

7000

Statement Executive Board regarding the research review of ASI

DATE

14 July 2025

OUR REFERENCE

2025/RdW/ys/0588

E-MAIL

secretariaat.bbz@vu.nl

TELEPHONE

+31 20 598 5150

ENCLOSURE(S)

2

Subject: statement Executive Board regarding the research review of Amsterdam Sustainability Institute

The Executive Board received and considered the final report of the research evaluation of Amsterdam Sustainability Institute. This evaluation covered the period 2019-2024. It was conducted in the context of the national Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP). An external evaluation committee received a written self-evaluation report written by ASI. During a site visit on 6 and 7 March 2025 the committee took part in a symposium and had meetings and interviews with different categories of staff involved in research at ASI. The self-evaluation report and the site visit formed the basis for the assessment report.

According to the committee ASI has, since it start in 2019, made remarkable progress in advancing interdisciplinary sustainability research at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. It acknowledges that ASI has also built a strong and diverse network with external partners. It successfully bridges research and practice, has influence on societal debates, policy discussions and engages a diverse range of stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, and the private sector. ASI makes effective use of the relatively modest financial resources. Recommendations were also made by the committee, they can also be found in the published report. These are:

- Increase financial support by seeking partnerships beyond traditional funding sources, including commercial enterprises, to ensure financial sustainability and support growth;
- Enhance co-creation processes with external partners from the outset of research projects;
- Develop internal mechanisms to monitor how societal actors engage with its research, thereby enhancing its ability to demonstrate its impact;
- Adopt a more targeted approach to media engagement to increase ASI's visibility among policymakers, civil servants, and the public;
- Take responsibility for evaluating the quality of ASI's research output by identifying and monitoring relevant indicators, as well as developing case-based narratives.

The Executive Board received written responses to the assessment report from the research director and from the lead faculty. These are enclosed in this document. Together with the report and recommendations they were discussed in a special meeting devised for this purpose, on 1 July 2025. In this meeting we exchanged ideas about a new funding strategy and the possibility of a physical convergence space with external partners. We also discussed the research in light of the new VU strategy

EXECUTIVE BOARD

VISITING ADDRESS

De Boelelaan 1105
1081 HV Amsterdam
The Netherlands

MAILING ADDRESS

De Boelelaan 1105
1081 HV Amsterdam
The Netherlands

WWW.VU.NL

2026-2030. The Executive Board is proud of ASI's research and will continue to support the sustainability research. Together we will work on further enhancing the quality and relevance of the research.

Finally, the Executive Board appreciates the thorough and careful assessment by the committee and wishes to express its gratitude to the committee for the considerable time and effort invested in the evaluation and to all people involved at Amsterdam Sustainability Institute for the diligent preparation.

Yours sincerely,
On behalf of the Executive Board

prof. dr. J.J.G. Geurts,
rector magnificus

Enclosures:

- Reaction of the lead Faculty Board on behalf of all deans
- Reaction of the research director of ASI

Aan het College van Bestuur
Per email: rectormagnificus@vu.nl

DATUM	ONS KENMERK	UW BRIEF VAN	UW KENMERK
06/05/2025	BETA/FB/2025/AK/np/68		
E-MAIL	TELEFOON	FAX	BIJLAGE(N)
bestuurssecretariaat.beta@vu.nl	020 598 8644		1

Betreft: Aanbieding onderzoeksevaluatie ASI

Geacht College van Bestuur,

In het kader van de landelijke cyclus van onderzoeksevaluaties is recent de evaluatie van het Amsterdam Sustainability Institute (ASI) uitgevoerd. Deze evaluatie wijkt af van reguliere onderzoeksvisitaties, omdat het onderzoek van de bij ASI aangesloten wetenschappers reeds elders – binnen hun eigen faculteiten – wordt beoordeeld. ASI is geen traditioneel onderzoeksinstituut, maar een netwerkorganisatie die faculteitsgrenzen overstijgt en gericht is op het stimuleren van inter- en transdisciplinaire samenwerking rondom duurzaamheidsonderzoek aan de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

