

## Management response to the assessment report of the *Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society* (February 2019)

The LUCAS MT would like to thank the committee for its assessment and for the dedicated and pleasant way in which it carried out its assignment. We consider the analysis and evaluation of our institute to be fair, balanced, constructive and clear. The assessment committee judges LUCAS' research quality to be *very good*; our relevance to society to be *very good*; and the institute's viability to be *good*. The committee was impressed by the quality and quantity of our research, and finds its national and international academic impact 'good and promising'. The committee also acknowledges the strengthening of training and development for PhDs (although unfortunately, despite briefly mentioning our Graduate Programme, it does not explicitly assess it), as well as the efforts that were made to overcome the financial challenges faced by the institute. It confirms that LUCAS 'has consistently advanced since its establishment in 2008 in the direction of a diverse, but coherent and well-led research institute' where 'staff and PhD candidates work together to build a sense of community, with mutual support, embracing serendipity and sharing good practice'.

We are very pleased that the committee recognizes these achievements and considers LUCAS to be successful at fulfilling its mission. We are also grateful for the helpful and concrete suggestions for further improvement provided in the report, which connect well with our strategic goals and the policies we set to achieve these. We are convinced they will be very useful in helping us do even better in the future. Below, we respond to the recommendations and introduce the actions we mean to take; both the response and the proposed plans were formulated in consultation with our advisory board. Over the coming period, we will work with our staff and the Faculty of Humanities to implement these – in fact, we have already started to set some of the recommendations in motion. The committee's report therefore functions both as an encouragement to continue in the direction we embarked upon, and as a valuable road-map to guide us along the way.

The assessment procedure has proved valuable in other respects as well. Our staff participated in the entire process, by providing input for the self-assessment, giving feedback on drafts, preparing the site visit together, celebrating its outcome, and advising us on the next steps. Colleagues in other institutes and on Faculty level shared their experiences and gave advice. This collective effort, which was crucial to the result of this assessment, also contributed to a greater involvement, awareness and sense of community among our members, as well as an even closer working relationship with colleagues outside our institute. We are therefore confident that LUCAS has the necessary tools to continue to flourish the coming years and look forward to making this happen with all parties involved.

On behalf of the *Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society*,  
Prof. Anthonya Visser, Academic Director

### **Recommendation 1. Carry out the recommendation of the previous review committee to install an external, international, research advisory board.**

We very much endorse this recommendation: such an advisory board can provide valuable input from externals and help us articulate our goals even better. Considering that one of our main goals for the coming years is enhancing the impact of our research, we think this advisory board should include both researchers and (societal) stakeholders, whose combined expertise will allow for a fruitful connection of the two domains. We therefore aim to include (inter)national researchers with expertise in LUCAS fields, as well as representatives of our most important societal partners, users and audiences, such as heritage institutions, schools, publishers, or (local) government. All three LUCAS clusters should be well represented in this board, the members of which will be appointed for a fixed term, so as to facilitate the influx of new members and ideas. The focus of the new advisory board will be LUCAS' research and impact strategies and policies. As such, it can fruitfully complement the existing internal advisory board, whose formal focus is on financial, personnel and organisational matters. It also forms a valuable addition to the societal advisory board which the Faculty of Humanities plans to install, and which will devote itself to high-level strategic matters. The internal advisory board will be asked to advise on the composition and procedures of the new board, with the goal of having it ready by September 2019.

**Recommendation 2. Create more possibilities to increase research time in cases of expected promising high quality results, regardless of whether or not an individual holds a grant. An internal fund for sabbaticals may be considered. It might also be desirable that researchers get additional internal research time for writing grant proposals, additional to the support already offered.**

We wholeheartedly agree with this recommendation: as an academic institute dedicated to fostering ground-breaking research, we consider the pressure on our staff's research time to be our key challenge. We believe an increase of research time would be one of the main ways to further incentivize and improve research quality, and would also contribute to staff well-being. Unfortunately, our current funding situation – which the committee rightly notes is ‘a system outside [our] control’ – makes it financially impossible to implement this in the near future, which means that presently, the only way to increase research time is by obtaining an external grant.

