

RESEARCH AND LDI ASSESSMENT – African Studies Centre (ASC)

1. Introduction

This report presents the research quality assessment of the African Studies Centre (ASC) for the period 2004-2010. The Board of the ASC asked for this assessment to be carried out in accordance with the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP). The Review Committee was explicitly asked to assess ASC's international standing.

The assessment was conducted by a Review Committee appointed by the Board of the ASC, composed of the following members:

- Prof. Filip Reyntjens, former Chairman (2001-2007) of the Institute of Development Policy and Management, University of Antwerp, Belgium (Chair)
- Prof. Michel Carton, former Deputy Director (until mid-2010) of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID), Geneva, Switzerland
- Prof. Clara Carvalho, Chair of the Board of the Centro de Estudos Africanos (African Studies Centre), Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa (ISCTE), Lisbon, Portugal
- Prof. Paschal Mihyo, Executive Director of the Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Dr. Barbara Spina, Head of Teaching and Research Support, Directorate of Library and Information Services, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, United Kingdom

Dr. H. van den Heuvel was appointed as Secretary of the Review Committee.

Criteria

The assessment was carried out according to criteria formulated in the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) for Public Research Organisations in the Netherlands (VSNU, NWO & KNAW, 2009-2015). The ratings were on the five-point SEP-scale: (1) unsatisfactory, (2) satisfactory, (3) good, (4) very good, and (5) excellent.

Additional questions

The Board of Governors of the ASC asked the Review Committee two additional, composite questions that will also be addressed in this report.

Question 1

The ASC will use the evaluation process and its results to feed into the current strategic discussions at the ASC about a) the most important research topics that should be the focus of the ASC's research strategy in 2012-2016; b) the balance between research and documentation/library activities; c) the balance between dissemination for a scientific and dissemination for a social audience; d) the 'architecture' of the ASC in terms of composition of staff, and in the relationships with the ASC community around the ASC, in the Netherlands, in Africa and beyond; e) the balance between tenured and non-tenured staff and between research and supervision/teaching work.

This question will be answered in Section 2.3, since the issues mentioned above relate to the "Leadership, strategy and organisational issues" that are addressed in this section.

Question 2

As for the LDI department, the Review Committee is asked to give its opinion regarding these two questions: a) Should the LDI department continue to focus on both paper and electronic journals?; b) In what ways could cooperation of the LDI department with other libraries in Europe and Africa improve the quality of the library?

This question will be addressed in Section 3.

Procedure

The Review Committee assessed the Institute and programme according to the following steps:

Setting up the procedure

The Chair of the Review Committee agreed with the programme of the site visit, which was prepared by the Management Team of the ASC and the Secretary of the Review Committee.

Preparation of the interviews

As background material, the Review Committee obtained in advance the self evaluation report of the ASC and Annexes. These documents served to prepare the Review Committee for the interviews.

Interviews

After an official welcome by Kathleen Ferrier and Prof. Dr. Hans Opschoor (resp. Chair and member of the Board of Governors) ideas were exchanged between the Board and Review Committee about the relevance of the Review for the work of the ASC.

In the next session an overview of the work of the ASC was presented by the Management Team of the ASC: Ton Dietz (Director), Dick Foeken and Jos Damen, including a 'SWOT-presentation'.

The following three meetings were with the three different theme groups within the ASC. In all meetings the leader of the theme group, together with one or two of its staff members, gave a short presentation of the state of affairs within the theme group, after which the Review Committee asked questions concerning the working of the theme group and the ASC as a whole.

At the end of the first day the Review Committee met three African guests of the ASC, two of them PhD students of the ASC, to discuss their experiences.

The subsequent morning meetings were scheduled with the Scientific Advisory Council of the ASC and the Library, Documentation & Information Department (LDI), followed by a visit to the library. The member of the Review Committee specialized in the field had additional meetings with the staff of the LDI and time to investigate the library.

During a meeting with PhD students questions were asked by the Review Committee about their research experiences, the supervision of the ASC and the structural bedding of their research activities.

During a lunch meeting, the Review Committee was able to exchange with support staff and other staff members.

Assessment

After the interviews, assessments were made according to the SEP. The additional questions posed by the Board of Governors of the ASC were also addressed. Once the interviews had been completed, the Review Committee evaluated the research and the LDI department of the Centre and, after extended discussion, decided on their final overall assessment. At the end of the second day, the Review Committee presented the preliminary results to the Management Team and the Theme Group leaders of the ASC.

At the end of the visit the Review Committee distributed the writing tasks for the different sessions of the report. Revision of the drafts and agreement on the final text was done iteratively by the Review Committee members via e-mail. The final draft of the report was checked for any factual errors by the Management Team of the ASC.

Report

This report consists of the assessment of both the research and the Library, Documentation and Information Department (LDI) (Section 2), answers to the specific questions regarding the LDI (Section 3) and the conclusions and recommendations of the Review Committee (Section 4).

2. Assessment of the Research in the ASC

In this section the research of the ASC is assessed. Since the ASC is a research institute with one research programme, the assessment has been made for the ASC as a whole. The assessment used the four standard criteria of the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP): quality, productivity, relevance, and vitality and feasibility. In addition, the Institute has been assessed with regard to its training and supervision of PhD students. The Review Committee gave special attention to the Institute's future plans, planned changes, and prospects.

2.1 General Assessment

Director of the ASC Prof. dr. Ton Dietz

Assessment	Quality	4
	Productivity	4
	Relevance	5
	Vitality and feasibility	4

The ASC has maintained a very good track record of research, teaching, publications and technical assistance to institutions and communities. The Review Committee examined the activities of the ASC as regards quality, productivity, relevance and vitality.

2.1.1 *Quality*

In assessing quality, the Review Committee looked at the scientific relevance of:

- teaching and publications
- academic reputation of researchers, the leadership of research, financial resources available for scientific activities, and the PhD training profile of the ASC.

The ASC has three thematic groups. Not all of them are at the same level in terms of quality or excellence. The demographic spread among the teams is balanced but the quality of research output is not the same for every group. One thematic team was found to be outstanding in terms of publications and ranking of publications. The other two were found to be very good. Therefore overall the Review Committee found the quality of research very high. As research and publications impact greatly on the reputation of staff, the ASC has a good number of reputable scholars most of whom have excelled on African studies and contributed substantially to their fields.

