not meet this minimum. However, we feel it is important to include the research programmes in the assessment, in addition to the research institute as a whole, since this is the level where the research takes place. Therefore, the principle is to assess both the programme level and the institute level. The decision on the level(s) of assessment is taken in consultation between the Faculty and the University.

- The SEP states that all research within the university has to be assessed, implying that research programmes or research groups that are being phased out also have to be included in the assessment. It is recommended to make the status of such group(s) or programme(s) very clear in the self-assessment report.

4. Scheduling and managing an assessment

- The Faculty is responsible for appointing an administrative coordinator within the research unit, whose task is to make the practical preparations for the assessment and who, if requested, can also provide the secretary of the assessment committee with further information.

- If Leiden University acts as the coordinator (penvoerder) of a national asssessment, or a joint assessment with one or more universities, the department of Academic Affairs coordinates the assessment process on behalf of the University, in consultation with the other participating universities.

Action plan

- The University will notify the Faculty well in advance in writing about the proposed start of a specific research assessment. In practice, this will mean approximately eight months before the start of the year in which the assessment will take place. In this notification the Faculty is requested to draw up an Action Plan for the assessment, to be approved by the University.

- In the case of a national or joint assessment the Action Plan is drawn up by the coordinating Faculty after consultation with all participating Faculties. The coordinating university then submits the Action Plan to the Universities involved.

- The Action Plan should contain at least the following elements:
    - whether the assessment will take place at the local level, at the national level or jointly with one or more partner universities;
    - how a benchmark can be provided;
    - a profile of the assessment committee and the required expertise;
    - the nomination of the chairman and members of the assessment committee;
    - the nomination of a secretary of the committee;
    - the preparation at the level of the research unit:
        - self-assessment
        - possible specific assessment criteria
        - the desirability/possibility of a bibliometric analysis
    - a budget estimate;
    - a global time schedule.

- The Faculty submits the Action Plan to the University for approval <u>at least six months</u> before the assessment is scheduled to take place.

Terms of Reference

- The University in consultation with the Faculty can add elements to the standard Terms of Reference for research assessments (Appendix B of the SEP).

- The University or the Faculty can present one or more specific strategic questions to the assessment committee, e.g. in response to the content of the self-assessment.

Composition of the assessment committee

In the case of a <u>local</u> assessment, the procedure is as follows:

- The Faculty will substantiate the nominations of the members of the assessment committee in terms of academic excellence, areas of expertise and independence, and will include a short curriculum vitae of the chairman and members.

- The University will present the nominations of the committee members in confidence to one or more external expert(s) for advice on the expertise and independence of the candidates.

- We advise not to approach any committee members before the University has approved the composition of the committee. It is not uncommon for the University to require changes to the committee composition.

- The Faculty notifies the University <u>at least four months</u> before the assessment visit of the final composition of the assessment committee. The committee will then be appointed by the University. The appointment of the committee secretary will follow the same procedure.

- The University notifies the committee members of their appointment through an official letter, which is acompanied by the Terms of Reference of the assessment, the SEP and the Statement of Impartiality and Confidentiality.

In the case of a <u>national or joint</u> assessment, the coordinating university, after consultation with the other participating universities, will appoint the members of the assessment committee.

Budget

- The Faculty is responsible for producing a budget estimate for the assessment (included in the Action Plan) which must be approved by the University.

- The costs of preparing the assessment (producing and printing the self-assessment, activities of the administrative co-ordinator) will be met by the Faculty.

- The University will meet the costs of the site visit, such as the remuneration and expenses of the assessment committee and the secretary. The University will also pay for any bibliometric analyses that are performed.

- Responsibility for payment (for example of the expenses of the assessment committee) rests with the Faculty or research unit. The expenses can be reclaimed afterwards from the University.

5. Self-assessment and additional documentation

- The self-assessment written by the research unit should first be approved by the Faculty. The Faculty then submits the self-assessment to the University. Only after approval by the University can the self-assessment be made available to the assessment committee.