Within the limited financial framework, we try to find various ways to best support our staff in doing research and acquiring funding. Besides continuing our existing support (administrative help, feedback on research plans), we will therefore focus on helping our staff obtain project funding by signalling opportunities (continuously), discussing upcoming calls with our staff (yearly with all professors to identify eligible staff; then follow-ups with the individual researchers), and organising workshops and mock interviews; coordination of these tasks is assigned to our Project Manager. While our finances do not allow substantial expenditures such as sabbaticals, we can provide financial support on a smaller scale, for instance by offering a student assistant to staff writing extensive proposals (to relieve their administrative workload), or by investing in professional preparation for grant interviews (with which we are experimenting this spring); if this results in a higher success rate, and finances permitting, we will continue this practice. In addition, we enable the clustering of teaching obligations to create limited teaching-free periods for individual staff members – an option which is already being used in certain programmes. LUCAS also participates in a University work group devoted to developing an integrated system of research support over the next 2.5 years; such a system will also benefit our researchers.

Parallel to this, we are working with the Faculty to rationalize teaching programmes to reduce workload (see Recommendation 7) and hope that the outcomes of this will provide us with the financial leeway to facilitate an increase in research time in a few years. If this is feasible, we will work with our two advisory boards to determine the best system: a general increase in research time, (and/or) a system of individual, temporary increases or sabbaticals to enable researchers to focus on specific projects, partnerships or publications.

**Recommendation 3. The institute's ambitions with regard to its research objectives should be articulated more strongly and tangibly. That may include the opportunities that will be offered by the future relocating of the institute into the renovated Arsenal building.**

We appreciate the committee's encouragement to be more ambitious in our research objectives. We will make this a primary point of discussion with our newly appointed advisory board and will discuss this in recurrent meetings with our internal advisory board and the cluster leaders. Useful input will also be provided by the newly appointed Faculty advisor on research funding and internationalisation (due to start in April 2019). Before mid-2020, we aim to articulate more tangible objectives with regard to the quality of research, research collaboration and synergy, and ways to attract, develop and retain highly-qualified research staff.

An important part of these objectives is the development of a LUCAS research agenda on the basis of the overarching ‘arts in society’ theme. This agenda will identify a number of institute-wide themes or lines which are either currently prominent in our research or promising for the future, and to which we will dedicate extra efforts in the coming period. We believe that such an agenda will encourage researchers to work thematically across disciplines and will help us enhance our profile as an academic institute. The agenda is meant to inspire and support strategic choices; it does not limit individual staff members in their choice of research topics. The agenda will be built by our researchers, under the guidance of the cluster leaders, who will be responsible for translating and carrying out this agenda within their clusters. The LUCAS MT, together with the cluster leaders, will monitor progress. Our planned relocation to the Arsenal building will be conducive to the development and implementation of such a research agenda, by providing a common physical space and thus contributing to more interaction between researchers from different clusters. Furthermore, by a reshuffling of our management and support staff, we have freed up personnel capacity for research strategy and policy (a General Board Member for research-related projects and a Project Manager for research policy and support).

**Recommendation 4. LUCAS should develop an explicit strategy for impact and communication. Relevance and impact should be appropriately included and rewarded in annual appraisals and in promotions.**

We aim to develop such a strategy over the course of 2020, with the input of our staff, the external advisory board, the cluster leaders, as well as impact and communication experts on Faculty level. This strategy will be linked to the research agenda mentioned under Recommendation 4, with impact efforts and results to be monitored on cluster level. As preparation, we established a LUCAS impact committee in December 2018, consisting of six staff members from various academic seniority levels. This committee will set up and stimulate several impact initiatives during one year, so as to explore the possibilities for LUCAS; their experiences will feed into the strategy to be developed. Their first proposals include launching an annual LUCAS impact lecture, an annual impact prize, and a series of visibility measures. The committee's test year coincides with a university-wide festive year to celebrate Leiden University's 444<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The festivities are focused on outreach and impact, and LUCAS will work with the Faculty's Communications department for the alignment of initiatives and the sharing of best practices. While including and awarding relevance in formal annual appraisals and promotions is a good idea, our influence to realise this is limited: criteria for these are set by the University and Faculty, and LUCAS is not at liberty to diverge from these. In our discussions with the Faculty Board, we will propose introducing relevance as a criterion for appraisal and reward.

