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**Statement Executive Board
regarding the research review of Earth Sciences**

DATE	OUR REFERENCE	
July 2021	2021/RW/jf/560	
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Subject: statement Executive Board regarding the research review of Earth Sciences

The Executive Board has received and considered the final report of the research evaluation Earth Sciences covering the period 2014-2019. This evaluation was conducted in the context of the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) 2015-2021. A self-evaluation report written by the research unit, together with interviews by an international expert assessment committee carried out in November 2020, formed the basis of the assessment. The Executive Board is pleased that the quality, relevance to society and the viability of the research unit are all assessed as 'very good' meaning that the unit conducts very good, internationally recognised research, makes a very good contribution to society and is very well equipped for the future.

The Executive Board received a written response to the assessment report from the faculty. Together with the report and the recommendations this was discussed in a meeting with the dean of the Faculty of Science and the head of the Geology and Geochemistry cluster. The department takes the recommendations and conclusions to heart and describes in the appendix how it will make, or already has made, improvements. The Executive Board supports this approach in further enhancing the quality and relevance of the research.

The Executive Board appreciates the thorough and careful assessment by the international committee and wishes to express its gratitude to the committee for the considerable time and effort invested in the evaluation and to the department Earth Sciences for the diligent preparation.

Yours sincerely,
On behalf of the Executive Board



prof. dr. V. Subramaniam,
rector magnificus

2900/2800

Prof.dr. Vinod Subramaniam
(per email: v.subramaniam@vu.nl)

DATUM	ONS KENMERK	UW BRIEF VAN	UW KENMERK
8 juni 2021	BETA//GS/sz/ 140		
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Betreft: Opvolging van aanbevelingen in het rapport van de onderzoeksevaluatie afd.
Aardwetenschappen

Geachte rector, beste Vinod,

Op 13 november 2020 vond de site visit plaats voor de onderzoeksevaluatie van de afdeling Aardwetenschappen van onze faculteit. Het eindrapport van de evaluatie omvat een aantal conclusies en aanbevelingen. In deze brief, en de bijlage, wordt uiteengezet hoe de aanbevelingen in de komende periode worden opgepakt.

Over het algemeen herkennen we ons in het beeld dat door het panel wordt geschetst en zien we de aanbevelingen als goede handvatten voor de verdere ontwikkeling van het onderzoek dat binnen de afdeling Aardwetenschappen wordt uitgevoerd. De afdeling heeft de aanbevelingen en conclusies dan ook ter harte genomen en opgepakt om een verbeteringslag te maken. In de bijlage wordt aangegeven op welke manier de afdeling dat heeft gedaan of nog gaat doen. Omdat het rapport in het Engels is, is ook de opvolging in het Engels geformuleerd.

Ik hoop dat met deze brief voldoende helderheid is gegeven over de opvolging van de onderzoeksevaluatie van de afdeling Aardwetenschappen.

Met vriendelijke groet,



Prof.dr. Guus Schreiber,
Decaan Faculteit der Bètawetenschappen

cc: Richard de Waard (r.dewaard@vu.nl)

Bijlage (zie hieronder)

Bijlage: Opvolging van aanbevelingen

1) Aanbevelingen specifiek voor de afdeling AW-VU (5.9 Recommendations ES VU, p.30 van het rapport) en opvolging:

There is a critical need for University support for laboratory facilities (including both space and technical support)

We fully agree with this recommendation and would like to highlight that not all our laboratory infrastructure will fit in the new building.

In addition, in the meantime, a 4.8 MEuro Investment grant was awarded to Prof. Gareth Davies by NWO for updating and expanding the isotope geochemistry labs.

Management needs to re-think department structure now that the cluster concept is being abandoned. Points to consider include: (1) increasing participation in department-level discussions, particularly the junior staff; (2) developing a mechanism to form and disband research interest groups; (3) stimulating interactions both laterally and vertically within the department; (4) creating a structure for developing big picture questions that could foster collaborative research, particularly on topics of societal relevance; and (5) developing a clear succession plan that will improve diversity in conjunction with changing diversity of senior staff.

Immediately following the research audit, a taskforce has started the internal discussion on Research Themes and “big” research questions in our department. The discussion is by now nearly finalized. It has resulted in 4 research themes/interest groups, with clearly defined sub-themes, which will be used for scientific discussion and cooperation. The new organizational structure along Themes will stimulate interconnections and thus lead to a more integrated department, which will also help to balance temporal shifts in workload. During this process it has also become clear that the division in clusters will remain relevant for teaching related issues.

The high teaching load, and the stress that it appears to be causing, suggest that VU should carefully evaluate the teaching portfolio, particularly with respect to identifying overlaps with EEE.

New positions resulting from the Van Meenen middelen and the NPO funds allow the department to reduce the workload per capita. In addition, the department intends to evaluate the contents of the teaching programme BSc Earth Sciences after the Covid-crisis. This will be an opportunity to consider the associated workload as well.

If collaborative work is deemed important, collaboration could be included as one metric for promotion. The criteria for promotion are not department-specific. Therefore, the department wants to examine in the coming year, together with the faculty board, how this can be handled.

There is a need for transparency how teaching loads are assigned, particularly for junior staff and PhD students.

Since the audit, the MT of the department has compiled all the information about teaching-, research- and management loads. The overview is used in discussions with staff-members about workload distribution.

The increasing emphasis on sustainability is good for the department's continued relevance and visibility, but poses a challenge to maintaining broad strengths in all Earth Science disciplines. Key is

the need to present a coherent vision that connects VU-ES teaching and research to national needs/strategies and highlights the unique contributions of VU-ES within this structure.

The department has decided to invest the Van Meenen middelen for a new tenure-track position on Sustainability. This is a next, important step to increase linkage with national needs. The upcoming intended revision of the BSc Earth Sciences teaching programme will be another major step.

2) Opvolging van een aantal algemene aanbevelingen:

PhD researcher interaction (2.5 PhD programme, p.10)

In some departments the PhD researchers could benefit from a more formal interaction with the management and stronger interactions with PhD researchers from other research groups within, as well as across, departments. The committee is of the opinion that such a formal discussion/interaction platform would not only strengthen the PhD community and provide a voice for their concerns, but would also benefit the research in each department as it would promote cross linkages and help to develop new ideas for collaboration.

Last academic year we have started our participation in the SENSE research school. In addition, we have started to organize monthly, department-wide PhD meetings, with presentations and discussions.

2.7 Diversity, p.11

The departments are encouraged to take further initiatives to improve the gender balance of their academic staff.

The gender balance has been improved during the past two years. As outlined in the self-evaluation, the department plans to improve it further, for example by means of career-tracks for females.