

# Evaluation report on the implementation of the management agreement between the Flemish Community and the Institute of Development Policy and Management (IOB) – English translation

17 May 2010

## Introduction

The Flemish Community and the Institute of Development Policy and Management (IOB) agreed on a management accord for the period 2006-2010. Part of the agreement is that its implementation is to be evaluated by review committee appointed by the minister. This committee was established in December 2009, with the following members:

- Dirk Buyens, Vlerick Leuven Ghent Management School, Chair
- Isa Baud, University of Amsterdam
- Jean Bossuyt, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM)
- Geske Dijkstra, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Secretary

The committee was charged with the task of examining whether the IOB has fulfilled the conditions and requirements of the management agreement and what the management agreement has meant for the Institute. The committee paid particular attention to the implementation of the following ten elements:

- Mandate and mission
- Educational policy
- Research
- Community service
- Student management
- Personnel management
- Quality management
- Financial management
- Management quality
- National and international cooperation

The committee received IOB's self-evaluation report in January 2010. On Thursday 25 February 2010, the committee conducted intensive conversations with the representatives of all sections of IOB: the management team, the personnel responsible for education, the conveners of the thematic groups, representatives of the assistant academic staff and special academic staff, representatives of the technical and administrative staff and representatives of students and alumni. The committee also had a tour through the facilities of IOB, including the library. The preliminary findings of the committee were presented to the staff and students at the end of the day. The definitive findings and recommendations are presented in this report. The report is arranged according to the ten focal points of the mandate, followed by conclusions and recommendations.

The committee would like to thank the chair and the management of the IOB for their hospitality and the efficient organization of the day, and all those involved for their constructive and open participation in the interviews.

## 1. Mandate and mission

The mission of the IOB includes the following elements: the stimulation of interdisciplinary (economic, social, political) research, education and community service in the area of developmental policy and management, international cooperation, focus on the poorest countries and groups, capacity development in the South, the exchange of information and equal opportunities for its staff.

The management agreement refers to a *demonstrable interaction* between the three key elements of education, research and community service in the area of economic, political and social aspects of developmental policy and management. Complementarity between education, research and community service has clearly increased during the past period, and this interaction has definitely been realized. It is clear that the topics of the three master's degree programmes are manifest in the facility's research publications and that this scientific expertise is also in demand among paying clients. The committee was able to experience first-hand the important role that the IOB plays in the social debate. The evening of the visitation, a debate was held concerning the 4x4 cycle (during which research was presented by a member of the IOB staff). This debate was attended by many. Interdisciplinarity has been realized as well. Scholars from different disciplines collaborate within the three master's degree programmes and the four thematic groups, in addition to interdisciplinary collaboration concerning academic publications.

At present, however, the core of the IOB mandate – conducting education, research and community service in an interactive manner – is under pressure. The main cause of this pressure is that the career opportunities of individuals within the UA (and, to a lesser extent, outside of the UA) are evaluated exclusively according to ISI publications. An area of tension thus exists between the mandate of the IOB and the criteria that are used to evaluate individual members of the IOB staff. All staff members agree that the interaction between education, research and community service are the most relevant and interesting aspects of their work. The performance pressure exerted by the UA, however, places a damper on the enthusiasm of the personnel to provide academic services, particularly with regard to the long-term cooperation and capacity-building efforts of universities in the South. In the long term, this tension could also affect the quality of the education.

Although there are no easy solutions, the committee deems it crucial for the IOB to adhere to its original mission. The experience of the last five years has demonstrated that the complementarity between the three domains is essential, also for the quality of education and other positive spin-off activities. The Flemish government could provide a partial solution by providing stronger affirmation of the special role of the IOB in its contact with the UA. Although the IOB should remain committed (and add further depth) to this complementarity, various career paths could be realized within the IOB. Additional personnel could be employed who would work exclusively on community service, as in collaboration with universities in the South. The mission is realized primarily through the four thematic groups that were established in 2005: Aid Policy, Impact of Globalization, Political Economy of the Great Lakes Region, and Poverty & Well-Being as a (local) Institutional Process. The thematic groups determine the identity of the IOB. They worked well for stimulating the cohesion of research and between research, education and community service. Nevertheless, the differences between the various thematic groups are sometimes exaggerated. The division of the facility into these groups was determined for five years and is once again up for discussion. In addition, the six ZAP vacancies that are anticipated in the coming years suggest that the IOB is facing a sort of 'identity transition'. This provides the IOB with new developmental opportunities that correspond to the topics of the future. These opportunities are discussed further under Point 6 (personnel management) and Point 9 (management quality).

