

Response of the African Studies Centre Leiden to the external evaluation carried out in April 2017 and submitted 23rd June 2017.

'... the Centre is more than a sum of the research profiles of its faculty'¹

In early April of 2017 an external evaluation of the African Studies Centre Leiden was held, the final report of which was submitted on 23rd June 2017. On the 1st of September 2017 Prof. dr. Jan-Bart Gewald took over from Prof. dr. Ton Dietz as director of the African Studies Centre Leiden. Shortly thereafter a “Strategic Day” (aka “Heidag”) was held on 12th September 2017 with all employees of the ASCL at Kasteel Poelgeest, to discuss the evaluation report and chart the way forward for the coming five years. Prior to the “Strategic Day”, all of the various sections of the ASCL (Support Staff, Library and Documentation, and Researchers) met independently of one another, to discuss the ASCL and their role within it in the light of their wishes, visions, and the recent evaluation. This response is based on the reports submitted prior to the “Strategic Day”, as well as discussions held on that day, and subsequent feedback from the various sections following that day.²

Given contemporary developments, particularly in the rapidly changing socio-economic landscape of Africa, the coming five years promise to be particularly interesting times for the African Studies Centre, and it was of crucial importance that employees of the ASCL could meet and talk openly about the evaluation and what they believe the future course of the ASCL and their role within that should be.

When Prof. Gewald applied for the directorship of the ASCL he reiterated that he believes that the ASCL can only truly succeed and prosper, when it functions as a whole with all the various sectors and sections of the institution working together on shared common initiatives, goals and interests. To a large extent the course and initiatives begun by his

¹ P. Nugent, M. Bollig, I. Soiri, D. Tsikata, M. Wallace, and L. Johnson, *African Studies Centre Leiden; RQA Report*, Spring 2017 (Final version: June 23, 2017).

² Complete set of documentation in electronic format relating to all the written responses, minutes, programmes and so forth associated with the discussions that underlie this response are available on demand from the secretariat of the ASCL.

predecessor will be continued, with adjustments that are aimed at improving our teaching component, workloads, and collaboration with Leiden University. In this there are three issues that are of crucial importance:

- i.) In the coming years the library of the ASCL and all that is associated with it, will continue to be fundamental to the continued success of the ASCL.
- ii.) The further and expanded role of the ASCL in university teaching with its own interfaculty graduate school heralds a shift in the role of the ASCL, and holds within its scope for the continued inclusion of young researchers within the ASCL.
- iii.) The Collaborative Research Groups (CRGs), an administrative model that functioned particularly well under my predecessor, will continue to play a central role in the ASCL, but will henceforth be open on a voluntary basis to all employees of the ASCL (support, library, and research), as well as PhD and MA students associated with the ASCL.

In dealing with the external evaluation in general, beyond the recommendations which will be dealt with further below, there are two points in particular that have to be dealt with. The first relates to the role of the Support Staff in the ASCL, and the second relates to the future research profile of the ASCL as a whole. As regards the first point, it is pleasing to read that the committee recognised the important societal relevance of the ASCL's work. Unfortunately the committee did not give credit to the Support Staff who are more often than not the core drivers of that visibility and engagement. Indeed, in many instances the Support Staff are the public image of the ASCL and the first port of call for outsiders seeking contact with the ASCL. In order to further integrate the working of the Support Staff, Library Staff, and Research Staff of the ASCL into a whole, steps have been undertaken to transform the role of the Collaborative Research Groups (CRGs), in such a manner that they will henceforth be open to all staff members of the ASCL, as well as MA and PhD students, associated with the ASCL. In this manner Support staff will become better integrated in the CRGs. The Support Staff is also crucial in organising the visibility of the ASCL at academic meetings such as the biannual European conferences on African studies (ECAS conferences), as well as by making high-quality products like the annual reports, and maintaining the ASCL's dedicated website.

