



**Universiteit
Leiden**

Institute of Security
and Global Affairs

**Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA)
Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs**

Professor Joachim A. Koops
Chair of Security Studies &
Scientific Director,
Institute of Security and Global Affairs
Universiteit Leiden

Locatie Wijnhaven,
Turfmarkt 99
2511 DP Den Haag

Tel.: +0031 70 800 9521
E.: secretariaat@fgga.leidenuniv.nl

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**Subject: Report by External Review Committee on ISGA's Full Research Evaluation
(2016 – 2021)**

***To: Members of the External Review Committee for ISGA's Full Research Evaluation
Cc: Faculty Board, Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs***

Dear Members of the External Review Committee,

On behalf of the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) of the Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs (FGGA), we would like to express our appreciation and gratitude for your report, analysis and very helpful recommendations.

We are delighted that your overall appraisal of the Institute's research accomplishments and in particular of its overall development, improvements and future trajectory is highly positive. We are heartened by your overall assessment that "*the work done since the 2019 midterm review can be considered impressive*" (p. 15) and that for the main categories of research, societal relevance and academic culture the report states that:

- "*the committee is impressed with the development ISGA has shown with regard to research quality, achieving high impact and quality, as well as external funding*" (p. 9)

- "*the committee is impressed with ISGA's academic culture*" (p. 13)

and that

- *the "committee concludes that ISGA research is highly societally relevant"* (p. 10)



We are particularly encouraged by your conclusions related to the organisational and managerial reforms we have introduced since 2019 and that the “*committee applauds the changes that have been made since the midterm review*” (p. 12), particularly in relation to

- PhD support (“*The committee applauds these measures to support PhD students, make them feel at home in ISGA and provide them with clear structures and support guidelines*”, p. 13)
- as well as Well-being, Inclusion, Diversity and Equal Access to Opportunities – WIDER (“*The appointment of the WIDER, who organises trainings and is involved with decisions on ISGA policy, is an example worth following by other research institutes*”, p. 13).

Naturally, our response focuses however on points of development and your recommendations on how we can improve the Institute and its future viability even further. We are thus very grateful for the concrete and highly useful recommendations you have put forward as a committee.

We have discussed the findings and recommendations of your report in the Institute Board, Faculty Board, Institute Council, Steering Committee and Institute as a whole and we are looking forward to implementing your recommendations in the next phase of the Institute’s further development.

Please find below our response to your category-specific and general overarching recommendations.

1. Recommendations related to Mission and Strategy: Determine the research focus and size ISGA strives for and formulate a concrete strategy and aims based on this focus.

The committee

“advises ISGA to move from organic growth towards a more purposeful and formalised shaping of the institute. This requires conscious strategic decisions. In order to determine what focus or breadth to aim for ISGA should clarify its position through mapping comparable or competing institutes on a national and international level and determining its relation towards them. In this way, it could establish its own strengths and specialties. ISGA can then make an informed and well-substantiated decision on its mission and aims, and formulate a more focused, concrete strategy.”
(p. 8)

The committee acknowledges the broad strategic exercise that was carried out, but points out that the strategy document had also the purpose of internal consolidation and was formulated



in a broad manner at the expense of more concrete aims and follow ups. The committee recommends in particular to engage in a strategic exercise on the focus of the Institute in terms of breadth versus depth. In other words, should ISGA include new topics, such as nuclear or climate security issues to become even more comprehensive, or should it rather focus on its current strengths and deepen them. This reflection also includes a discussion on coherence vs. fragmentation, the roles of research groups vs. an overarching research programme and an international mapping of similar institutes in national and international contexts.

ISGA Response:

The Institute had already initiated an explorative conversation amongst research group heads and senior research leaders of the Institute in October 2022 to exchange views on cross-cutting themes and connecting the thematic focus areas of research group in a multidisciplinary manner. In the coming months and years, ISGA will continue this reflection with the aim of exploring various strategic choices, also taking into consideration ISGA's present and future positioning. Care and attention will have to be placed, however, on ensuring that the outcomes of this exercise do not become too restrictive. There is consensus among research group heads that the strengths of ISGA lies in its diversity and interdisciplinarity across a range of topics and subjects. This also includes different and differing interpretations of "security" and "global affairs" that enrich rather than restrict the Institute. A healthy balance will therefore be sought between more coherence on the one hand and flexible diversity and autonomy on the other hand, based on the understanding that the current set-up and approach of the emphasis on research groups and the facilitation of cross-over research projects remain guiding principles of an inclusive research environment. This approach also allows for enough room for strategic manoeuvre when it comes to hiring policies at the intersection of new education and research needs.