## 2. Educational policy

Although the master's degree programmes consist of three tracks, unity is created through the division into four modules. There is one programme director and one mode of evaluation for each module (the 'end of module paper'). Master's degree dissertations are evaluated in the same manner. The modules are presented by the thematic groups, thus providing better coordination with research. The module structure also makes it easier to work with guest lecturers (including those from other countries), and it increases the peer pressure among all lecturers involved in a module. The average of 45 students each year is sufficient to comply with the conditions of the management agreement. The division of labour between the director of the master's degree programme and the OWC is favourable: the OWC discusses and determines the policy, and the director is responsible for management and implementation.

The IOB receives many applications, and only about 30% of them can be accepted. The popularity of the IOB can be attributed to the uniqueness of its educational offerings (governance, political economy), in addition to other factors. For example, prospective students are not required to obtain permission from their own governments in order to apply to the IOB. Although students experience the master's degree programme as quite difficult, they are highly satisfied with the quality of the education, the intensive supervision and the possibility of arranging the learning process according to their own interests (for example by free choice of topics for papers and dissertations). The rate of return following the first year is high (about 85%), although it is decreasing slightly. This is largely because many students prefer to follow internships, and they are difficult to combine with the timely completion of a dissertation.

The decision to offer the master's degree programme exclusively in English (instead of alternating with French) is understandable, given the high workload imposed on the staff in order to switch between languages from year to year (including the search for appropriate literature). Despite the fact that the IOB offers an intensive training course in English and allows students to write their papers in French, the number of students from francophone regions has decreased considerably. This also entails a decrease in the number of students from the Great Lakes region, which is one of the poorest regions in the world and an area in which the IOB is specialized. This is regrettable.

With regard to the number of doctorates, IOB is doing much more than specified in the management agreement. The average number of new candidates in recent years has been 4.2, while the agreement specifies a minimum of two. There are currently 30 doctoral students, who are supervised within the thematic groups. The smaller thematic groups (in terms of ZAP) appear to have proportionately more doctoral students than do the larger thematic groups. All ZAP members are carrying a high supervision workload. The UA is exerting heavy pressure to realize more doctorates. Additional synergy should be sought in the form of joint publications with the doctoral candidates.

For their part, doctoral candidates experience the IOB as a stimulating research environment. Each candidate is a member of a thematic group, and each has one supervisor within the group. They have considerable contact with all members of the group. Doctoral students present their work during IOB-wide lunch seminars. They are allowed considerable intellectual freedom to shape their own research, they have sufficient resources for participating in conferences and they experience the contact with master's degree students as stimulating. Several doctoral candidates, however, feel that they are called upon too frequently to act as tutors for the modules of the master's degree program.

The short courses offered by the IOB are a good way in which to have direct contact with relevant policy makers. The IOB is developing an e-learning system for both the pre-master's and post-master's degree programmes. These are good initiatives. The IOB also organizes an optional course for all UA students, and it organizes successful lectures and debate sessions for a broader audience.

### 3. Research

In general, research is coordinated within the thematic groups. Although joint publications with people from other thematic groups do appear from time to time, the lack of contact between thematic groups results in the loss of many opportunities for cooperation and synergy. The question of whether each thematic group has the critical mass necessary in order to be a successful research group remains open to debate.

The total research output of the IOB increased during the period 2005-2008, relative to the period 2001-2004 (for example, the number of CERES A-E publications increased from 223 to 252). The number of staff positions, however, has increased even more (by 1/3). There has thus been no increase in the quantity of publications per staff member. Nonetheless, the quality of publications (also per staff member) has clearly increased. The members of the IOB staff have produced significantly more CERES A and B publications and many more ISI articles than they had generated before 2005. It remains unclear whether this can be attributed to better coordination and streamlining within the research groups (as mentioned in the self-evaluation report, p.27). One important explanation seems to involve the increased pressure within the scientific world in general (and within the UA in particular) to produce more ISI publications. The pressure within the UA to produce more ISI publications and confer more doctoral degrees can be traced to the relatively lower score that the university received in this area in comparison to other Flemish universities.

In the period 2005-2008, the IOB was very successful in attracting external funding, particularly with regard to increases in FWO and Vladoc funding. The total volume of external funding increased from €664,108 to €978,838, and the proportion of FWO and Vladoc increased from 2% to 44%.