The Review Committee also raised questions of how research is organized and managed and whether there were systems for quality assurance within the thematic groups. Peer review, internal seminars and joint publications were found to be major mechanisms for quality assurance, peer support and research leadership. On PhD teaching it was noted that teaching loads were not evenly distributed. According to what they themselves told the Review Committee, one theme group has 20 PhD students, another has 12 and another 3-4 (these figures are different from those put

forward by the management). It was noted also that the thematic group with the highest number of supervisions did not have a commensurately high number or high quality of publications.

2.1.2 Productivity

In assessing productivity at the ASC, the Review Committee focused on the link between inputs and outputs, policy measures taken to raise output and the link between the outputs and the scientific community. Incentives and constraints were also examined. On the link between inputs and outputs we found the ratios very favourable in comparison with similar organizations. This relates mainly to the number of staff compared with the research output and the number of students taught and supervised. The Review Committee did not delve into the ratio between financial resources and research and teaching outputs but there was a general feeling that the outputs justified the financial inputs. On the issue of policy measures to support productivity it was noted that over the years the ASC has developed a system based on thematic group autonomy and philosophy. Therefore while there is common vision and strategy for the whole ASC, each thematic group has its own dynamics. However there is increasing realization of the need for harmonization of approaches. Recently there has been a review of practices and the SWOT analysis that preceded the assessment was used to develop common approaches within the ASC policies; balance research and staffing levels; design better systems of work load management; develop alternative methods of dissemination; rationalize the demographic composition of staff and increase the number of associate or affiliate staff. On the link between outputs and the scientific community it was clear from the consultations with various thematic groups that not only is the ASC's library one of the best and most accessed by researchers on African issues, but the ASC is very active in organizing workshops, conferences, off-shore training activities, collaborative research and training activities with African institutions of higher education including close working relationships with ministries of foreign affairs and regional organizations through projects providing problem-oriented technical advisory services to various stakeholders.

On incentives and reward systems, there were mixed opinions. Most staff felt that there are no clear incentives for productivity within the ASC. However some were of the opinion that there were systems of recognition and other forms of compensation. The assessment of the Review Committee is that because many members of staff are affiliated to other universities, they get their compensation and recognition in terms of promotion from those organizations and as a result think there are no incentive systems at the ASC. It is important to note however that the ASC operates a semi-flat organizational structure without ranks or hierarchies of its own. This has worked over the years but needs to be re-assessed and modified to ensure that career ladders are established. Without a new structure, systems of performance evaluation and incentives will remain difficult to use effectively as instruments for human resources management and development.

2.1.3 *Relevance*

Relevance was assessed from two angles: societal quality based on interaction with societies and communities and societal impact in terms of action taken by such communities in the use of knowledge either imparted or disseminated. The underlying criteria were accessibility, value attached to and the utility of knowledge generated through research or teaching. The Review Committee found all the thematic groups committed to societal quality and societal impact of their activities on various communities. One thematic group stated categorically that it is committed to outreach to African intellectual and other communities even if this means foregoing some assets. For example, it encourages staff to publish jointly with African scholars and to use African publishing houses, which in some cases meant a lower rating of their publications. Another strategy the group adopted was alternative dissemination mechanisms such as developing films in order to enable rural communities to access research results. Other groups have organized joint publications with regional research networks mainly CODESRIA and OSSREA. Most if not all the groups have programmes that target rural and poor communities and some of the ASC projects (such as ‘Tracking Development’ and ‘Community Based Health Insurance’ which are still running) are devoted to reaching out to the rural and poor communities and popularizing alternative paths to development and service delivery. Evidence of the value attached to the knowledge generated by the ASC was shown by the level to which its experts are involved in technical advisory services for various governments and regional organizations, the number of research and training projects run by the ASC and the high demand for partnership between the ASC and African organizations.

2.1.4 *Vitality and feasibility*

The Review Committee concentrated on the capacity of the ASC to respond to changes within the Netherlands, Europe, Africa and globally. It was noted from the outset that for a considerable time the ASC was assured of secure funding, staff were assured of tenure after a period of time and thematic groups were stable. This created a culture of compartmentalization as each team was assured of surviving within the whole but on its own dynamics. For quite some time there was no significant change. Recently, however, there has been a realization that the ASC has to position itself strategically to respond to changes going on in the Netherlands, Europe, Africa and the world at large. Prior to this assessment the ASC undertook a SWOT analysis through which it has charted its path for re-engineering itself. It is hoped that this assessment will help the ASC to continue those efforts.

In spite of these positive traits and aspects, the ASC needs to address some areas which may reduce its vitality and productivity. First is the imbalance in output between groups. Some groups seem to be content with publication in CERES B or C journals while one group aims at publishing mainly in A journals. This imbalance may lead to a “free rider” problem. Secondly, as will be mentioned later in the section on leadership, incentives for productivity and quality should be clearer than they are at present. Norms need to be reviewed and enforced more transparently than has been the case in the past. Instruments and systems of performance assessment must be used more effectively and rewards for performance and sanctions for poor performance

more effectively enforced. Third, thematic group affinity is still stronger than affinity with the ASC. Creative ways need to be found to institutionalize an organizational rather than a departmental culture. Finally within the contexts of the SWOT analysis carried out by the ASC, a favourable balance between teaching and research needs to be worked upon.

2.2 Library, Documentation and Information (LDI)

Assessment	Quality	5
	Productivity	5
	Relevance	5
	Vitality and feasibility	5

The Library, Documentation and Information Department (LDI) has a reputation as one of the strongest and most active in Europe, with a clear profile and awareness of responsibilities and an extensive range of users, both physical (core ASC and others) and virtual (national, European and worldwide). Over the period under review (since the 2004 external evaluation) a number of policies have been progressed in order to keep abreast of technological and international developments and to improve support for the LDI's target groups and user groups.

The LDI has been successful in interpreting its role within the ASC's mission (1947), "... to promote a better understanding and insight into historical, current and future societal developments in Sub-Saharan Africa." It has also a solid basis within the ASC's strategic goals as set out in the 2004-2008 Policy Plan:

1. Primary strategic goals: The ASC strives to be a top international scientific institute that: ... (ii) collects and makes available knowledge and information about Africa for scientific research and academic purposes through the provision of a library, information and documentation department.
2. Secondary strategic goals: Through its research and the dissemination of knowledge the ASC aims: ... (ii) to further the debate between researchers, policy-makers and development practitioners, journalists, the business world and the general public, and also to promote an understanding of African societies in these groups through the provision of library, information and documentation services.