2. Recommendations related to Research Quality and HR Policy:

- **Differentiate between staff members and their profiles (research, education, impact or leadership focus) and set clear targets for each staff member, including how promotion criteria can be fulfilled per profile.**
- **Aim for more high-impact research output where possible, in order to boost the research career trajectory and positioning of the individual researchers and their eligibility for grants.**

The committee recommends both in relation to research quality and HR policy that the Institute should focus on maintaining the momentum of aiming for "more high-impact research output, where possible" (p.15) and places also emphasis on enabling different career paths according to particular strengths and focus areas of staff members. Thus, for example,



colleagues that have a strong track-record in, interest and talent for publications in “highly-ranked academic outlets should be encouraged to submit to these outlets, rather than seeking to publish large numbers of book chapters or similar publications” (p. 9). At the same time, researchers “with a different profile, whose work does not lend itself to publication in highly-ranked outputs (for instance due to interdisciplinarity, specialist orientation, or a stronger policy focus), should be actively steered towards the journals or publications that generate the maximum exposure for them” (idem).

For grant acquisition, similar differentiation should be made for researchers with a talent for and interest in large-scale and individual research grants on the one hand and those that could opt for education-related grants. For both aspects, the Research Support Team “should continue to play an active role in finding the best outlets and opportunities for each type of researcher. By strategically boosting the careers, success, and visibility of its individual researchers through a focused and more bespoke approach, ISGA as a whole is likely to do better in obtaining national and international grants and projects” (idem).

In addition, the committee recommends in relation to HR policy that “that even more precision could be achieved in career management by explicitly distinguishing between the various profiles of ISGA staff. In line with the national discussions on Recognition and Rewards in academia, ISGA could differentiate more between staff members with a strong research, education, impact, or leadership profile by formulating specific targets and promotion criteria for each profile” (p. 12). In addition, past efforts of increasing support staff and support procedures (to help reduce work-load for research and education activities) should be reinforced.

ISGA Response:

The Institute appreciates the committee’s recommendations and its positive comments on international and national recruitment, talent management and HR policies as well as the committee’s positive comments on ISGA’s growing success in research output and grant acquisitions. The Institute agrees with the Committee that maintaining this path of success should be a core priority for the Institute, as well as explicitly supporting different career and promotion paths and tracks according to different talents. In relation to the former -i.e. increasing publications in strong academic outlets- enough time also needs to be allocated for preparing, submitting, and revising such publications, which often takes considerable time. This means the publication output might vary if researchers choose to engage in trajectories aimed for more high-impact journals, which could be accommodated in annual performance reviews. ISGA staff should also engage in a further reflection exercise of what constitutes “high quality” and “high impact” publications, as this differs from discipline to discipline. For the latter (i.e., creating room and promotion possibilities for different research strategies), ISGA has already applied this practice in the context of the “Recognition and Rewards” framework and has promoted colleagues from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor



based on outstanding achievements in education management and institutional management positions.

Yet, further refinement of the promotion criteria, promotion practices and procedures is needed – in close cooperation with the Faculty. In particular, clearer guidelines and agreed, transparent policies are needed when it comes to a shared culture of promotions. The Fleet Review meeting is a good coordination and calibration meeting, but it has also laid bare different (disciplinary) views and opinions on the standards required for promotions. As part of the next governance reform, a well-calibrated and evenly implemented policy on promotions and talent management should be advanced in cooperation with the faculty.

The Institute appreciates the committee's recommendations on a two-pronged strategy of encouraging high-impact publications and "room for everyone's talent" in terms of other publication strategies. This should further be reflected on, in particular for advising early career scholars and balancing a differentiated strategy on the one hand, and the ability to engage in a competitive international university sector on the other hand. ISGA needs to ensure that it allows for a differentiated talent management, and also prepares early career colleagues for a successful career allowing them to successfully gain employment in an international research environment.

3. Societal Relevance, Hague Mission and Internationalisation: "Reflect on the tension between the "Hague Mission" and ISGA's new, more international orientation and formulate a strategy and policies that take the imbalance between international and Dutch Staff Regarding Societal Relevance into account"

"The committee concludes that ISGA research is highly societally relevant. ISGA's origins and locations have made it a natural partner to policymakers and local or national government bodies. However, the growth of ISGA as an institute is changing its identity: ISGA currently employs a larger number of international scholars. Naturally, their link to the local and national contexts is weaker, and this has caused a shift from a policy towards a more academic orientation. The committee appreciates this shift but recognises that it causes some tension with the Hague Mission of Leiden University Campus The Hague. The Committee appreciates that this tension is inherent in ISGA's orientation and recommends reflecting on the impact that ISGA's internationalisation has on its societal output" (p. 10). This also includes reflections on how to avoid an overburdening of Dutch-speaking staff when it comes to valorisation and media work and developing an adequate mechanism for rewarding such societally relevant work.

