

ACTION PLAN/MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam

In response to the Research Assessment Reports covering the period 2017-2022

The report of the evaluation committee

In September 2023, an evaluation committee consisting of three independent evaluators conducted a mid-term evaluation of the ISS research program titled, **Global Development and Social Justice**. The report provided by the committee and the self-evaluation of ISS research covering the period 2017-2022 were received positively. Based on interactions with the EUR Rector's office, the ISS self-assessment document and the review process were deemed to be thorough and fulfilled almost all the elements required for a full-term evaluation. However, a missing element was that the evaluation committee did not include a PhD researcher which is a requirement set out in the SEP protocol for 2021-2027. To correct this gap, in April 2024, a PhD researcher was added to the committee. The PhD researcher engaged with the other committee members, evaluated the various documents, and met with several PhD researchers. Based on these inputs, an addendum has been included to the report submitted in September 2023. Considering the inclusion of the PhD researcher as a member of the evaluation committee and the fact that the SEP no longer requires a mid-term evaluation, the faculty and university administration have agreed that the mid-term evaluation will be treated as a full-term evaluation. The next research evaluation based on assessing activities over the period 2023-2028 will take place in 2029.

Based on its terms of reference, which were grounded in the SEP, the committee was asked to assess the quality of research conducted by ISS as well as to offer recommendations to improve the quality of research and develop the research strategy of ISS. Specifically, the Committee was asked to judge the performance of the unit on three main assessment criteria and offer its written conclusions as well as recommendations. The main assessment criteria were:

- 1) Research quality
- 2) Societal relevance
- 3) Viability of the unit

In addition, the Assessment Committee was asked to incorporate four specific aspects. These aspects were included as they have been identified as becoming increasingly important in the current scientific context and help to shape the past as well as future quality of the research unit. These were:

- 1) Open Science: availability of research output, reuse of data, involvement of societal stakeholders [*primarily covered in section 3, Research Quality*]
- 2) PhD Policy and Training: supervision and instruction of PhD candidates [*primarily covered in section 6 and the addendum, special analysis of the PhD program*]
- 3) Academic Culture: openness, (social) safety and inclusivity; and research integrity [*primarily covered in section 5, Viability*]
- 4) Human Resources Policy: diversity and talent management [*primarily covered in section 5, Viability*]

In its report the committee noted that the ISS research vision is, *“to produce internationally competitive, critical development-oriented research with substantial relevance to society and high-quality education in development studies, in order to contribute to the enhancement of well-being and social justice and a more equitable world”* and concluded that ISS is indeed succeeding in making a substantial contribution to this vision.

In terms of research quality, the committee commended the institute for its research performance in terms of conventional research metrics as embodied in The QS World University ranking of EUR-ISS in Development Studies (an increase from 48 to 11 in 2022). On relevance to society, the committee

argued that this was “*well demonstrated*” through “*five PhD alumni portraits and five research-related cases which spoke to the societal relevance, engagement, and impact of ISS research and alumni.*” With regard to viability, the current report echoed the 2017 Research Assessment which concluded that ISS ranked as ‘World Leading / Excellent’ in terms of its viability and supported a continued assessment at this level. While noting the challenges faced by “international development institutes” the Netherlands, the report went on to argue that *the research field of ‘development studies’ remains vibrant, with high demand for taught postgraduate programs and PhD positions in the discipline and a large number of research funding opportunities; within this, ISS’s goals and activities remain scientifically and socially relevant.*

The committee paid specific attention to the PhD program and commented that, “*the steady growth in the PhD program over the years indicates a successful program that can attract a diverse and high-quality pool of young scholars interested in Global Development. Notwithstanding the heterogeneity in topics, methods, and research groups there seems to be a cohesive PhD community where students feel at home. PhD students value the academic freedom and high levels of engagement at ISS and are generally satisfied with their PhD supervision*”.

The report concluded by offering various recommendations and identifying opportunities for consideration as ISS moves into the next research strategy period. In the following pages, the recommendations contained in the main body of the report and the addendum have been assessed and for each of these a course of action has been indicated.

Recommendations and course of action

The Committee formulated 17 recommendations for the coming review period (13 in the main report, and 5 in the addendum). Several of these are overlapping recommendations. These have been distilled into 11 recommendations and are summarised in the table below. For each of these we propose a course of action.