The second point of interest is that the report does not mention the research topics and the strategic choices that could be made for the future by the ASCL. The interpretation of the ASCL is that the committee unanimously endorses the current choices, as well as those embedded in the professorial plan of the ASCL. None the less the ASCL needs to look to the

future and seek to maintain a strong focus on demography, migration, urbanisation, and hinterland impact, and how to rebuild linkages with ‘law’. Yet it is precisely in the field of legal studies that the ASCL is currently adrift. In a world in which the rule of law appears to be the only protection available to the individual, it is imperative that the ASCL re-vitalise its long tradition in African law and re-establish its long-term relationship with the Van Vollenhoven Institute. A further point that needs to be considered is how the ASCL will develop its links with the humanities. Currently in the realm of popular political culture negotiations have started with the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS), for a joint appointment of a promising young academic working on Central Africa. The ASCL needs to redevelop its knowledge base in so far as it relates to Pan-Africanism, The African Union, the African Diaspora, and the growing calls for the “Africanisation” of the Academy. Similarly the ASCL would be well advised to develop its links with Archaeology which has recently expanded their focus on Africa tremendously. Finally, let it be noted that the CRGs form the perfect locales for the setting out of new research ideas that might not necessarily have found traction in “Big” research programmes, in other words the CRGs provide people with space to dare to think.

In what remains of this response I will detail the response of the ASCL to the recommendations of the external evaluation as outlined on pages 22-24 of their final report.

The recommendations of the external evaluation and their responses are as follows:

- 1) *That the ASCL takes a strategic look at its academic publication policy with a view to building the reputation of its publication series, but also to increasing visibility within international peer-reviewed journals.*

The ASCL has its own publication conduits, and employees also publish with external publishers. The ASCL is reviewing its publication policy with regard to i.) increasing the impact of the research being conducted by the ASCL, as well as ii.) cutting the costs to the ASCL.

- i.) The ASCL is anxious to dispel the impression that might exist that too much of what it publishes is published with in house publishers or does not achieve the recognition that is due to it on account of it being published in ventures that do not do justice to the scholarship and research of the authors involved. In the future the ASCL will endeavour to be more selective in the publication of academic papers and consciously concentrate

on publishing in specific settings that will enhance the visibility of the centre. As was noted at the Strategic Day, the ASCL will initiate a publication policy that will concentrate on quality as opposed to quantity; what was referred to as a specific as opposed to a scatter approach. That is, in keeping with the formal policy of Leiden University as a whole that the ASCL researchers will consciously concentrate on placing their research papers and findings with high-impact journals.³

- ii.) The independent publication programme of the ASCL is currently under review, with the publications committee having been directed to submit a report by the end of the year detailing the publication series of the ASCL, the manner in which materials can be published, with which publishers the ASCL has formal links, and where cutbacks in terms of costs to the ASCL can be made.

Preliminary findings indicate that too many of the core publications of the ASCL are currently being placed with Brill Publishers. Although the bulk of these publications are subject to external review, the general impression persists in which Brill is seen as an in house publisher. The ASCL is currently reviewing its publication series with Brill, and will terminate some of these whilst concentrating on the continued existence of the *African Dynamics* annual series with Brill. *African Dynamics* provides an outlet for innovative, not to say experimental, avenues of research in African Studies and has proved to be remarkably popular.

Further, the ASCL will end its publication agreements with set publishers, such as Karthala and Langaa, which in essence entailed subsidised publishing for outside interests at the cost of ASCL funding. In addition, costly, in terms of investment by senior research staff, is the Africa Yearbook currently being published in conjunction with other institutes in Europe with Brill Publishers. It is questionable whether in the present digital age the ASCL should spend so much of its resources in publishing reference works.

The publication in hardcopy of material in the *African Studies Collection* is to be sharply curtailed. In the past the ASCL acted as the

³ See in this regard policy as formulated at the *Strategische Conferentie 2017* of Leiden University at Egmond aan Zee on 15 and 16 June 2017.

publishing outlet for much of African Studies as a whole in the Netherlands, this has changed with our integration into Leiden University. The amount of subsidised time and effort expended by the ASCL in the layout, editing, and publishing of this series on behalf of others not directly employed or involved with the ASCL cannot be justified any longer.

It is envisaged that *African Dynamics* series will continue to be published in conjunction with Brill, and that the *African Studies Collection* will primarily be published in electronic form. In addition, instead of the ASCL having to expend precious resources on the layout of publications submitted for publication, that manuscripts submitted in the *African Studies Collection* which fail to comply with the ASCL stylesheet and format required will be rejected. In addition, that all publications taken on from beyond the ASCL, will only be taken on with full and accountable payment of the real costs involved.