- Since the self-assessment has to be available to the assessment committee one or two months prior to the site visit, it must be submitted to the University <u>at least ten weeks</u> prior to the assessment visit, in order to allow time for any modifications which may be necessary.

- We recommend to send a draft of the self-assessment for consultation to the department of Academic Affairs well in advance.

- A bibliometric analysis can be included as an appendix to the self-assessment. In the case of a national or joint assessment the bibliometric analysis for all research units involved will usually be provided as a separate report.

- Some researchers are employed by another university or research institution in addition to Leiden University. In these cases only the research output related to their Leiden position should be included in the self-assessment.

- In the self-assessment report, the research unit has to identify output indicators for research quality and relevance to society (Table D1 on p25 of the SEP). These indicators are selected by the research unit and not dictated by the SEP. The university also <u>does not</u> specify which output indicators should be used. However, within the university a model for indicators of societal output and impact has been developed, which might prove of use to research units preparing a self-assessment (Appendix 1).
  Other organisations have also developed discipline-specific quality indicators. This includes the KNAW , which has published reports on quality indicators for the Humanities and the Social Sciences [1]. In addition, the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) document of 'Panel criteria and working methods' lists a large number of examples of 'impact' across the whole scientific spectrum [2].

- In the case of a national or joint research assessment the research units and Faculties involved will have to reach a consensus on which output indicators to use.

- For certain categories of employees, such as professors by special appointment and guest researchers, separate publication overviews can be set up, in order to provide transparency regarding the link between input and output.

- It is possible to provide the assessment committee with additional (quantitative) information through a dedicated website.

6. Site visit

- The management of the research unit, under the responsibility of the Faculty and in consultation with the chairman of the assessment committee, is responsible for the programme of the site visit.

7. Assessment report

- In addition to the public assessment report, the assessment committee can write, or can be requested to write, a confidential management letter to the Faculty, with a copy to the University. This management letter relates to possible sensitive information of a personal nature or sensitive business information about the (future) position of the research unit.

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[1] https://www.knaw.nl/shared/resources/actueel/publicaties/pdf/20111023.pdf (humanities) and https://www.knaw.nl/shared/resources/actueel/publicaties/pdf/20131001.pdf (social sciences)
[2] http://www.ref.ac.uk/media/ref/content/pub/panelcriteriaandworkingmethods/01_12.pdf

- In the correction phase of the draft assessment report the management of the research unit can, in consultation with the Faculty, ask the assessment committee to transfer sections of the report to a management letter in the event that circumstances such as, for example, contractual obligations toward external parties impede disclosure.

- When the assessment committee presents the assessment report to the University, the University verifies, together with the Faculty, that the report is complete and consistent with the Standard Evaluation Protocol. The University also verifies that the report complies with any additional requirements stipulated in the Terms of Reference. In the event that the University or the Faculty requires any further information or explanation of the report, the University will ask the committee chairman via the secretary of the committee to include this additional information or clarification in the report.

- The University, together with the Faculty, decides to accept the assessment report if the report meets all the requirements of the Standard Evaluation Protocol and any further requirements stipulated in the Terms of Reference.

- The University can decide, in consultation with the Faculty, to reject the assessment report. The University makes this decision known to the chairman of the assessment committee.

- When the University has accepted the assessment report, it formally discharges the members of the assessment committee. The University expresses its appreciation for the work of the committee in a letter to all committee members.

8. Public accountability and follow-up

- When the University has accepted the assessment report, it asks the management of the research unit, through the Faculty, to respond to the assessment by the committee. The follow-up actions proposed by the research unit in response to the report should be SMART (<u>s</u>pecific, <u>m</u>easurable, <u>a</u>ssignable, <u>r</u>ealistic and <u>t</u>ime-related).