The LDI staff has been and continue to be particularly active in developing and utilizing the potential of the digital and ICT environment through:

- Extension of the (print) abstracts journal to an online service, *African Studies Abstracts Online*, now available on the *EBSCO host* database
- Monthly *Library Acquisitions Online*
- Web dossiers
- Mailing lists for these three services and a Tables of Contents (TOC) service
- *African Studies Thesaurus* - subject indexing via the library catalogue or the ASC website
- Online bibliographies in support of Theme Group research

- Advocating and actively populating the ASC repository of staff and PhD research in African Studies, hosted at the University of Leiden
- Developing the *Connecting-Africa* web service linking researchers and resources in a range of repositories
- Transferring the entire film collection to DVD for preservation and ease of use
- Providing links from the online catalogue through the “ASC link” resolver to full-text, book-covers, book availability in libraries worldwide &c.
- Hosting websites of affiliated organisations

The Review Committee recognises that this labour intensive and skilled work by LDI staff has led to an imbalance both between staff costs and materials spent and within the ASC staff budget overall. Nevertheless, the importance of the LDI as one of the two pillars of the ASC and the significance of its work both directly supporting the ASC’s researchers and promoting library, information and documentation services to the world render this acceptable and perhaps unavoidable. The inclusion of the Head of the LDI in the Management Team (both currently and in the proposed new structure) ensures close links with the parent institution and a continuous awareness of policies, events and developments to which the LDI can and should contribute.

A second area of interest is the LDI’s dual role both supporting research and scholarship and also promoting an understanding of African societies to policy-makers and development practitioners, journalists, the business world and the general public. The LDI has close collaborative links with other Dutch libraries on a regional basis regarding collection development and other services; and with Africanist libraries and institutions in Europe (e.g. European Librarians in African Studies [ELIAS] network and AEGIS), in North America (Africana Librarians Council [ALC] network and African Studies Association [ASA]) and Africa (mainly individual links to date). The links with European libraries through ELIAS are beginning to be productive in terms of collaborative projects and partnerships (e.g. *ilissAfrica* portal) and should be developed. There is scope for extending and deepening links with libraries in Africa and this should be encouraged by the ASC management and researchers. We note the ASC’s participation in the new joint Ethiopian/Dutch/South African Capacity Development of Business and Economics initiative (2011-2017) with four Ethiopian universities, and the potential input by LDI staff.

The LDI performs another dual role in that it is both a physical entity containing staff and publications and attracting visitors and also a “knowledge centre” providing a range of online services and resources to the scholarly community worldwide. The Review Committee notes the statistics indicating a decline in personal visits and book loans; this fits in with a general trend reflecting the growing importance of electronic resources. The LDI has to date dealt appropriately with this by shifting from print to digital where feasible and re-organising its physical collections (e.g. creating shelf-space by removing print runs of journals available electronically). The 2011 Collection Development Policy (CDP) focuses on “patron-driven, perpetual access and primary data”. The Review Committee considers the rationale for this to be sound – based on the LDI’s position as the only academic library in the Netherlands and one of the key libraries in Europe collecting on the whole of Africa.

An issue of concern among Africanist librarians, and discussed in ELIAS and other forums, is that of perpetual access and the preservation of non-core, usually free,

materials (e.g. “born digital” official publications on less reliable Government and other institutional websites). It is of immense value that a library such as the LDI addresses this in its CDP. Primary data includes the contents of institutional repositories, and the LDI is looking to improve links with African universities in order to harvest repository materials and assist with searchability/visibility.

The Review Committee notes that 50% of the LDI’s print holdings (c.100,000 items in total) were recently identified as unique in Dutch libraries, and that a significant proportion of these are published in Africa. The LDI has also identified primary data, including grey literature, as a key area for collection development, as opposed to more mainstream publications which are held elsewhere in the Netherlands or accessible electronically. Staff will need to undertake more acquisitions trips (simultaneously showcasing the ASC by speaking at conferences and demonstrating services?) and build closer links with ASC and other researchers, especially visiting researchers after their return to Africa in order more effectively to acquire local publications.

During the site visit the Review Committee noted some concerns regarding support for PhD students at the ASC. While generally the LDI was praised for the helpfulness of its counter staff and the quality of the collections, there is scope to develop more formalised and proactive research and information (information literacy) skills for PhD students and for visiting and tenured researchers. The Head of the LDI already participates in such a programme for the Research Masters students. The joint Ethiopian/Dutch/South African Capacity Development of Business and Economics project, for Masters and PhD students, will involve LDI input into training in Ethiopia and helping the development of Ethiopian libraries – and could stimulate the strengthening of skills training programmes overall.

The Review Committee noted overall the pressure on researchers to raise external funding and the dependence of the ASC on a limited number of funding streams. It seems the LDI has yet to come under such pressure but will almost certainly do so. The LDI has already successfully attracted funding for specific projects (e.g. 75,000 Euros from the PICA Foundation for a cooperative e-cataloguing project with other Dutch libraries). Most services, however, are freely available - a deliberate choice in favour of open access. The Review Committee supports the LDI’s preference for fundraising for projects rather than charging for services, but recommends aiming for a balance in this. The Review Committee also recommends that the LDI seek to position itself strategically within a network or consortium of libraries within the Netherlands which can act as a base for fundraising and other collaborative activities.

The Review Committee commends the LDI for its range of activities and skills, its focused support for its own staff and students at the ASC and its extensive network of links and services in the Netherlands, Europe, Africa and worldwide. For example, the proportion of electronic visits by people in Africa to the research repository during the last quarter was 2,000 out of a total of 18,000 – around 10%, which is high. Looking beyond the physical library collection, the LDI is larger than the sum of its parts and far larger than required for the immediate needs of the ASC. This is a strength on which the ASC can and should build. Where the Review Committee noted any weaknesses or gaps (e.g. problems with IT), the Head of the LDI and his staff have already identified them and are actively formulating policies to address these issues.