The self-evaluation report provides no insight into the relative productivity of the various thematic groups.

### 4. Community service

In the past period, academic services to the community increased by approximately 1/3. Many IOB staff members are experts in particular areas and are invited to perform projects or receive such assignments through competitive procedures. The most prominent clients are the Flemish and Belgian governments, although a smaller number of projects are received from other entities, including NGOs, international organizations and foreign governments. In this regard, the IOB has achieved considerable complementarity with its scientific research.

## 5. Student management

Students are highly satisfied with their reception within the IOB. They refer to friendly, high-quality lecturers, excellent facilities and favourable assistance by the technical and administrative personnel (who are even prepared to help students outside of working hours). The only exception in this regard involves student housing.

It is difficult to find good housing for this group of international students in Antwerp. It is therefore advisable to invest a portion of the IOB's financial reserves in student housing. Unfortunately, this is a slow process, as it involves many other partners.

In recent years, the IOB has also invested in alumni policy. Examples involve the use of the alumni magazine *Exchange to change* and an E-zine.

## 6. Personnel management

The committee spoke with many staff members. In general, they are satisfied with their workplaces within the IOB. The atmosphere is pleasant, and they have many opportunities to perform their work according to their own judgment. This applies to the ATP as well. Tasks are performed efficiently, and employees help each other in times of high workloads. The IOB is subject to the regulations of the UA with regard to recruitment and classification. Although this is largely an advantage, it can sometimes create tension as well. For example, it is peculiar that ATP employees within the IOB are less eligible for statutory appointments than are their counterparts within the UA. This can lead to higher turnover than is desirable.

In general, representatives from AAP and BAP are also highly satisfied. For this group, the tension between the IOB mission (which assigns equal importance to research, education and service) and the determination of individual career opportunities according to ISI publications is quite tangible. This is a threat to the corporate culture of the IOB (which is the source of its strength), as well as to the quality of education.

The UA regulations also pose an obstacle with regard to ZAP. The IOB is allowed to determine the rank only upon the appointment of new employees. Thereafter, promotion is determined according to strict UA criteria. The IOB's options are also limited by an informal quota system, despite the fact that it is largely independent financially. This situation creates tension, as ZAP employees do not receive promotions to which they are entitled according to the standards of the IOB. For example, employees could score well on the three components identified in the IOB mission, but not quite high enough on research. Alternatively, they could meet the UA criteria (research output), but there is no position available. Of the four ZAP employees submitting applications during the last session, only one was honoured. The situation also exacerbates internal tension, as the Academic Personnel Committee (CAP), which evaluates the applications, does not consist of the prescribed number of seven persons (three of which are from other UA departments). Instead, the committee is composed of three internal colleagues. The reasoning behind this composition is that other UA staff would have difficulty evaluating IOB employees. It may be advisable to compose the CAP according to UA norms, thus generating a committee of seven with three external members.

In recent years, the IOB has been unable to fill its three ZAP vacancies due to several reasons. In order to achieve a more international staff, the IOB attempted to attract promising foreign candidates to fill these vacancies. In one of these attempts, a foreign candidate was recruited, only

to withdraw later. The committee recommends acknowledging that the conditions of employment are not of a sufficiently high level to attract excellent international scientists. Nonetheless, it has proven possible to attract international guest lecturers who can contribute to research during their stays through the system of 'scholars in residence'. The AAP and BAP are partially internationalized as well. In filling permanent ZAP positions, the IOB should search primarily for promising candidates from Belgium and perhaps the Netherlands.

The gap between the IOB and the UA criteria is also visible in the appointment of ZAP. It is important to ensure that the UA criteria do not dominate the process, particularly the criteria regarding ISI publications and the conferral of doctorates. The IOB benefits from employees who are able to combine research with education and community service. It is also important for the appointment of new ZAP members to take place within a broad perspective on the IOB. Care should be taken to avoid filling positions exclusively with reference to the existing thematic groups. The recent development in which the IOB chair is also the chair of the committee for advice on the appointments is therefore beneficial.

In the coming years, three ZAP vacancies are expected to arise due to anticipated retirement (and early retirement). It is therefore important to stimulate an open discussion regarding the future of the IOB. Topics of discussion should include which new challenges can be identified within the three components and how they should be addressed. The committee recommends that this discussion should not be held exclusively with the current ZAP, but should be extended to include both BAP and AAP as well. It is also advisable to compile an inventory of other medium-sized research institutes on development studies in order to identify the IOB's own priorities and complementarities. The discussion should not be about individuals, but about general criteria and priorities, including strategic benefits, international visibility, finance options and the potential to increase coherence between the various IOB activities.