- The Faculty presents the response of the research unit to the University together with its own management view on both the report and the response of the research unit, <u>no more than six weeks</u> after the assessment report has been accepted.

- After receiving the response of the research unit and the view of the Faculty, the Rector of the University holds a meeting with the Dean of the Faculty and the management of the research unit where the findings of the committee and the response of the research unit are discussed. Together these parties decide on the follow-up actions in response to the assessment report. They also decide how these actions will be monitored. This meeting takes place <u>no more than four weeks</u> after the Faculty has presented its reaction to the University.

- If the assessment committee has written a confidential management letter, this will be discussed between the Rector and the Dean of the Faculty.

- In consultation with the Faculty and the management of the research unit, the University drafts its public management response with regard to the assessment report. The management response will be published on the university website together with the report.

MID-TERM ASSESSMENT

All research units have to conduct a mid-term assessment three years after the last external assessment. The mid-term assessment is carried out as a self-assessment. It serves as an interim review:

- to monitor the follow-up actions taken in response to the last external assessment (retrospective)
- to determine further profile choices and ambitions in preparation for the next external assessment and, if necessary, define new SMART follow-up actions (prospective).

▪ The University will notify the Faculty well in advance about the desired start of the mid-term assessment. At this time it will also stipulate the conditions relating to the process of the mid-term assessment.

▪ The procedure for the mid-term assessment is as follows:
  - The Faculty, in consultation with the research unit, submits a proposal for the self-assessment procedure to the University for approval <u>within three months</u> after the notification of the start of the mid-term assessment.
  - The research unit writes a self-assessment report (guideline: 4 to 5 pages in essay format);
  - The self-assessment report is evaluated by an external party (for example by an advisory council or supervisory council, ad hoc committee, external expert(s));
  - The Faculty submits the self-assessment report and the reaction(s) of the external party/ies to the University, together with its own management view.
  - A meeting takes place between the Rector, the Dean of the Faculty and the management of the research unit where these parties decide on the follow-up actions necessary to prepare for the next external assessment.

▪ The self-assessment report should contain the following information:
  - an evaluation of the developments in the research and organisation of the research unit and its surroundings in the last three years;
  - an update on the follow-up actions arising from the previous external assessment, and if necessary a proposal for new or modified follow-up actions (SMART);
  - a prospective analysis of the perspectives and expectations of the research unit, including a SWOT analysis;
  - An internal self-evaluation does not normally include a citation analysis.

▪ The costs of the mid-term assessment are borne by the Faculty.

▪ The results of a mid-term assessment do not have to be presented on the university website. However, the annual report of the university does include a paragraph on the most important conclusions from each mid-term assessment performed in the previous year.

APPENDIX 1: IMPACT MATRIX
(last update: August 2015)

Interaction with > Deliverables v	Academic field (scientific interactions)	Professional field (professional interactions)	Commercial sector / (non) Governmental sector (interactions with companies / enterprises / public entities)	Society at large (public interactions)
Knowledge production and exchange (results)	<u>Outreach activities for/with peers</u> ▪ (Co)Publications (articles, books, comments) (refereed vs. non-refereed, open access) ▪ Outcomes of specific research projects, dissertations (PhD supervising) included ▪ Education to bachelor/ master students ▪ Active participation in scientific/ academic associations	<u>Outreach activities for/with professionals</u> ▪ (Co)Publications / interviews in professional journals, manuals, books ▪ Lectures for professionals ▪ Projects / events with/for professionals	<u>Outreach activities for/with specific companies and public entities</u> ▪ (Co)Publications / interviews in business or governmental media, manuals, books ▪ Lectures for employees, officials / round table discussions ▪ Collaborative projects / events with companies or public entities	<u>Dissemination of academic insights to general audiences</u> ▪ General (co)publications (books, articles / comments / interviews in papers, public journals, magazines) ▪ Public lectures ▪ Open access ▪ MOOCs, etc.
Knowledge utilization (effects)	<u>Use of research outcomes by peers</u> ▪ Use of information, instruments, infrastructure / research facilities, datasets, tests, labs, models, processes, software tools or designs that the unit has developed or obtained ▪ Citations	<u>Use of research outcomes by professionals</u> ▪ Use of information, instruments, models, processes, software tools or designs that the unit has developed ▪ Advices to professionals ▪ Support of young professionals through a center of entrepreneurship, or incubators	<u>Use of research outcomes by companies / public entities</u> ▪ Use of information, instruments, models, processes, software tools or designs that the unit has developed ▪ Contributions to clusters (BioScience Park, Museums, etc.), and standardization committees (CEN, ISO) ▪ Consultancy / Policy advice ▪ Contribution of expertise to aspects of societal importance (i.e. membership of committees, councils, etc.)	<u>Use of research outcomes by general audiences</u> ▪ Contributions into public discussions on forums, television, in social media (You Tube, Blogs) and so on ▪ Contributions to events / exhibitions ▪ Added societal value alumni