**Recommendation 5. The committee advises the institute's management to address more explicitly and transparently its personnel policies.**

We recognize the importance of transparency and open communication. We will evaluate the need for information and action with our internal advisory board. In terms of providing information, we are working on an online manual for staff (in addition to the information provided by the Faculty of Humanities), which will appear in spring 2019 and also address personnel policies: the academic job classification system including descriptions of jobs, procedures and requirements for promotion, evaluation procedure and criteria, etc. It will also clearly signpost regulations and helpdesks relating to questions of integrity (cf. Recommendation 12). Moreover, following the results of last year's university-wide personnel inquiry, the culture and communication within our institute will be subject to an investigation by an external agency during the first months of 2019. We hope that both the process and its outcomes will contribute to mitigating the frictions observed by the assessment committee and will help build a more open communication environment.

**Recommendation 6. LUCAS should seek support by the Leiden University communications office to ensure greater visibility of their research in national and international media and social media.**

Over the last months, we have already intensified our collaboration with the Faculty's Communications department to increase the visibility of our research on the various media outlets of Leiden University itself (websites, newsletters, Twitter, quarterly printed newspaper). We have also set up a dedicated 'Faculty Bookshelf' on our LUCAS webpage, highlighting new publications, and have launched a weekly LUCAS newsletter which covers our staff's research. From January 2020 onwards, in conjunction with the development of the Impact strategy, we will work with the Communications department and our external advisory board to formulate a Communications plan and to enhance exposure in (inter)national mainstream and social media. We will also think about the physical visibility of research in the design of the new building.

**Recommendation 7. LUCAS is advised to investigate the possibilities to review and potentially rationalize teaching programmes in the Faculty.**

We agree that rationalizing teaching programmes is the most promising method of reducing teaching workload and increasing research time. We also recognize, however, that such a process can only take place on a Faculty level. Therefore, LUCAS was one of the initiators for the [Faculty-wide rationalization process](#) which started in 2018. The process, which will continue of the next years, aims to set Faculty-wide norms for workload in teaching and admin, as well as norms for teaching programmes. LUCAS supports these goals and actively participates in the dedicated working group.

**Recommendation 8. LUCAS should be more explicit with the minimum number of contact hours PhD candidates may expect. LUCAS should give further thought to how PhD supervision is incentivized or accounted for in the workload model.**

We subscribe to the underlying goal of this recommendation: to make sure that every PhD candidate receives sufficient supervision. We also realize that the current exclusion of PhD supervision from the workload model puts extra pressure on supervisors' research time, and that – although the majority of our professors are dedicated supervisors and enjoy investing time in their PhD candidates – there is a potential risk of supervisors prioritising their own research over supervision activities. For that reason, we have in the past investigated the possibility of including supervision in the workload model, together with our internal advisory council. At that moment, it was unfeasible for financial reasons, and because the Dean of the Faculty preferred handling this matter on a Faculty level, rather than at the level of individual institutes. The matter has therefore been made part of the Faculty-wide rationalization process mentioned above; we will await further results.

For now, being unable to account for supervision in the formal model, and recognizing the diversity in needs and working styles of PhD candidates, we are hesitant to introduce a requirement like a minimum number of contact hours – a requirement which will also lead to more administration on all sides. Rather, we think raising awareness (of rights and responsibilities, as well as possibilities to confidentially discuss problems), providing guidelines and support, and acting upon individual issues is a more feasible solution. This would include, among other things, discussing the importance, form and frequency of supervision with supervisors and PhDs, limiting the number of PhDs per supervisor (see Recommendation 10), providing guidelines for supervision (including meeting frequencies), making information about confidential advisors more visible in our documentation for PhDs, and asking our PhDs about the contact frequency (laid down in their Training and Supervision Plan) during the annual PhD talks held with both funded and external PhDs.

**Recommendation 9. LUCAS should seek to bring PhD candidates together in new and different ways, e.g. through a thematic research seminar programme or other clustering of common themes.**

This is indeed a desire also expressed by our PhD community and supported by the LUCAS MT, because of its potential to enrich the research and experiences of our PhDs. Possible ideas that have been voiced are recurrent work-in-progress seminars and thematic reading/discussion groups. Together with our PhD Council, we will investigate the needs, discuss possibilities and set up a first initiative in 2019, to be evaluated and if necessary adjusted after one year. We have also decided to fund a proposal by the PhD Council, to run a lecture/debate series on the current state and future of the Humanities during spring and autumn of 2019. Although this is a one-off event for now, it will provide us with valuable lessons for future recurrent programmes. We will continue to support the bi-annual LUCAS Graduate Conference and its spin-off peer-reviewed Graduate Journal (JLGC), both organised by our PhDs, which bring together PhD candidates and internationally renowned academics around themes like Death (2013), Breaking the Rules (2015), Landscapes (2017) and Animals (April 2019).