- 2) *That the ASCL looks at its engagement policy strategically with a view to perhaps being more selective in cognisance of the time constraints currently experienced by staff.*

The consistently expressed issue of workload and time pressure experienced by employees at the ASCL relates directly to this point. The following points have been listed in terms of priority:

- i.) In the coming years ASCL employees will increasingly be drawn into the teaching structures of Leiden University. This is unavoidable and necessary, particularly given that our core funding, which is ODA based, could be cut. Research and teaching of the highest quality thus has to be our highest priority.
- ii.) It is imperative that the ASCL prioritise its relationships with external partners. In the long-term it is crucial that the ASCL maintain its close working relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MinBuza), and the directorate Africa (DAF) in particular. In line with this, in keeping with the prime source of our core-funding, will be the ASCL's continued cooperation with the Directorate General International Cooperation (DGIS) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is crucial that the ASCL maintain its

position in liaising with and the training of Ministry staff who are seconded to embassies of the Netherlands in Africa.

- iii.) It is probable that in the coming years there will be an increasing emphasis on developing relations with European Union and African Union staff. In addition, given the rapid changes in African economies, it is advisable that the ASCL develop relations with the African Development Bank. It is possible that the ASCL could develop the relationships with the EU, AU, and AfDB in conjunction with European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) in Maastricht.
- iv.) In terms of generating recognition and maintaining our reputation as a centre of excellence in relation to Africa, it is advisable that the ASCL maintain its relationship with journalists and journalists in training. Similarly the ASCL must maintain its cordial relations with the Netherlands Africa Business Council (NABC) and PARTOS, the Dutch membership body for organisations working in international development. In addition the initiatives that have been developed to work with companies and selected NGOs should be maintained.
- v.) In line with our role as a centre of excellence in relation to Africa, we must maintain and develop our links with the Ministry of Defence and Police services. A word of caution, the ASCL cannot allow itself to become party to research conducted on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, and must consistently maintain its independence as an independent research institution in all its dealings with this ministry and the police.
- vi.) In terms of strategic importance, the relationships of the ASCL with following external partners is generally low, but could in certain instances be strategically beneficial:
- Student organisations, Universities of applied sciences, teacher training institutions, teachers, African embassies, associations established by Africans in the diaspora , questions from the general public.

3) *That the ASCL looks at its current MoUs with a view to prioritisation.*

The ASCL does not maintain its own Memoranda of Understanding with institutions in Africa. MoUs are the responsibility of the University as a whole.

None the less, the ASCL does maintain close working relations with institutions in Africa, and these are generally on the basis of long-term interpersonal relations. The ASCL shall continue to maintain or develop relationships with institutions in Africa for specific clearly delineated projects and purposes. Given the limited pool of employees the ASCL shall not endeavour to cover the whole of Africa, but seek to maintain strategic partnerships with selected institutions, such as:

NIMAR (Netherlands Institute in Morocco), NVIC (Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo), a selection of university partners with whom we are currently cooperating in Africa (Legon, Tamale, Nairobi, Addis Abeba), and the partner universities in the current Enhancing postgraduate Environments (EPE) in South Africa.

- 4) *That the ASCL finds ways to showcase its societal relevance to Leiden University and asks Leiden University to recognise this work.*

In 2020, to commemorate sixty years of African independence, the University will host a Africa year. This will be organised by Leiden ASA, which is subject to the ASCL, and will draw attention to the importance and relevance of Africa and the ASCL to Leiden University in the past, present, and future.

In addition, after the external evaluation had visited Leiden, African Studies in Leiden was placed and showcased on the website of the University:

<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/2017/06/rd-africa>

The University funding made available to Leiden ASA to facilitate the integration of the ASCL in to the University, is absolutely crucial to improving knowledge within the University with regard to the relevance and importance of the work of the ASCL.