Knowledge exploitation (revenues)	Marks of recognition from peers ▪ Research grants / Science awards ▪ Membership of scientific committees, editorial boards ▪ Appointment as guest scholar/lecturer Positions in rankings and EU-networking activities and alliances External funding ▪ NWO (Topsectoren included), EU (ERC, Collaborative programmes); other sources ▪ Budget for Impact	Returns/gains through: ▪ Contract research ▪ Courses / training for professionals (post-academic education) ▪ Participation in advisory boards (monitoring-, evaluation committees) ▪ Use of research facilities by professionals ▪ Practices / entrepreneurship (spin outs / spin offs) ▪ Secondary positions	Returns/gains through: ▪ Contract research (including consultancy) ▪ Professional training/courses (post-academic education) ▪ Participation in advisory boards (monitoring-, evaluation committees) ▪ Use of research facilities of and by companies / other bodies ▪ Patents / licences/disclosures/revenues	Returns/gains through: ▪ Public prizes ▪ (Paid) Open courses ▪ Appointments / positions paid by societal entities ▪ Employment / jobs

Explanation

- This matrix can be used as a tool to describe different types of impact of the scientific/academic work of the institute in relation to users and stakeholders.
- The matrix covers the demands of the SEP and is consistent with other contributions in the debate on impact and valorization.
- The matrix reflects the idea that impact of knowledge is only meaningful in relation to users, customers and stakeholders in the academic field, professional field, commercial and (non) governmental sector, or society at large. These different target groups are listed in the upper row of the matrix: 'interactions'.
- Three different types of deliverables of knowledge can be identified: Knowledge production and exchange (results of knowledge), Knowledge utilization (effects of knowledge in the various fields), and returns or gains of Knowledge exploitation. These deliverables are listed in the far left column of the matrix.
- In each cell of the matrix examples of the specific type of impact are presented. For the row 'Knowledge production and exchange' these examples refer to outreach activities, sometimes in collaboration with partners in the various fields. The row 'Knowledge utilization' refers to the use of knowledge generated by the research unit, or contributed by experts of the research unit, by a user in one of the target groups. The row 'Knowledge exploitation' refers to research activities or contributions of expertise which result in revenues or resources for the research unit or researcher(s). This category also includes marks of recognition from peers, positions in rankings and external funding.
- The examples in the matrix show a variety of impact activities, now placed in a more or less logical connection between scientific / academic output and different target groups. These examples should be seen as suggestions to the faculty or institute involved. The types of impact that are relevant will be very different for different faculties or institutes. An institute or faculty can use the matrix to describe those types of impact that are most relevant for the field. For example: the Faculty of Science may describe its patents portfolio and the Faculty of Law its annotations that play a role in Court. This also means that not all cells in the matrix have to be filled: the research unit can focus on those cells that are most appropriate for their type of research.