

# From ‘Cloister’ to ‘Beehive’

## NIAS Policy Document 2011-2014

*Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, Wassenaar May 2011*

### Introduction and Context

This Policy Document was formulated in the light of:

- the appointment of the new Rector (August 2010) entrusted with the task of modernising and developing a dynamic NIAS;
- the KNAW’s long-range Strategic Plan 2010-2015;
- the Evaluation Committee’s recommendations in 2008;
- NIAS’s mid-term evaluation for the KNAW 2011.

NIAS is a [KNAW](#) Institute with an annual budget of about 2.5 million euros largely funded by the KNAW supplemented by a modest contribution from external sponsors. Each year about fifty scholars, mainly from the Humanities and Social Sciences, work at NIAS for between 3-10 months supported by a small group of staff members (15 fte). NIAS is currently a member of two international networks of Institutes of Advanced Study: [SIAS](#) and [NetIAS](#). NIAS differs from the other KNAW Institutes in that it does not employ researchers to work on a fixed research programme. It is, in effect, a ‘granting’ organisation awarding financial support, residential and study facilities to selected scholars for a maximum of ten months. NIAS’s aims are formulated in the [Mission Statement 2011](#).

In the context of the KNAW’s long-range plan for its Institutes (2010), NIAS positions itself unequivocally as an independent, international and interdisciplinary research institute with a unique niche function within the Netherlands. The KNAW aims to introduce flexible funding for its institutes in relation to quality measures (2013). In response NIAS has developed a panel of quality criteria tailored specifically to its function as a granting organisation (for which common methods of measuring output are not applicable). These specific criteria will be used to steer and, subsequently, measure whether NIAS achieves the aims set down in its mission.

The [KNAW](#) has selected certain overarching research themes and encourages its Institutes to interact, innovate and ‘take a leading role in drawing up the Dutch and the international research agenda and to contribute to methodological innovation in the humanities’. In line with the KNAW plan, NIAS will give precedence to individual and theme-group applicants (2012-2014) who address topics from one of three broadly defined research domains: *Cultural Heritage and Computational Humanities*; *Brain and Cognition* and *Global Society and Identity*.

### Point of Departure and Goals 2011-14

In line with the goals of the Mission Statement, NIAS organises, (co)funds and provides facilities for:

- **International Theme-Groups led by a researcher from the Netherlands**

NIAS intends to increase the number of theme-groups, be more flexible in terms of planning, timing and duration and extend the provision of academic support by student assistants. The Rector will capitalize on these facilities, which are unique in the Netherlands, to attract theme-groups working in the research areas targeted by the KNAW. This experimental pro-active approach will be implemented in close consultation with the newly formed Scholarly Committee. The Scholarly Committee will also be involved in considering innovative ways for NIAS to bring more focus and substance to specific research areas, in line with recommendations of the [Evaluators 2008](#). They will also explore how NIAS can connect with

research areas prioritized by other organisations and funding bodies such as NWO, EU, NSF as well as the other KNAW Institutes.

- **Short International Workshops**

The facility to hold small-scale workshops, meetings or debates of between 1-3 days will be expanded over the coming years, made more flexible, more accessible and more widely known. Qualified researchers from within and outside NIAS can make use of this facility, for example, to explore the possibilities for a future theme-group application, to finalize a previous theme-group project, to investigate or debate innovations for the research agenda.

- **Individual researchers ‘Fellows’**

Individual researchers mostly (but not exclusively) from the Humanities and Social Sciences benefit from the facilities and the interdisciplinary, international, interactive context at NIAS to assist them in taking a major step forward in their (internationally validated) research. NIAS actively encourages Fellows to take part in new innovative ways of publishing (‘enhanced’ publications) and preserving and sharing their data (Open Access) etc.

- **Co-Sponsored ‘Special’ Fellowships**

NIAS has strong ties with noteworthy institutions and regional partners such as the City of The Hague (Spinoza Fellowship), the Hague International Institute of Law (Schermers Fellowship) and the Dutch Banks (Duisenberg Fellowship) who sponsor a number of ‘Special’ Fellowships particularly in disciplines which have traditionally been under-represented. This project will be extended and has already led to arrangements with Erasmus University Rotterdam (Dorne Fellowship), the Royal Dutch Library (extension of the KB Fellowship) while talks are also underway with the Fulbright Organisation, Leiden Humanity Center and Unesco-L’Oréal among others.