2.3 Leadership, strategy and organisational issues

As clearly expressed in the self-evaluation and formulated at every step of the assessment, the ASC is at a crossroads: internal changes are necessary, some further national political and institutional transformations are expected and Africa is becoming for better or worse an ever more important international concern. That is why leadership is a key component of any transformation process consisting of capitalizing on the success achieved, coping with identified problems and paving the way for some further development steps. The ASC has reached an institutional and scientific plateau the limits of which are foreseeable. Some key decisions, based on more explicit grounds, have to be taken soon in order to create a successful balance between the opportunities and threats identified during the self-evaluation.

2.3.1 Leadership and institutional management

Institutional procedures

The Review Committee was surprised not to find any rules and regulations in the annexes to the self-evaluation report. In his introduction, as well as during the debriefing, the Director clearly expressed his will to put in place or reinforce the institutional procedures which should allow setting the normative frame (rules and regulations), within which decisions will be taken and the work of the ASC as well as of the different groups and individuals be organized and evaluated.

This step has to be taken rapidly in order to reinforce the collective identity of the ASC as well as the motivation of the staff, and give the clearer image needed to face as well as anticipate the coming (un)expected changes. These objectives of the Director may face some internal opposition, to be expected in any academic institution. The meetings with members of the Board as well as of the Scientific Advisory Council (SAC), however, indicated that the Director enjoys strong support for implementing his transformation objectives.

The composition of the Scientific Advisory Council

An enlargement of the composition of the SAC to include one or two African academics, who might come from a Centre's partner institution in Europe where these persons would be based for a short-to-medium term, could accelerate the implementation of one another objective of the ASC, that is to reinforce its connections and relevance with and for Africa.

Management of the ASC

Under the paragraph Leadership, the self-evaluation report underlined the overlapping of responsibilities between the Management Team (MT) and the Scientific Management Team (WT), one effect of which has been to limit in-house transparency. The preliminary ideas that have been circulated to the Review Committee indicate that the current management structure may disappear and be replaced by three vice-directors. Two vice-directors, one for Research and Education and one for LDI and publications, would be more coherent, with an administrator for support staff. Concerning transparency, some improvements have been recently

introduced via internal communication instruments. The implementation of the above-mentioned normative objectives of the Director would need to go beyond the necessary (but not yet sufficient) better communication.

It seems that the counter effects of a long-standing informal decentralized and participatory management are today at work. But, as decentralization and participation are core values of the ASC that are to be preserved, these management tools also need to be formalized in order to be effective and efficient. The creation of a faculty council with some clearly defined attributions was mentioned as a means to improve in-house communication as well as to offer to the Director a staff consultative body (with some real decision-making powers concerning the main orientations of the ASC). The position of the non-permanent scientific staff in such a body would have to be determined, as this category will surely increase in the near future.

Compartmentalization

The Review Committee did not have the opportunity to deal with the recurrent issue in every research based institution like the ASC: how to avoid the compartmentalization stemming from the specificities of each research programme in terms of staff, themes, finance? What trade-off can be offered by the ASC between the priority to be granted to research themes/programmes in order to secure quality, and the scientific and political advantages as well as the requirements and constraints of being part of a larger body? How to articulate the above proposed integrative faculty college with the vertical self-interests of a team and the horizontal institutional ones? A first answer is mentioned in the framework of the Preliminary Idea for the ASC's research architecture distributed to the Committee: (bi-) annual planning per theme, which could be presented at the faculty college proposed above. An annual conference per theme is mentioned in the same document. A bi-annual conference for the ASC as a whole would also play a role in the horizontal information sharing/coordination/collaboration processes that are desperately needed between programmes. In any case, a cyclical external evaluation of the research programmes will have to be put in place in collaboration with the SAC, an important standard being the transversal collaboration between them.

2.3.2 Strategy

The previous paragraphs have referred to the leadership and institutional management situation that the new director has started to change, in relation to the strategic objectives being finalised. The following three points refer first to the overall strategic issues that are at stake today, next to the specific ones in terms of research activities and finally to the dissemination of the research of the ASC.

Overall strategy issues

The Review Committee has been informed that some drastic changes could occur over the next few years concerning the overall architecture of the global/area/development studies in the Netherlands. As the political scene seems quite unstable, the ASC will have to develop different strategic scenarios covering the potential short-, mid- and long-term schedules that could be imposed on it. There is currently an international trend towards creating - at the national, regional and

international levels - the “critical masses” which are supposed to increase the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of training and research programmes in any field. This trend is largely based on financial considerations, but can sometimes have a scientific and policy relevance: i.e. the articulations between area, development and global/comparative studies make sense in a world where global trans-disciplinary issues impact on the socio-economic ones: Africa may be the best illustration of such a situation. The strategic scenarios the ASC might develop would then range from a close-to-status quo situation to an externally imposed integration in a larger institutional and scientific frame. Whatever the situation, the ASC will need to better define the niche that will allow it to develop by keeping its important degree of autonomy or as a component of a wider organization/network.

Some considerations will be made below about the scientific niches that would reflect the strategic research priorities the ASC is going to put in place. Whatever the niche, some attention will have to be paid first to the following fields:

- *Funding*: the ASC is today dependent for its core funding (staff and recurrent costs, research activities) on subsidies as well as competitive and non-competitive external funds which are predominantly Dutch. The geographical and institutional diversification of the funding, both for staff (i.e. chairs supported by different types of non-public funding) and research activities (NWO/WOTRO, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, EU, private foundations, etc.) should be explored. Simultaneously, a more detailed focus of five proposed research programmes would facilitate the mobilization of new external funding.
- *Institutional and research relations*: the number of institutional ties in Europe and Africa, listed in annex 3 of the self-evaluation report, is impressive. One can wonder whether they reflect an institutional policy or rather the diversity of the Theme Groups/individual working relations. The latter are indispensable in the context of any research programme, but cannot all be presented as the reflection of the ASC’s priorities. The Review Committee finds it difficult to believe that all these ties are close; a number of them probably reflect just an ephemeral contact. The definition of these priorities would for example facilitate the attribution of some institutional means for supporting a limited amount of training (Research Masters, PhDs) and/or research joint activities at the national, regional (specifically Africa and Europe) and international levels.
- *Balance between research and training activities*: the paradox mentioned earlier concerning the research-cum-training activities (Research Masters, PhDs) of the ASC, is taken for granted. An important criterion should be used to clarify the situation, i.e. the explicit contribution of the participants in these programmes to the conceptual, thematic and methodological innovations they can bring to some focused research activities. Some means to fulfil this criterion have been mentioned above: strict student selection process, quality of the supervision modalities, formalization of the participation of the students in the programmes activities.