- 5) *That the ASCL dedicates time to discuss how much time and other resources should be dedicated to the valorisation of research over the coming period in a resource-constrained environment.*

Valorisation exists in doing our work well as the ASCL and making it available to as wide an audience as possible without ever compromising our academic integrity. It is precisely because we conduct independent scientific research that

external parties turn to us for expertise. None the less, the outside world has to know of our endeavours. As such, ten percent of our resources will be used to this end. This entails the continued input of support staff involved in public relations, such as F. Veldkamp, M. van Winden, and M. Westra. As well as the continued input and improvement of the country portal of the ASCL by H. Westra, E. de Roos, and U. Oberst. For the bulk of the researchers ten percent of their time would be equal to 150 hours, which is substantial.

- 6) *That the ASCL takes a strategic look at the size, composition, function/remit and governance of both the Academic Advisory Council and the Societal Advisory Council.*

The ASCL has begun the process of transforming the role and remit of the Wetenschappelijke Raad van Advies (WRVA) or Academic Advisory Council in line with the manner in which the Maatschappelijke Raad van Advies (MRVA) or Societal Advisory Council is organised. In future the WRVA will be meeting once a year in a small conference setting in which the ASCL will bring together its academic colleagues from elsewhere in the Netherlands for strategic discussions about African Studies within the Dutch Academy. It is anticipated that gathering together the WRVA around a specific theme and particularly inspiring academic speaker, will ensure that more members will attend, and that in the informal setting of coffee and tea breaks, and final drinks, there will be an opportunity to interact. In the course of the year the chair of the WRVA and the Director of the ASCL will interact on an ad-hoc basis, but at least four times annually.

- 7) *That the ASCL considers ways to stabilize funding commitments beyond ODA, by the relevant Dutch ministries.*

The ASCL is enthusiastically engaged in establishing its graduate school and ensuring that it actively participates in the teaching cycle of the University. In addition, ASCL are involved in vigorously seeking external funding for projects. It is to be hoped that the work done by the ASCL will be so good that it cannot be

missed and essential to the functioning of the University to ensure its future funding.

- 8) *That the ASCL considers whether part of the financial administration might in the longer term be best placed under the administration of the central university.*

Part of the financial administration was transferred to the University in 2016/17. It needs to be borne in mind that the ASCL project office as it exists at present is essential to the smooth running of the ASCL, particularly given the fact that they are well aware of the particular nature of the relationship that the ASCL has with African partners, and ASCL researchers in the field in Africa. Should any further integration take place, the ASCL runs the risk of being assigned to bureaucratic purgatory on account of the particular nature of our activities. If the ASCL were to have to lose its own financial administration, it would be advisable to let this occur in 2022, when the ASCL will move to its new premises at the WSD, Cluster Zuid, complex.

- 9) *That the ASCL develops a funding strategy to increase the success rate for EU grants such as ERC, Marie Curie and ITN and to ensure adequate mentoring of funding applicants.*

The ASCL has already begun employing young research assistants to actively begin writing project proposals, initially with a view to NWO funding, but also in preparation for EU funding proposals. To be successful in this it will be imperative for us to work together and collaborate with the project office of the University.

- 10) *That the ASCL and Leiden University look at ways of ensuring the longer-term financial viability of ASA.*

Leiden ASA, if it is to continue beyond 2019, will need to develop a broader role than seeking to integrate African Studies in Leiden alone. In this Leiden ASA has already undertaken steps to actively further the cooperation that exists between

Leiden University, Delft and Erasmus University in Rotterdam (LDE). Leiden ASA is developing a minor in African Studies within the context of LDE, and it is here that Leiden ASA could find further funding in the years after 2019.

- 11) *That the ASCL looks at whether there is a case for encouraging Master students to stay on at ASCL for a PhD.*

In the new organisation of the Collaborative Research Groups, CRGs will henceforth also be open to MA students, in this manner they will be further integrated into the active functioning of the institution. In addition a “stepping stone” programme has been initiated, in which each one of the ASCL professors has been given the opportunity to employ promising young academics to write research proposals, with the proviso that successful applications be stationed at the ASCL. The down side to this is that the initial investment may appear to be high, whereas the returns, which can be quite substantial, take some time to be realised.

- 12) *That the ASCL looks at ways of encouraging PhD students to become active within the CRGs.*

Henceforth all CRGs have been opened to the voluntary inclusion and active participation of not only PhD students, but also MA students, and all staff members of the ASCL. It is believed that this will contribute to the further integration of the ASCL.