Special fellowships with other partners include the EURIAS fellowships, which are subsidised by the EU in partnership with NetIAS. The first EURIAS fellows, one senior and three junior scholars arrived in September 2011. In addition, the successful NIAS-Lorentz programme in partnership with the Lorentz Center (Distinguished Lorentz Fellowship) will be extended (2011-2016) and new Lorentz Theme-groups will be introduced (2013). The chair of the Lorentz Advisory Board, Professor Rinnooy Kan, will be consulted to examine how these theme-groups can engage with the top sectors recently designated by the government.

## Selection Criteria

In the spring of 2011, the selection criteria for Fellows were clarified and amended in keeping with the move towards modern transparent selection procedures. The new criteria reflect the policies adopted by NIAS and fits in with recommendations put forward by the Evaluation Committee in 2008. The decision only to consider applications that receive an A status from expert reviewers was implemented in 2010. All applicants are now required to have at least three years post-PhD experience and must demonstrate how their NIAS project will advance knowledge in their own disciplines and show how their work can contribute to research in the Netherlands. Priority will be given to interdisciplinary research and research that has already been validated by the receipt of other external grants. Subsequently, the year-group is populated to ensure diversity in terms of age, gender and country of origin. Low priority is given to former fellows and end of career researchers.

## Public Relations and Visibility

To increase NIAS’s profile in the international research field and engender support for NIAS among the various administrative bodies and the general public in the Netherlands, it will be necessary to set up a modern effective communication plan. Other steps that will be taken include strengthening

the Alumni programme (in cooperation with members of the NIAS Fellows Association - NFA) and facilitating 'outreach' activities where NIAS Fellows can present their work to a wider audience. This public role is particularly suitable for the Writers, Journalists and Translators-in-residence.

In addition, NIAS will source new target groups by contacting/organising events for Masters Students, PhD Students as well as Lecturers from the Universities of Professional Education.

## Personnel and Organisation

Since 2007, NIAS has not had an operational manager: the former Rector fulfilled the role of both academic director and operational manager. There are four sections varying in size fulfilling tasks ranging from financial administration, facilities, ICT and support to communications and selection. Some tasks are outsourced (cleaning, catering, garden) and student assistants are hired on a temporary basis for the theme-groups.

NIAS, together with the KNAW, is responsible for the upkeep of buildings, meeting halls, accommodation, offices, library and grounds. The modernisation of studios recommended by the Evaluators in 2008 was begun in 2011. NIAS wrote a review of its work methods in the light of environmentally friendly practices and has since implemented several changes.

With the arrival of the new Rector, NIAS's working practices were critically examined in the light of the current NIAS Mission and the demands of a modern academic environment. Help was enlisted from the KNAW and the HRM advisor Marjorie van der Kruijs analysed the situation both from an individual and an organisational perspective. This led to a change management and development plan for staff, which is currently in progress.

Furthermore, Marjorie van der Kruijs advised the Rector to appoint an interim operational manager to assess and restructure working practices and processes and Paul Wormer was appointed in March.

## SWOT Analysis

### Strengths:

- Committed staff
- Strong financial situation
- Excellent translation/editing and library service support facilities
- Co-sponsored Fellowships with prominent partners

### Weaknesses (solutions):

- Undefined working practices and processes (appointment operational manager)
- Unclear staff guidance (appointment operational manager)
- Poor public transport connections (consultation with Wassenaar Council)
- Lack of access to Online electronic catalogues (solution via the KNAW)

### Opportunities:

- Room to target financial resources and implement a variety of 'grants'
- Unique facilities for short workshops. Flexible arrangements for theme-group research
- Age profile among staff can be balanced in near future

## Quality Indicators

NIAS is a 'granting' organisation and does not employ its own researchers so the Rector cannot influence the number of publications produced. This means it is not appropriate to judge performance by counting output. Nevertheless, it is important to design other criteria which can assess whether NIAS is doing a good job. These criteria should reflect the NIAS mission and the policy choices formulated in this document.

NIAS can be said to have achieved its goals if it offers the kind of facilities that allow excellent researchers to advance their research through interaction with international colleagues in an interdisciplinary 'academic community'. Questions that provide an answer to this would be:

- Are the best scholars applying for fellowships and workshops?
  - *As a measure of academic excellence*
- Are we building and maintaining partnerships with prominent sponsors and?
  - *As a measure of social relevance*
- Are we able to bring together theme-groups to work on innovative research topics?
  - *As evidence of interdisciplinarity and NIAS's ability to innovate*
- Are we attracting workshop organisers who contribute revitalizing research?
  - *As evidence of NIAS's role in current academic debates and increased visibility*

### **Planning 2011-14**

This Policy Document, written by the Rector with input from NIAS staff and the Scholarly Committee, will be used as a guideline for management and the sections in implementing the restructuring process. Annual progress reports will be produced to record what has been achieved and where necessary the Policy Document will be updated.

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