**Recommendation 10. The committee recommends that LUCAS should consider a cost/benefit analysis of taking on unfunded PhDs and consider just how many of these is sensible, given other demands on the supervisory staff.**

We share the committee's concerns about supervision demands, especially considering the limited success rate of unfunded/external PhD candidates. However, we also recognize that this is a complex issue, given the traditional freedom of professors to take on PhDs. Our first action will be to initiate a discussion about the issue with our internal advisory board and in the quarterly Professors' Meeting in the spring 2019 and to decide upon our next steps on the basis of that. There are several concrete actions which could be considered, such as providing guidelines for the maximum number of PhDs per supervisor or taking the number of current PhDs of the supervisor into account when considering the admission of new candidates; this matter is also receiving attention on a Faculty and University level at the moment. We might also consider ways to monitor progress more closely once the PhD trajectory has started. This may be done by requiring external PhDs to compose a Training and Supervision plan (TSP; already mandatory for funded PhDs) in which the design, planning and supervision of their project is laid down, and use this as a point of departure for a formal evaluation after an initial period, in which progress is assessed and a decision for continuation is made. This is already standard procedure for

employed PhD candidates (because of its relation to funding), but also for external PhDs, a formal go/no go decision might be an effective way to make sure that valuable supervision time is spent on promising projects.

**Recommendation 11. The committee recommends that LUCAS should devote more attention to tracking the careers of PhD alumni.**

This suggestion will help us strengthen the connections with our PhD alumni. In 2019, we will explore the possibilities of staying in touch with our alumni via social media, newsletters or events. An annual review of alumni careers will also be scheduled. We will approach the newly founded Alumni Office of the Faculty of Humanities for advice and possibly partnering up. LUCAS will also continue to participate in the Faculty's recurrent PhD Career Events, where PhD alumni from the various institutes interact with current PhD candidates and inform them about career possibilities.

**Recommendation 12. Counsellors and helpdesks for research integrity questions should become more approachable and visible.**

We recognize the importance of academic integrity and the visibility of information on this, and are stepping up our efforts in this respect the coming years. We will include all relevant information in our existing PhD Practical Guidelines, our new staff information manual (to be published in spring 2019) and on our website. The academic integrity training for PhDs, already a mandatory part of our Graduate Programme, will be further developed and substantiated in 2019 with a Faculty-wide plenary part and discussion groups per institute – this will further increase awareness among young researchers. As part of our efforts to improve research support, a closer collaboration on the management of research data is foreseen with the Faculty's Data Management and GDPR teams, as well as with the Centre for Digital Scholarship. Lastly, the Faculty is currently establishing a new Ethics Committee, which will advise on the ethical issues of research, and to which researchers will be actively referred by LUCAS.

**Recommendation 13. LUCAS should try to actively recruit more international staff and PhD candidates.**

We will continue to strive for a diverse and inclusive institute. To increase the share of international staff, we aim to take several approaches: increasing the international visibility and attractiveness of LUCAS (by enhancing LUCAS' international profile and the visibility of its research); better promoting the opportunities for international researchers (by advertising local job openings and funding calls in international groups, mailing lists and on social media, in addition to our own website); better facilitating their practical integration into the institute (by providing information about the Dutch academic environment, disseminating the [Beginners Guide to Dutch Academia](#) and promoting Dutch language courses financed by LUCAS); informing selection committees of LUCAS' internationalization policy; and asking staff to actively reach out to promote the institute and opportunities within their international networks, and encourage them to request exchange grants (such as NWO's Rubicon and EC's Marie Curie grants), to stimulate the (temporary) influx of international academics. We will also ask institutes with a more international staff to share their best practices with us, so we can learn from their experiences. We expect that installing an international advisory board will also contribute to LUCAS' international (out)reach.