De beoordeling is uitgevoerd op basis van een aangepast evaluatiekader, dat is ontwikkeld in lijn met het Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP 2021–2027) en toegespitst op het unieke karakter van ASI als interfacultair instituut. De evaluatie richtte zich op drie kernthema's: (1) de levensvatbaarheid van ASI als organisatie, (2) de kwaliteit en innovatie van het door ASI gefaciliteerde onderzoek, en (3) de maatschappelijke relevantie van de activiteiten van ASI.

De visitatiecommissie, onder voorzitterschap van prof. dr. Michael McClain (IHE Delft), baseerde haar oordeel op een uitvoerige zelfevaluatie van ASI, deelname aan het jaarlijkse symposium, en een dag met intensieve gesprekken met het managementteam, de wetenschappelijke stuurgroep en betrokken onderzoekers. Deze aanpak stelde de commissie in staat een rijk en genuanceerd beeld te vormen van de werking en impact van ASI binnen en buiten de VU.

Het rapport biedt een positief en constructief beeld van de ontwikkeling van ASI in de afgelopen vijf jaar. De commissie onderkent ASI's belangrijke rol als katalysator van inter- en transdisciplinaire

samenwerking, en als brug tussen wetenschap en samenleving. De aanbevelingen van de commissie vormen een waardevolle leidraad voor de verdere positionering en ontwikkeling van het instituut.

Als penvoerende faculteit bieden wij u hierbij de inhoudelijke reactie van het ASI-managementteam op de conclusies en aanbevelingen, ter doorgeleiding aan het College van Bestuur.

Met vriendelijke groet,
Namens de penvoerende faculteit van het Amsterdam Sustainability Institute,



Prof. dr. A.D. Kraneveld
Decaan Faculteit der Bètawetenschappen
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Cc:

R. de Waard; P.H. Pattberg, N. van den Bongardt; A. van Witteloostuijn, R. van Woudenberg, M.W. van Tulder, F.A. van der Duijn Schouten, F.J. van Ommeren, J.G. Halff, J.G., F. Scheele en onderzoek.beta@vu.nl.

Bijlage: Inhoudelijke reactie ASI

2980

College van Bestuur
Prof. Jeroen Geurts
j.geurts@vu.nl

DATE
1 May 2025

OUR REFERENCE
F25/0010/PP/ib

YOUR LETTER DATED

YOUR REFERENCE

E-MAIL
philipp.pattberg@vu.nl

TELEPHONE
+31 (0)20-5989542

ENCLOSURE(S) PAGE
1 of 3

Subject: **Reaction research evaluation ASI**

Dear Professor Geurts, dear members of the CvB,

We are very pleased with the positive feedback we have received from the assessment panel; we also are thankful for especially useful and practical recommendations. With this letter, we present a summary of the main findings of the report, including key recommendations. We also provide a short reflection on these recommendations from our perspective and strategic actions to implement the recommendations over the next evaluation period.

Summary

The panel highlights ASI's excellence in fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, building bridges to stakeholders and realising societal impact. The panel finds that 'ASI has made **remarkable progress in advancing interdisciplinary sustainability research** at VU Amsterdam'. Furthermore, the committee's visit "confirmed **ASI's catalytic role, particularly in fostering interdisciplinary collaborations** that are unlikely to have emerged organically within existing faculty structures." Beyond building a strong interdisciplinary network at VU, the committee also highlights ASI's role in fostering partnerships with external stakeholders: 'ASI has **successfully built a strong and diverse network of external partners**, including local and national governments, NGOs, and private sector actors'. We are particularly pleased to hear that the committee clearly acknowledges our "**tangible, real-world impact**". All these outputs have been achieved with a modest budget, and consequently the committee concludes that this shows a "**highly effective use of funds**".