- 13) *That the ASCL includes research integrity training in its doctoral programme.*

Research integrity will be central to training in the ASCL Graduate School, and explicitly dealt with in a compulsory course.

- 14) *That the ASCL looks at ways of encouraging career progress for female researchers.*

The composition of the ASCL consists of many women in junior positions, but only two full professors at present. The ASCL will actively seek to recruit promising young female academics, not only as postdocs, but as candidates for tenure track positions. A full 80% of the young assistants currently employed by the ASCL and engaged in writing proposals for PhD and or Postdoc funding are women.

- 15) *That the ASCL continues to look at ways of increasing the number of African scholars on its staff.*

This recommendation is particularly relevant, principally in the light of the growing assault on “European” academia, as evidenced by the “Fees must Fall”, “Decolonisation” and “Africanisation” campaigns being waged in Africa, the United States, and increasingly Europe. The assault is to be welcomed, in so far as it does not degenerate into racism and empty-headed sloganeering. The whole debate revolves around the core issue as to who has the authority and right to speak about Africa, if not for Africa. If an analogy can be made, one does not need to be a Roman to study Roman history. This is not to deny that being a Roman would give one insights into Roman History that would remain hidden to outsiders, but it would also make one blind to the hidden underlying assumptions of Roman society. The hidden taken for granted deeply engrained deep structure that is to be found in all societies and that makes sense even if unconsciously executed. The long awaited, anticipated and frankly thoroughly overdue assault on European academia tackles precisely those hidden taken for granted assumptions of how we do things, and in this we must welcome this assault in the same way as we must continue to defend the right of outsiders to study Africa, Europe, South America and the like.

To be sure, the ASCL needs to be fully aware of its origins, and aware of the debate raging around the topic of Africanism, yet this should never stand in the way of critically informed source based research. Research material collected in a scientific manner, is material that can be utilised irrespective of the gender, colour or creed of the person who collected it. To deny this, is to deny the scientific

venture as a whole, and to allow for a descent into the free-floating world of biased opinions. Any future research to be carried out at the ASCL needs to be critically aware of these debates, and be able to deal with them in an academically sound manner.

That being said, the current director of the ASCL grew up and was educated in Africa, three of our current permanent research staff are of African descent, and the assistant to the director is an African. Virtually all of our visiting fellows are Africans, and many of our guest speakers come from Africa. Possibly, we could increase the percentage of Africans that come to be engaged at the ASCL if the University were to waive the fee for African MA students. In addition it is possible that the ASCL and the University could consider exchanges, within the context of the inter-University MoUs, that would allow African Faculty to come to be employed at the ASCL.

- 16) *That the ASCL gives serious thought and devotes adequate resources to the development of the graduate school.*

The ASCL is well aware of the absolute necessity and central role of the successful establishment of a Graduate School at the ASCL. To this end the ASCL has tasked one its top senior academics, Prof. dr. Rijk van Dijk, with the assignment of establishing a successful graduate school. In addition financial reserves have been earmarked to ensure that there will be sufficient administrative support for this crucial venture.

- 17) *That work load issues are addressed with urgency across the board.*

The ASCL as a whole is well aware of the work load, and the ASCL's Works Council (Dienstraad) has repeatedly brought this aspect to the fore. In the future, as the integration of the ASCL into the University gathers pace, there will be ever more pressure for staff members to teach. This will undoubtedly increase the perception of an ever larger workload. It will be absolutely essential that the management of the ASCL ensure that blocks in which teaching, research, and

other tasks, are rostered do not clash and allow for the employee to concentrate primarily on a single task. This will necessitate annual planning across the board, which will allow for researchers to have space in which they have weeks or months in which they can concentrate on either teaching, researching, or otherwise. Crucial in this will also be a review of email and availability policies.

The recommendations for the Library and their responses are as follows:

L1) That the ASCL Library should be ring-fenced for the present, until the negotiations on its future are successfully concluded. The timetable for these negotiations should be clarified.

The current position of the ASCL as an Interfaculty Institute is designed for five years, so there will be an evaluation in 2020. The building of a new “Africa Library” (UL-WSD) is now foreseen to be completed in 2022. The ASCL will take the initiative in the debate about the contents and form of the “Africa Library”. Main point is that ASCL wants the Library to be in the direct vicinity of Research and Support Staff, so the ASCL can function in an optimal way.

