

Minutes of the LIAS Advisory Council meeting of 29 April 2020, via Microsoft Teams.

Present: Asghar Seyed Gohrab (chair), Fan Lin, Ruben Gonzalez Vicente, Radika Gupta, Monica Klasing Chen, Noa Schonmann, Mehdy Shaddel Basir, Ivo Smits, Rint Sybesma.

Regrets: Peter Bisschop, Ab de Jong, Jonathan London, Siavash Rafiee Rad, Sanjukta Sunderason.

1. Opening

2. Minutes

The minutes from the last meeting were approved. Thanks for Rint for drafting them.

3. Regulations of the Doctorate Programme.

A number of concerns were raised regarding the latest draft circulated on 16 April. The following list addresses the different points in the document, and includes also issues brought up by colleagues in their email correspondence with members of the Advisory Council. It was also suggested that a meeting between the MT and PhD supervisors, announced earlier in the semester, should still take place online despite the current coronavirus situation:

-Points 1 and 2: Given that some external scholarships follow deadlines that are different from those followed by the programme, it was suggested that LIAS will need to provide PhD applicants with a receipt acknowledging their applications. This is a document that applicants are usually asked to submit with their funding applications, and it is necessary to make sure that we do not reduce our PhD researchers' chances of accessing external funding from institutions other than the ERC and the NWO.

-Point 3: The AC objects to having fees for students that are already part of the LIAS community. The AC understood the MT and the AC had reached an agreement on this issue in our last meeting, and we are surprised and concerned to see that the fees for current students have been reintroduced in the current draft. The AC has received a number of emails from colleagues also concerned about this matter. A number of points complementing previous arguments were raised in the meeting:

i) it is unclear what is the purpose of the fee for students who have been enrolled for more than 6 years. If it is meant to be a punitive fee, it is unfair on various counts. The lack of fees was an incentive to lure students into the programme, and adding a fee at this stage would set a negative precedent. Also, the current proposal leaves no room to address the particularities of individual cases.

ii) if the fees are meant to be punitive, they also seem inefficient. Students able to pay the fees could remain enrolled, while the punitive measures will have a more severe impact on students under difficult economic circumstances.

iii) if LIAS truly needs to do something about PhD students who extend their studies for far too long (although it is unclear how significant this problem is, and the AC would like to see the relevant data) alternative punitive measures or incentives were suggested: individual ultimatums by supervisors; a limit of 6 years per PhD but with a board of appeals for those needing extensions; or a go/no go revision after 6 years.

iv) if the fees are meant to contribute to LIAS resources and are not meant as a punitive measure, the measure is not worth it. The AC doubts how much LIAS would gain financially, while trust in the system would get a very serious blow.

v) It was suggested that PhD students who also have ancillary positions as docents should not be charged any fees. This is an exception that needs to be made due to Dutch labor laws.

-Point 4: The AC recommends that the PhD Council is included in the information meeting in September.

-Point 5: There is a debate on whether PhD students benefit from the current coursework structure. For some, the burden is too high, for others it is reasonable. It is also unclear whether this is a matter open to debate, or whether the amount of coursework is mandated by the University or the Faculty. If this is the case, it should be explicitly mentioned in the document. The AC would also like the document to clarify whether the courses need to be taken from the LIAS catalogue or whether students can take courses from other institutes or faculties.

-Point 6: Overall, the AC thinks that the time allotted for supervision does not reflect the actual heavy workload of supervisors. A suggestion was made that at the very least we should compare the allotted time to what we offer for MA and BA theses. In this sense, the Faculty recommended this year a minimum of 18 hours per semester for a BA thesis, and a PhD supervision should at least require the same amount of time (i.e. 36 hours per academic year), and possibly more. Also, it was suggested that the PhD regulations should be clearer about what the terms 'first supervisor' and 'second supervisor' mean. Our understanding is that in many cases the promotor takes a secondary supervisory role, while the co-promotor is the actual main supervisor. To avoid confusion, the document should use both terms and specify how they relate to each other.

-Point 7: Again, it is necessary to specify that this refers to the main supervisor rather than to the promotor.

-Point 9: It was suggested that in order to facilitate the production of yearly reports the Institute should provide supervisors with forms to fill in.

-Finally, and in reference to all the points above, the AC also discussed how with all these rules and regulations LIAS may be creating another alternative reality, as many of the measures will not be enforceable if they conflict with the 'ius promovendi' granted to full professors and UHDs.

4. Composition of the AC.

There are still two empty positions in the AC. The AC will ask the MT to send an email to the LIAS community inviting applications for these positions. One of those positions should be taken by a colleague in a docent position.

5. Update WD selection (without news from the Dean yet)

As the 'informateurs', Ab and Noa have held meetings with all the professors in the Institute, and with any colleague who asked to meet with them after a public announcement in February 2020. Two reports have been elaborated and they will be shared with the LIAS community once it is clear when the next council meeting will take place. The Dean will bring the decision to the AC for discussion once one has been made.

6. Staffing plan: how to discuss this with the LIAS community in this corona-crisis period?

The AC will ask the MT how do they plan to address this issue.

7. Courses cut out from programmes

Concerns were raised that MA courses have been cut from a number of programmes without previous discussion with the course instructors. There seems to be a problem of communication as some colleagues were informed in advance and others were not. While it seems that the chairs of the programmes have been involved in this process, the removal of courses can have profound repercussions (positive and negative) and it was suggested that this is an issue that should be addressed in programme wide meetings. Questions were raised about whether the rules allow to remove courses without this being first debated in programme meetings. Decisions about course offerings can affect the quality and attractiveness of the programmes, and it was suggested that they should not be based only on student numbers – particularly when it comes to courses with a high degree of specialization (e.g. endangered pre-modern language courses).

8. Staffing on MAIR and BAIS

The AC discussed how under the current plan circulated in 6 April the staffing and teaching needs of the MAIR and the BAIS cannot be properly addressed. The current plan decentralizes staffing issues by regional groups and one thematic group (Middle Eastern studies, Near Eastern Studies, Southeast Asian Studies, East Asian Studies, and Religious Studies). These groups have an incentive to look at staffing matters from the perspective of their area programmes (or thematic, in the case of Religious Studies), and will be less able to address the needs of transversal programmes such as the MAIR and the BAIS. The plan hence risks marginalizing the two programmes that attract the largest number of students and that as such are the major sources of revenue for LIAS. Two possible ways to address this issue would be to create a separate group to discuss MAIR and BAIS staffing in addition to the 5 above; or alternatively to create mechanisms whereby people involved in these two major

programmes would be able to communicate and participate in shaping staffing across LIAS's five areas.

9. Other issues

It was suggested that Nathal could organize a meeting with all programme heads and the AC to discuss the faculty-wide 'programme norms'. Currently, the Faculty is communicating with individual programmes, and programme heads have met with the Dean. However, it would be useful to look at the broader implications for the Institute, particularly on questions such as the reduction of courses taught and the protection of smaller fields. The Institute may need to present a coordinated position on some of these matters.