Recommendation	Course of action	Responsible	Date
1. Define and articulate the use of the word ‘critical’. If this is a defining feature of ISS that sets it apart from other development studies institutes, it needs to be articulated and instilled more fully throughout research programs and curricula.	ISS academic staff often argue that they are proponents of ‘critical development studies’ as opposed to ‘development studies.’ If this is indeed a defining feature of ISS it needs consideration/reflection. The process of developing a (research) strategy provides an opportune moment to discuss, reflect and articulate this issue.	ISS Strategy Team	31/06/2025
2. Reconsider the organization of research groups and think outside the box in terms of research topics and locations	ISS is currently in the process of developing a (research) strategy document which will be finalized in the summer of 2025. The reorganization of the current research groups and/or selection/definition of new research topics will be included in such discussions.	ISS Strategy Team with inputs from the Deputy Rector for Research and Research Group Coordinators	31/06/2025
3. Work deliberately to position ISS as a leading voice within the European Union as a source of research and evidence to support development policy.	ISS recognizes the potential lack of focus in such efforts which are often fragmented and not co-ordinated and will strive to position itself as a leading voice on development policy issues both in the Netherlands and the European Union. This will be done through streamlining/focusing on specific research themes and enhancing outreach efforts with the co-operation of the EUR’s EU liaison office.	ISS Strategy Team/Deputy Rector for Research/Research Group Coordinators/Policy officer research	Continuous process with stock-taking by 31/6/2026

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4. Advance the communication of research findings using a range of different methods. Consider updating the way audio-visual materials are presented and the consider providing funds for communicating less visible projects/researchers, including the work of PhD researchers.	During the period 2018-2022, ISS made considerable effort to enhance research communications. This was done through appointing a full-time research communications officer and the launch of several instruments such as Research Insights (access to bite-sized pieces of ISS research), Research Insights Live (a TV style panel discussion), a blog. Deliberate efforts were also made to reach out to and include less visible projects and researchers. A research communications strategy has been developed. These efforts have stalled in 2023-24 due to personnel shortages. Based on the new strategy, these research communication activities will be picked up and implemented.	Deputy Rector for Research/Research Group Coordinators/Research Communications officer	Continuous process with stock-taking by 31/6/2026.
5. Reflect on the 'research active' and 'teaching intensive' profiles, to ensure that opportunities are made available to all staff to conduct high quality research	All staff do have the opportunity and sufficient time and resources to conduct research. However, an implication of this recommendation is whether ISS would like to continue with such a system of allocating research time, that is, based on research output or consider a different approach to time-allocation based on work profiles and discussions surrounding rewards and recognition. These issues need to be discussed and decisions need to be made.	ISS Strategy Team/Deputy Rector for Research/Rewards and Recognition Team/HR	31/06/2025
5. Investigate and implement mechanisms for staff mentoring with a particular focus on research	This recommendation focuses on junior staff/assistant professors. The ISS does have a system of providing a mentor for every newly appointed assistant professor. However, this is perhaps not working as effectively as envisaged and/or there are substantial variations in effectiveness across mentor-mentee pairs. The key concerns need to be identified and training for mentors may be needed.	Deputy Rector for Research/Faculty Coordination Committee/HR office	31/06/2025

Recommendation	Course of action	Responsible	Date
6. Identify structural teaching opportunities at EUR for PhD students/support the ambitions of PhD candidates and enhance opportunities for academic engagement, particularly regarding teaching.	There has been a long-running discussion on this issue. In March 2024, a PhD task force which includes the Rector/Deputy Rector for Research, and the PhD Council was set up to discuss these issues and to find potential solutions. While teaching opportunities remain an issue, ISS has offered PhD researchers the services of the projects office in terms of help/support to develop research proposals.	PhD Task Force/ISS Projects Office	Continuous with annual review on progress in March of every year.
7. Expand coursework offerings for PhD students	PhD researchers may enrol in MA courses at ISS, follow course work at CERES (National School for Development Studies) or at EGSH. In addition, it is also possible to design tailor-made readings-based courses. Needs and solutions to address the shortcomings will be discussed and addressed.	Deputy Rector for Research/RDC/PhD Council	31/12/2025
8. Further incorporate diversity in impact and engagement activities into incentive, promotion, and advancement processes.	This is part of the mandate of the Rewards and Recognition team at the ISS and the university and is under discussion.	Please see point 4 above.	Please see point 4 above.
9. Develop a clearer strategy around knowledge exchange and ethics as a framing piece to more firmly root questions of justice, equality, and power into the relevance, impact, and engagement work.	This is part of the Open and Responsible Science Agenda at ISS/EUR. The Deputy Rector for Research, the Research Committee will take a lead on developing such an approach.	Deputy Rector for Research/Research Committee	31/06/2025
10. The initiation of a new strategy should continue to support the meaningful engagement of PhD researchers with the activities of the institute.	The Rector will take active steps to ensure that PhD researchers are represented and heard during the development of the ISS strategy.	Rector/ISS Strategy Team	From now till 31/06/2025

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11. Greater need for transparency, internal communications, and onboarding to improve the connection of PhD researchers with the institute and their integration into Dutch society.	The Deputy Rector for Research and the Research Degrees Committee will discuss these issues with the PhD council and identify specific actions/initiatives.	Deputy Rector for Research/RDC	31/12/2025