L2) That the ASCL Library should be ambitious for a new Africa Library, bearing in mind the assets it brings to the University, and the fact that African Studies within the University are being considerably strengthened. Library resources need to be at the heart of this process.

The ASCL wants the new “Africa Library” to play a vital role within African Studies in Leiden. Key points will be digitisation, acquiring new collections and archives, and a more active role in education.

L3) That trust should be built between the two libraries and steps should be taken to build up cooperative working where possible.

This cooperation is indeed important. In the last years UBL and the ASCL Library have been working together in several ways, e.g. working together on the university repository and with acquisition trips. Currently the libraries are working on the

integration of the catalogue, and more cooperative working is possible, e.g. on the handling of archives.

L4) That the ASCL Library, whether it retains its own identity or becomes part of a new Africa Library, should retain its own clearly defined, separate space and dedicated staff.

This issue is a key element for the ASCL, as mentioned at the start of this response. A separate space and dedicated staff is vital for the functioning of the ASCL Library. The position of the ASCL as an Interfaculty Institute within Leiden University is an important tool in helping to actively make this work.

L5) That positive consideration be given to the creation of a new Africa Library, building on the collections and profile of the ASCL Library.

The ASCL thinks that the creation of an Africa Library will give a new impulse to further digitisation, to the opening up of Africanist research and archives and to cooperation with national and university libraries in Africa.

L6) That the Africa acquisitions budget should be increased in real terms.

This is already planned. The aim is to have an Africa acquisitions budget of EUR 200,000 per year, divided equally among ASCL and UBL. This budget will be gradually built up from the current budget, all within a few years.

L7) That the ASCL staff budget should be protected and where possible increased.

Increase of the acquisitions budget and added tasks have to be accompanied by an increase in library staff. The library staff budget was curtailed in the last decade, and will be gradually built up. Library staff will also be systematically included in the CRGs, thus involving them directly in the research ventures of the ASCL.

L8) That the ASCL Library/new Africa Library should be housed in close proximity to ASCL research staff and that the present staff expertise, community spirit, documentation functions, integration with the ASCL researchers and acquisitions expertise should be maintained and nurtured. Staff ability to act flexibly and innovatively should also be safeguarded, as should the openness and accessibility of the Library. This should not, however, preclude looking at forms of rationalisation that do not damage these strengths (this might, for example, include bringing accessioning and cataloguing into the University Library systems).

Current talks of the ASCL with Leiden University (Vastgoed) are ongoing and aimed at fulfilling these recommendations. It is vital that the ASCL as a whole be assigned enough space in the new premises to be able to be a vibrant centre. Proximity of research, library and support staff is a key element in this new set-up.

L9) That the Library continues to build its open access content.

One of the most important features of the ASCL Library is the attention it gives to open accessible content. ASCL plans to continue along this way, particularly by building and expanding repositories, e-docs and looking for new possibilities.

L10) That as much of the collection should be kept on the open shelves as possible (bearing in mind that library storage space is always at a premium and that most large libraries have to out-house some material).

The open shelves in the library are a symbol of the open access to information that ASCL deems important. The ASCL Library can continue to be a key meeting point for students, researchers and other staff, and form an inspiring research environment. Out-housing material can be considered for material that has been digitised and is available online.

L11) That a strong case be made to except acquisitions from Africa from bulk tender arrangements.

As the ASCL is and will be responsible for its own library acquisitions, it will also continue to have acquisition trips to Africa and work with suppliers in Africa. ASCL will of course follow the usual European regulations with regard to book acquisitions.

L12) That the needs of the ASCL Library for funds to carry out non-core, but still essential, activities (e.g. digitisation) should be considered in ASCL and University Library funding applications.

There is a large diversity of funding applications. In the Dutch context, chances for the funding of digitisation of Africana material has thus far proved to be slim. Cooperation with Leiden University Library and European partners might improve chances. Leiden University Library has cooperated with Google Books (in much the same way as the ASCL did with Google Scholar), and we might explore these kind of possibilities. <https://www.library.universiteitleiden.nl/news/2017/10/over-56000-early-printed-books-from-leiden-university%E2%80%99s-collection-available-through-google-books-library-project>

JBG, JD, 13 October 2017