However, the panel also notes some shortcomings, for example, that despite making efficient use of its limited resources, securing long-term funding remains a challenge. The panel recommends exploring opportunities to increase ASI's visibility within VU, to create a more pronounced impact narrative and to explore additional funding sources.

Recommendations

The report provides the following recommendations, for ASI and the wider VU community.

For ASI, the panel recommends to:

- take responsibility for evaluating ASI-supported research outputs to show ASI's impact by identifying relevant indicators for the quality of these outputs (incl. use of research outputs by peers) and starting to monitor them structurally and effectively.
 - Action: find a feasible way to register ASI-members in Pure and correctly track their ASI-related research.
- prioritise co-production from the outset of research projects.
 - Action: encourage applicants of our seed money and booster calls to consider co-production in the project design phase by adjusting application instructions.
 - Action: organise workshops to facilitate the co-production process.
- develop internal mechanisms to monitor how societal actors engage with ASI's research.
 - Action: discuss with VU library and other VU actors how to best measure use of research outputs by societal stakeholders beyond case studies and anecdotal evidence.
- explore new funding sources, including partnerships, philanthropic organisations and with commercial enterprises.
 - Action: develop a funding strategy for the next 2-3 years that utilises our local Pan-Amsterdam ASK network as well as the global SDSN network.
- explore opportunities to increase ASI's visibility within the VU community, especially the university board, colleagues and students.
 - Action: discuss optimal feedback and reporting cycle with ASI board and CvB.
- clarify ASI's dual role more explicitly in the Institute's future strategy (primarily research production versus serving as a catalyst for research, or both)
 - Action: we will review all internal documents and communications to ensure clarity in our positioning and communications; for ASI management, the role as catalyst for innovative and inter-disciplinary research was always key.
- develop a more strategic approach to media engagement that could help increase ASI's visibility among policymakers, civil servants, and the general public; and related, to craft a compelling narrative around ASI's mission, vision, and unique contributions to sustainability research and societal engagement.
 - Action: improve website and other communication materials with impact narrative.
 - Action: review Climate Expertise Centre structure and programme to improve media visibility.
- develop a budget that is in alignment with ASI's prospected strategy and activities – ideally within the framework of a five-year plan.
 - Action: discuss budget stability and need for clarity and reliability with board and CvB.

For VU and faculties, the panel recommends to:

- explicitly recognise ASI in the implementation plan for the university's 2026-2030 strategy.
- recognise ASI as an essential instrument through which faculties can demonstrate their commitment to, and progress toward, implementing the VU strategy.
 - provide sufficient basic funding.

Reactions and clarifications

The panel observed that adequate information on the scientific usage of our research outputs (i.e. citations) and more detailed information about the budgets of seed money and booster projects were missing. With regards to these two comments, we wish to clarify the following.

First, with regards to measuring scientific excellence, we have decided in the preparation of the self-evaluation report not to provide a full bibliometric analysis because:

- a) we do not have full member data (Pure only covers 60 out of 150 researchers) and thus face a data gap due to different policies per faculty regarding the registration of research output on Pure across multiple units.
- b) data in Pure does not distinguish between monodisciplinary publications as part of regular departmental activities and interdisciplinary research resulting from ASI.
- c) most participating units have recently been evaluated according to SEP; to avoid double-counting, we decided to skip a full bibliometric analysis that would largely overlap with already concluded recent assessments of research quality.

Second, regarding the lack of budget information of seed money projects: Unfortunately, no detailed budget spending overview exists for seed money and booster projects, as reporting on this would require a lot of additional resources and administrative burden for researchers. As budgets are allocated to faculties and departments, it is their rules that determine how the budget is allocated and reported. We regret that we do not have this information available at ASI level at the moment but will assess if it can be obtained for future evaluations.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Philipp Pattberg
Professor of Transnational Environmental Governance and Policy
Head of Department Environmental Policy Analysis