Scientific strategy

A scientific strategy is the reflection of the tension between the autonomy of the researchers' ideas/objectives and the institutional/financial/political dependency in which they are embedded for the construction, development, production and dissemination of the former.

As far as the construction of research ideas as expressed via themes and programmes is concerned, the following issues arise:

- *The definition of some specific research niches* is urgently needed, but is influenced by the overall context where development/global/area/comparative studies are both competing with and complementing each other. African studies are today the mere reflection of this situation. These general considerations have to be modulated in accordance with the comparative advantages the ASC possesses, to extract from them the higher added value in terms of quality and image. A trade-off between the urgency of defining some niches in order to fix some "shares" in a very competitive research market and the necessary reflection aiming at securing a scientific originality has then to be found in a progressive way, in order to establish a rotating process between the pursuing of on-going themes and the launching of innovative selected ones.
- *The thematic approach* seems to be the way in which the ASC conceptualises and organises research. Many staff members have emphasized the importance of clarifying the weight of the disciplinary dimensions in this process. A clarification of the balance between themes and disciplines would provide a clearer image of the ASC for the students, the universities and the employment market, and would facilitate the definition of the staff profile for recruitment and evaluation. The tension between the "closed" disciplinary perspectives and the "up to date" global perspectives is a research topic in itself.
- *Partnership* is also a fashionable concept. It is conceptually obvious that partnership with African institutions, networks, groups and individuals must be a key component of a research theme definition. The capacity building activities in/with Africa that are listed in the self-evaluation are in general a good starting point to later develop some joint research activities based on explicit contractual conditions.

Dissemination of the research

The dissemination of the research outputs concerns the scientific community as well as the non-academic audience. The Review Committee has extensively reviewed the theme group publication outputs, internal publication policies and perspectives. The issue at stake is to define the right balance between an overall institutional policy in terms of internal and external publications of books and articles with different quantitative and qualitative evaluation criteria, and the degree of autonomy that each theme/programme requires to fit its specificities.

The ASC's publication policy in itself is highly appreciated, especially because of the stable and constructive collaboration with Brill and the concern for collaboration with African publishers, in spite of the relatively low "academic benefit" which can be drawn to date from this type of collaboration. In addition, an extension of the web-based publications would be welcome in order to complement the open-access policy the ASC has adopted, especially in connection with the situation in Africa.

A specific consideration has to be made concerning consultancy, as a debate seems ongoing concerning its very definition as well as its roles and institutional and individual functions and management. It is well known that many African universities are undermined by consultancy work offered to their academic staff, allowing them to earn much more than by full-time teaching. The situation is obviously not the same at the ASC, but the Director is very clear: consultancy can fit the policy relevance objective of the institution, and can be the starting point for the launching of a research project. Consultancy cannot, at any rate, become an end in itself either for individual or for institutional reasons, as this risks undermining the scientific skills of the concerned staff and the quality image of the ASC. If the idea of creating a specific unit dedicated to consultancy work were pursued in order to create new income opportunities, this unit should have a (semi)autonomous status with some clear contractual relations with the ASC especially in terms of benefits sharing.

2.3.3 *Organization*

The success of leadership and strategy relies very much on good organisation, which secures a stable environment as well as a capacity to create, anticipate, follow, resist change. The previous paragraphs have already suggested some directions which are either already explored or could be put in place. The main one consists in the formalisation of some of the major processes that have allowed the development of the ASC up to now. This formalisation is becoming necessary, to allow the ASC to clarify and stabilise its management rules and regulations in accordance with some norms and values. The Review Committee has indeed been faced with some concerns of both staff and management relating to the lack of clarity and transparency of some decision-making processes and management practices. The following points relate mostly to staff management:

- The very fact that *different categories* of permanent academic staff have contractual and financial relations with a university and the ASC creates some tensions which are exacerbated when it comes to job descriptions, salaries and promotions. The clarification of this issue in terms of profiles and expectations corresponding to each category is necessary.
- The Dutch civil service rules do prevent the introduction of some *flexibility* in the staff management in terms of classification and promotion, as well as of financial incentives and sanctions as consequences of work quality assessment. This constraint might be overcome by using some work organisation-related incentives such as short sabbatical leaves, publication facilities, assistantship availability, limitation of PhD supervision, etc.
- The *demographic structure* of the core research staff will lead soon to the opening of some new positions, for which some clear profile definitions (especially in terms of discipline background, interdisciplinary dialogue and team work skills, pedagogical capabilities, outreach potential) will help the selection process. Nevertheless, as its subsidised share of the budget will not increase, augmenting the non-ASC paid and externally funded academic staff will be necessary. The institutional management transformations mentioned earlier will have to integrate this evolution, in order to secure that the new coherence of the ASC is not undermined by the centrifugal forces induced by some staff. The ASC Community proposed by the Director would be the second integrative circle of the

ASC, after the first circle represented by the faculty college proposed above by the Review Committee.

2.4 Training and supervision of PhD students

While lecturing and student supervision is not a major strategic goal of the ASC, it falls within its main objective: the dissemination of knowledge on Africa and the promotion of a “better understanding and insight into historical, current and future societal developments in Sub-Saharan Africa”. During the period under evaluation mentoring activities by ASC research staff more than doubled, and the number of PhD students being supervised increased to the point that these activities have become one of the defining features of the ASC. The ASC follows the general trend observed in European research institutes where contribution to graduate training has become essential.

The self-evaluation report points out that the increasing number of both staff and students involved in lecturing, tutoring and research projects is due to:

- a) participation of researchers in lecturing at universities;
- b) policy of diversifying funding by sharing the financial reward for every PhD completed, as stated: “In this respect, agreements concerning the sharing of bonuses from completed PhD projects with the universities involved must have high priority” (self-evaluation report, 10);
- c) including PhD candidates in research projects in order to decrease the average age of researcher staff, which is relatively high.

a) The participation of ASC researchers in PhD training is fully expressed by the number of staff currently tutoring, teaching at universities or participating and even organising summer schools. ASC also has a specific publication series for mainly PhD theses - the series *African Studies Collection* published a total of 42 books during the period 2004-2010. This growing activity has led to an increasing workload for the entire staff, but particularly the researchers, as is pointed out in the self-evaluation report (self-evaluation report, 11). However, the participation of staff members in tutoring activities differs and there is no common pattern: some researchers are not supervising PhD research while others accept more than 10 students, up to a maximum of 23.