ISGA's Response

The ISGA management and Steering Committee recognises this as both one of the core challenges and main opportunities in terms of the Institute's identity and impact, but also its



cohesion and orientation in the future. While there are some tensions in maintaining both the Hague mission and its internationalisation tendencies, there lies also the core of ISGA's further opportunities by combining both in an effective and fair manner. ISGA should maintain a good balance between both aims, but also develop a further follow-up and implementation of its valorisation strategy linked to promotion criteria. Some good progress has been made in recent years and stronger reflection is required on how to link the valorisation strategy to HR and promotion policies in the context of the "Recognition and Rewards" framework. As a result of current national developments and discussions on internationalisation in the Dutch higher education landscape, the Institute needs to maintain its track-record of being both a highly successful international Institute with a clear "Hague mission" and national impact. This will also include stronger emphasis on making effective language training available to all international colleagues and working even harder on integrating Dutch and international colleagues into a vibrant community that serves both national and international research, education and valorisation needs.

4. Formalise ISGA management structures, in particular the role and position of head of research group.

The committee notes that "thus far ISGA's informal and organic structure has allowed it to absorb increasing numbers of researchers as well as research groups. The committee points out that in its current, larger size, ISGA is in need of more formalised structures to avoid further 'growing pains'. The research group heads have gained their positions through natural developments at the creation or incorporation of the groups, but the duration of their term as head, the number of co-heads per group, their succession, or their precise working portfolio have not been laid down formally. The committee recommends creating more clarity around these important positions and simultaneously looking into the workload of these key staff members who run their research groups, deal with hiring and HR issues, teach, perform administrative tasks and do research all at the same time". (p.11).

ISGA's Response

ISGA's management appreciates the committee's recommendations on further formalisation of its management structures. Heads of Research Groups play a vital role in almost all of the Institute's HR and management processes and are therefore a pivotal function within ISGA. For the next governance review round, particular emphasis will be placed on further clarifying processes, principles and procedures for the selection, mandate, duration and rotation of the position of Research Group heads. Various positions in ISGA's management structures have already been clarified in this spirit, including the position of the Scientific Director, Education Director, Programme Directors and portfolios such as Institute Council Chair, PhD Coordinator, WIDER, etc...A similar clarification process should be carried out



with respect to Research Group Heads. Particular emphasis will also be placed on managing Research Group Heads' work-loads and support structures.

5. Investigate if PhD training can be further developed in cooperation with other parties inside or outside of the university, and whether external students should be offered more tailored options.

The committee positively evaluated the measures that have been advanced since the mid-term review and notes that “the committee applauds these measures to support PhD students, make them feel at home in ISGA and provide them with clear structures and support guidelines. The committee discussed these measures with PhD candidates, who highly appreciate the additional support and structure. PhD students noticed a clear improvement in supervision trajectories and felt supported by their research groups and the PhD coordinator. In order to continue this upward tendency, the committee advises ISGA to communicate even more clearly what it expects of its PhD students in terms of milestones along their trajectory” (p. 13).

In relation to ongoing action taken to offer a more focused PhD Training Programme, the committee notes that “The committee appreciates ISGA’s work in improving PhD training and compliments the institute with what it has achieved so far. In order to ensure that the training programme does not add too much to the workload of ISGA staff, the committee recommends investigating carefully which elements should be taught internally (and what their size should be) and which ones externally. Also, ISGA should look into the option of welcoming non-ISGA PhD students in its foundational training. This could bring in some extra resources to set up and teach the training. The committee also suggests looking into the extent to which all PhD students are in need of following the new training schedule in full. Particularly for the external PhD students, the combination of PhD writing, their work, and a sizeable training schedule might prove too ambitious. ISGA should allow PhD training to be tailored to the specific needs of these PhD students.” (p. 14).

ISGA Response

The ISGA management appreciates the positive evaluation of past efforts of improving the support and training of ISGA PhD candidates. Since the date of the research evaluation various changes have taken place at University-level, including the introduction of a more mandatory PhD programme. Fortunately, ISGA is well-prepared for these changes, based on its past work on developing a tailor-made PhD programme. In order to comply with the committee’s recommendations, the PhD programme has now been developed in a way that keeps additional “in-house” work-load to a minimum, whilst taking advantage of synergies with other faculties and external providers. Following these developments, the institute will continue to reflect on and tailor the extent to which all PhD students need to follow the new training schedule in full, and what requirements for external PhD students are most fitting. ISGA management is also mindful of committee’s suggestion to account for the financial



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feasibility of such a programme, which warrants a continued reflection during the development of the programme. In addition, ISGA is at the forefront of connecting its PhD programme to the European University Alliance “UNA”, which consists of 11 European Universities and for which ISGA’s current Scientific Director is developing an international PhD training programme. These and other synergies will be exploited for developing a high-quality training programme for ISGA PhDs and externals whilst keeping the work-load manageable.

In conclusion, I would like to express on behalf of the Institute Board, Steering Committee and Institute Council my sincere gratitude for your time, attention and highly constructive feedback that will help the Institute on its further path of development.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. A. Koops'.

Professor Joachim A. Koops,
Scientific Director and Chair of Security Studies
Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA),
Leiden University, The Netherlands.