During the visit the Review Committee had the opportunity to meet several researchers and students involved in mentoring/tutoring activities. A total of 88 PhD students are currently being tutored at the ASC but their status and involvement with ASC activities, including their insertion into research lines, as well as their relation to tutors and particularly to ASC tutors, is multiple and varied. This diversity is fully expressed in the fact that:

- 88 PhD are currently mentored by ASC research staff of a total of 96 during the period under evaluation;
- From these 96 students, 80 had a tutor from the ASC, 25 a co-tutor and 9 of these students have both a tutor and a co-tutor from ASC;
- 23 students are involved in ASC projects;
- 20 of these are externally funded (self-evaluation report, 11).

Table: PhD Tutoring at the ASC

	Promoter	Co-promoter	TOTAL
Andre Leliveld		1	1
Dick Foeken		2	2
Han van Dijk	21	2	23
Jan Abbink	8	3	11
Jan-Bart Gewalt		4	4
Jan-Kees van Donge		1	1
Leo de Haan	1		1
Marcel Rutten		1	1
Mayke Kaag		1	1
Mirjam de Bruijn	14	5	19
Rijk van Dijk		5	5
Stephen Ellis	2		2
Ton Dietz	12		12
Wim van Binsbergen	6		6
Wouter van Beek	16		16
TOTAL	80	25	105

One of the most successful ASC activities has been the integration of African scholars and diffusion of their work. This purpose is also expressed in their tutoring activities, as 43% of all PhD students are Africans, i.e. the largest number of the students involved in research projects and programmes, a total of 13 out of 23. As PhD publication goes, 36% of the monographs of the *African Studies Collection* were from African authors. There is a sound interest in and a large diffusion of ASC projects among African students, and the ASC has the potential to keep fitting these students into projects and PhD programmes.

b) One of the objectives of tutoring activities is to diversify ASC funding by sharing the financial reward for every PhD completed. Whether or not this strategy is adequate to both the human and library resources available, considering the total amount of the reward per PhD (93,000€), the financial benefit of the intensive tutoring activities conducted by research staff is not clear. ASC is now negotiating the terms of the financial agreement supporting tutoring activities with Dutch universities, and considering the amount of supervision workload that should be asked/allowed to each researcher.

c) One of the stated objectives of including PhD candidates in research projects was to decrease the average age of researcher staff, which is relatively high, as well as to refresh the research agenda. While it seems clear that the average researchers' age would decrease, the Review Committee has no data regarding the age ratio influence of the insertion of the PhD students into research programmes. It seems more interesting to consider the general contribution of PhD students to the main objectives of ASC, i.e., improving research in African societies and promoting the academic debate. PhD students also contribute to the ASC research evaluation as each delivered PhD counts in the CERES ranking.

The full integration of PhD students into research projects does not seem to be one of the better accomplished objectives. Their relationships with the ASC are extremely diverse and there is no common pattern. Students can use the ASC facilities, like the

library, but only a small number of them are considered part of the ASC thematic groups (23 out of 88) and participate in seminars promoted by the ASC. This diversity is fully expressed by the Theme Group leaders who could not specify the number of students being supervised within their group.

The Review Committee had the opportunity to meet PhD students inserted in thematic groups and noted that although recognising their privileged position in relation with other colleagues they seemed not to have a clear idea about their position, rights and obligations towards the ASC. After spending one year in a TG, a student was still unclear about the scientific area he/she was going to enrol in. While the ASC self-evaluation report stresses PhD candidates' input to the definition of new research programmes, students were not aware of their contribution.

The Review Committee noted overall the substantial activity of ASC research staff in tutoring and their efforts to include PhD students in research lines, as well as the full capacity (and even appeal of ASC research prestige and facilities, such as the Library) to attract these students. The importance of the PhD reward system to diversify external funding seems a feasible objective, but it is not yet fulfilled. Finally, PhD insertion into thematic groups or in the ASC as a whole needs to be clarified.

Considering this general picture as well as the main orientation of PhD programmes and tutoring in the European Community, we therefore recommend:

- The ASC should have a clearer and more proactive policy towards PhD tutoring, including PhD training objectives, relationship between mentoring and research, insertion of students into research lines and projects, engaging with African universities and research institutes in students' training.
- There should be a defined supervision policy fully discussed and adopted by all researchers. Tutoring should be an activity better shared amongst researchers with a defined limit of the number of PhD training allowed. This is what the management proposes to do.
- Tutoring activity ought to be submitted to an agreement with the leading university stating clearly the ASC financial counterpart.
- Every student listed at the ASC should be directly engaged in ASC activities and thematic groups/projects. This effort has to be led jointly by tutors and project leaders, but more advanced students might also be engaged in integrating the newer ones. PhD students accepted at the ASC would benefit from having clear directions on their rights versus ASC expectations concerning their work.
- The nature of the research engaged by PhD students, and particularly fieldwork done in what is, for many, a foreign country/region, obliges a specific preparation and a solid follow up during field research.
- The ASC has a privileged position to engage with African universities in student training from a partnership perspective. Current training and supervision of African students at the ASC is already done, but should be part of a more general agreement involving African institutions as full partners.
- Taking into consideration the overall activities of the ASC, as well as the generalized trends in graduate training within the European space that stress the close relationship between research and lecturing/tutoring, the Review Committee advises the ASC to create its own PhD programme, together with partner universities, in order to overcome the main impasses into which tutoring activities are falling. ASC has the full capacity to create a PhD programme together with

African universities, and become one of the leading European institutions to engage in these partnerships, which are already being discussed at the European University Association (EUA).

3. Answers to the specific questions concerning the LDI

The Board of Governors of the ASC has asked the Review Committee two specific questions regarding the policy of the LDI, that will be answered in this chapter:

1. Should the LDI department continue to focus on both paper and electronic journals?
2. In what ways could cooperation of the LDI department with other libraries in Europe and Africa improve the quality of the library?

3.1 Should the LDI department continue to focus on both paper and electronic journals?

While the current trend in the information world is to go digital in order to increase searchability and visibility and to ease access, this is not a panacea nor is it necessarily appropriate for all disciplines or area studies. There is an ever-expanding set of mainstream journals, which are electronically available and should be reasonably secure in perpetuity (at a cost). Print runs of such journals may safely be withdrawn. Alternatively, for a library such as the LDI, which perceives itself as a natural "holding" library for African studies, removal to a remote or off-site store might well be a preferred option. There does need to be at least one institution (preferably two) in a country, which holds a full print run and provides security for the future (holdings vs. access debate).

For area studies, and particularly for African area studies where print publication will continue to predominate in the short-to-medium term, it would be unrealistic to move wholly to electronic journals. A "hybrid" library would be the most appropriate.

Efforts could be made to enable easy and free electronic access to scholarly resources by researchers worldwide and especially those based in Africa. Such efforts could include assistance to universities and libraries in Africa in developing their own digital publication, institutional research repositories and secure storage of electronic data.

There is in all libraries a tension between space and budget constraints and the desire to collect as comprehensively as possible. A balance can be achieved by aiming for a "steady state" physical library where the objective is a collection which is continually renewed and updated but within the same physical space. For example, the collection is built up according to a clearly defined Collection Development Policy focusing on identified user needs; it is weeded regularly; suitable items for digitization are identified and processed (and the print version withdrawn or moved to a remote store) &c.

The Review Committee therefore recommends the LDI adopt an "e-first" policy for journals covering subjects of a theoretical, general or non-regional nature but develop and maintain collections of print periodicals relating to or published in Africa, for posterity as well as current access. Where available, electronic access to these periodicals should also be provided.

3.2 In what ways could cooperation of the LDI department with other libraries in Europe and Africa improve the quality of the library?

The European Librarians in African Studies network (ELIAS -planned in 2005 at AEGIS ECAS in London and inaugurated in 2007 at AEGIS ECAS in Leiden is a product of the initiative of three African Studies ASC libraries (London, Leiden and Uppsala). It has already started to bear fruit in terms of networking (annual meeting in different countries, discussion list, website/workspace), mutual awareness of activities and projects, and collaborative partnerships.

ELIAS is modelled on the Africana Librarians Council in the USA and its most active national group is the SCOLMA network in the UK, which provides another example of cooperation. Other African studies libraries have also become active in the group (e.g. Frankfurt, Basel, Paris, Lisbon) and more connected internationally. It would be a retrograde step for the Leiden LDI to pull back from such a potentially fruitful European network and the Review Committee recommends that membership of this and other groups continue.

While the Review Committee notes that there are already individual links with African institutions, the potential for cooperation and collaboration with libraries in Africa has yet to be realised. The ELIAS network offers a springboard for such relations to develop, within which the LDI would clearly be a major partner.

An obvious advantage for the LDI and, by association, the ASC of such relationships would be more effective collection of local African publications. The LDI already has strong holdings of African publications, including primary materials, and almost 50% of its collection is unique in the Netherlands. In addition, closer links with African university libraries will enable closer cooperation and mutual support regarding e-repositories of academic research in universities. Cooperative relations would also assist in developing a common approach to perpetual access and secure storage of African (and other) institutional web publications. This would further support the ASC's other pillar, its Research Department, which has strong links with Africa and a clear emphasis on publication based on empirical research and use of primary resources.

In this electronic age, the possibilities for connecting and working together internationally are far greater than in previous eras. At the same time, all countries face economic and other constraints. No single library can hope to collect comprehensively on a subject or region; bi-lateral and multi-lateral arrangements, both formal and informal, can help to avoid duplication in collection development and management, assist strategic planning and focus on digital and web-based research support.

Cooperation with libraries in Europe and Africa would strengthen the LDI and support the ASC's primary and secondary strategic goals by helping to position it strategically within Europe and vis-à-vis Africa. The Review Committee recommends that the LDI be encouraged and supported to take a lead.

4. Conclusions and recommendations of the Review Committee

The Review Committee considers the ASC to be among Europe's foremost centres for African Studies. In the past and today, its strength is based on two pillars: research and library/documentation. The publications of its staff are among the best in Europe and the world, and its library and documentation production are truly unique. The working environment is clearly stimulating, and its structure is horizontal and collegial. These recommendations do not intend to underrate the excellence of the ASC, but rather to suggest points either seen as risks or where improvements could still be made. This section formulates general recommendations; specific recommendations have been made earlier. This part also offers a few observations that could not be raised in the preceding pages.

As does the self-evaluation report, the Review Committee observes that a decreasing number of research staff has to take on an increasing number of tasks. This is due in part to the fact that the core funding tends to decrease, which leads the ASC to seek other revenues in 2nd and 3rd funding streams. However the acquiring of these new means leads to even more demands on a dwindling research staff. The ASC has 10.1 fte researchers on its own payroll, which is only one third of total staff in this category. 8.4 fte staff works in LDI, while 9.1 fte is support staff. The evolution from 2004 to 2010 is telling: from 14.6 to 10.1 for research on the ASC payroll, status quo (from 8.3 to 8.4) for LDI, and from 7.8 to 9.1 (including one student-assistant of 0.6) for support. All researchers reported overstretching and felt that they could not take on more while maintaining quality. Some external funding, while bringing in money, may cause additional problems. "Tracking Development", which accounts for over 50% of "research on request", seems to be an example. The Review Committee feels that choices need to be made, particularly if the ASC wishes to safeguard its core business, which is research and LDI. These choices could involve only accepting the supervision of doctoral research that closely fits in the research agendas of the thematic groups (TGs) and reconsidering the contribution of teaching assignments (both in the ASC-led Research Masters in African Studies and in other universities) to the ASC core business. The envisioned increase of non-payroll staff (under the form of Fellows, Associates and Affiliates) may help, but it could also create new transaction costs, with the real burden remaining with senior payroll staff.

The self-evaluation report notes "a degree of compartmentalisation". The Review Committee finds that this phenomenon is very pervasive. It is not a risk, but a reality, and this finding is confirmed by nearly all persons met. The TGs were described as "islands" or "cocoon" with very little interaction between each other; some staff pointed to "the difficulty of talking to each other". This reality of three "mini ASCs" working alongside but not with each other, described as a "serious problem" by some of the persons met, is compounded by both the inadequate nature of forums for discussion at ASC level and the lack of a common set of expectations. This results in quite diverse patterns of performance when TGs are compared. Although some researchers feel that the repositioning of staff would help create a new mix, the Review Committee fears that this may even get worse if the ASC were to implement the currently discussed idea of moving from three TGs to five "research programmes". Not only would this reduce the critical mass in each unit even further, but it might also lead to five instead of three "mini ASCs". The Review Committee

suggests to provide for cross-TG synergies and exchange, and to reconsider the option of increasing the number of units.

The issue of expectations strikes the Review Committee as very important. There is no common profile of researchers nor of TGs, and many (though not all) on the work floor expressed the need for a clear set of expectations as well as for recognition on the basis of such a profile. The lack of a clearly defined and uniform profile is linked to (but also cause of) the absence of an incentive structure which was acknowledged by all: staff, management and the chair of the Scientific Advisory Council (SAC). The available CERES rating is not really used internally, though the Review Committee notes that the director intends to introduce the use of the CERES norms for individual researchers.

This uncertainty leads to very diverse responses by TGs that, implicitly or explicitly, define their “own” profiles. This shows in many ways. For instance, during 2004-2010 SMPC produced 23 A-B publications, while EEE published ten and C&T only three. On the other hand, according to their own estimate, SMPC staff supervise 12 ‘own’ PhD students against 20 for C&T (EEE has only 3 or 4). SMPC was very clear: this TG said to go primarily for “innovative research in high-ranked journals” and has decided “not to play a lead role” (read: has decided not to invest too much) in other tasks (except dissemination and policy advice, which they consider as a spin-off of good research).

The Review Committee suggests that this dual problem (profile and assessment) could be tackled by a structure in three cycles: expectations → assessment → incentive, each separated for instance by a two-year period. Expectations refer to the formulation of a profile for staff members and TG, assessment to an evaluation of the extent to which the reality matches the expectations, and incentive to rewarding or not rewarding the match. The Review Committee does not suggest that this needs to be done in a sanctioning fashion, but should rather be based on convincing.

The Review Committee feels that PhD supervision is neither transparent nor well structured. First, it is unclear what the ASC considers to be “ASC PhDs”. The self-evaluation report claims that ASC staff supervise 90 PhD students, and a document provided to the Review Committee during the visit indeed offers a nominal list of 88 students. On the other hand, the TG’s estimation led to a total of about 35 (it is revealing in itself that the TGs do not seem to know how many PhDs they supervise). When meeting with the Committee, the director saw two categories of ASC PhDs: (i) research funded through ASC, carried out at ASC, and supervised by an ASC professor; and (ii) students located elsewhere, but with an ASC supervisor or co-supervisor. The self-evaluation report acknowledges that not all are “claimable” by the ASC, which cannot share the graduation bonus of all these PhDs. The Review Committee suggests to clearly define what counts as an ASC PhD, a definition that will need to be negotiated with other stakeholders, the universities in particular. It also suggests only to accept PhD projects that seamlessly match the TG’s research agendas.

Second, the Review Committee has noted earlier that a limited number of senior researchers take a huge share in PhD supervision. Of course this is linked to the fact that these are professors who can accommodate these projects in their respective

universities, but these figures strike the Review Committee as much higher than is commonly found in the humanities and social sciences. This raises the question of how this supervision can be offered in a qualitative fashion, while allowing these supervisors to conduct their core business at the ASC. It is probably no coincidence that those with the largest CERES A-B publication output are also those with the lesser PhD supervision tasks. This issue also refers back to the divergent expectations/profiles of the TG.

Third, supervision seems to be poorly structured. It differs depending on the supervisor, and at least some PhD students see coaching as insufficient. Some African students also mentioned attitude problems among staff, but the Review Committee has not been able to ascertain the extent and prevalence of this phenomenon. PhD students, including the “AIOs” generally do not feel that they are integrated in the ASC or in a TG. The Review Committee feels that this neglects the potential of PhD students to contribute to the scientific output of the ASC, and even to help alleviate the problem of scarce research capacity mentioned earlier.

Next to the burden associated with PhD supervision, senior staff also devote considerable time to teaching assignments. Six researchers hold chairs at Dutch universities, either on behalf of the ASC or in a part-time appointment, and two more are expected to follow soon; these assignments take up one or two days a week. While in some cases this eases the ASC budget, it also compounds the pressure on staff. In addition, it is often unclear what these secondments offer the ASC: according to the management, those seconded often use their affiliation to universities, rather than that to the ASC (although that is their main attachment) when identifying themselves in public, and their spending time (physically) elsewhere makes them less available for the production of public goods at the ASC. Likewise, the Review Committee is not entirely convinced of the cost-benefit analysis of taking a lead role in the Research Masters in African Studies. It understands that this programme has an annual intake of about 12 students, of which only a few come from Africa, which raises the question as to whether this is worth 10% of the scarce research staff time. The director evoked the idea of exploring the possibilities to organise the same type of programme in partnership with some African (and maybe European) institutions.

As said earlier, the Review Committee found little ownership of the ASC as a whole among researchers. This may be due to a management structure that is both too complex and not sufficiently inclusive. The ASC could consider merging the Management Team and the Scientific Management Team (this is already the case to some extent, as both teams jointly meet on occasion). In order to make the structure more inclusive, all researchers could be part of a merged team; if this were to prove too heavy, holding a general assembly (like a faculty board) twice or thrice a year could be an alternative provided this forum has a visible impact on decision-making. Such an ASC-wide forum may also contribute to fighting compartmentalisation.

A last and strategically important issue concerns the current incipient discussions about the creation of a Leiden-Den Haag-Delft-Rotterdam (LDDR) pool, and within it a unit for Area and Global Studies (AGS). There is a consensus among the ASC that it should not give up on area studies; indeed some of the persons interviewed stated that it would be “disastrous” to do so. The ASC management seems rather confident that, given its relative weight compared to the other global and area studies institutes

potentially involved, the ASC will play a lead role in this structure. The Review Committee urges to fully consider the risks involved in this scenario, as experience shows that area studies are often dominated by global studies in this kind of set-up. The features that make the ASC unique could be diluted, thus endangering its relevance.