This discussion will also address the future structure of the thematic groups. Some of the current thematic groups have a regional focus, while others are more focused on specific topics. This is an odd combination. It would be more logical to determine divisions according to topics. In addition, previously determined criteria should be used in order to select future topics. Given the quest to create critical mass and more cooperation within the IOB, it is recommended to opt for fewer and thus larger groups. 'Less is more'.

Discussions are currently taking place with regard to a single regional focus for the entire IOB. Possibilities under consideration include Sub-Saharan Africa or, more specifically, the Great Lakes Region. The committee nonetheless believes that this would result in a loss of considerable expertise with regard to other regions. Moreover, regional comparisons are stimulating to both research and education. Following the choice to stop offering education in French, the choice to specialize in the Great Lakes Region does not make sense.

The IOB has implemented performance reviews for nearly all of its staff members. The AAP and BAP performance reviews are conducted within the thematic groups. Thus far, no performance reviews have been conducted for ZAP employees. The committee recommends the implementation of performance reviews with these staff members as well.

All personnel sections are represented in the Council of the IOB. A highly developed culture of consultation exists within this body. This is discussed in further detail in Point 9 (management quality).

## 7. Quality management

In the past, the IOB has committed itself to strengthening its quality management. The CIKO employee appointed by the UA monitors the quality of the master's degree programmes. This employee talks to student focus groups that are established for each module in order to provide feedback on the education and corresponding organization. The focus group reports are discussed in the OWC. The CIKO employee also conducts the evaluation of the lecturers and discusses the outcomes with them. The UA provides courses for lecturers, which have thus far been optional. The evaluations of the ZAP are positive. The presentation of a trial lecture is always part of the selection procedure, and candidates can be declined according to these lectures. Temporary lecturers (including external lecturers) with negative evaluations are not invited again.

The IOB master's degree programme is subject to external visitation by the VLIR. It achieved accreditation in 2008. Research is evaluated every five years by the UA.

The IOB infrastructure is very good. There are adequate workspaces for staff and students, and the UA provides lecture rooms near the IOB. The library infrastructure is excellent as well.

## 8. Financial management

The financial management of the IOB is good. A large reserve has been built up in recent years, and the current policy is to use a part of these reserves for new activities related to education, research and community service (NOOCI), with another part being allocated for investment in student housing. To date, the IOB has been unable to realize the costs budgeted for NOOCI, due to strict regulations of the UA and the IOB in this area. The committee supports the use of the reserves for these purposes.

## 9. Management quality

Considerable consultation takes place within the IOB. This consensus model has both advantages and disadvantages. In addition to the IOB Council, which meets monthly and includes representatives from all personnel sections, informal consultation occurs regularly among ZAP employees, and a monthly ATP meeting is held with the IOB chair. Management tasks within the IOB are performed by the chair and the management team (which consists of the chair, the vice-chair and an academic secretary), while a large portion of the day-to-day coordination takes place within the thematic groups, each with its own convener. An education committee, a research committee and a doctoral committee are also active. The master's degree programme has a director.

The existence of all of these entities generates a high meeting pressure (higher than in similar institutes), particularly for the ZAP. Consideration should be given to ways in which some of these tasks can be combined and some of the entities eliminated. The position of the chair could be strengthened, partly in order to ensure that the culture of participation within the IOB can be accompanied by the necessary strategic direction and decision-making power.

The role of the IOB management team is not entirely clear. In addition to the chair, this team could consist of the directors of research and education, who would simultaneously be the chairs of the education and research committees. The activities of the doctoral committee could be performed by the research committee, particularly now that the regulations have been developed. Considerable

discussion appears to take place in the committee. For example, in addition to discussing the workload of students, the OWC discusses the workload of lecturers, even though this task could be performed by the education director or the IOB chair.

The IOB had planned to establish an academic advisory board during the evaluation period in order to assist the IOB with strategic choices. To date, this board has not been established. This provides the opportunity to redefine the advisory board in broader terms. An external soundboard could be sought in which both domestic and foreign scientists are involved, in addition to representatives of clients (e.g. community-service clients, potential employers of students). Such an advisory board could contribute to the consideration of short-term and long-term strategic positioning and the niche of the IOB, the benefits of the IOB as a 'large-small' institute with regard to competition and relevant policy choices (e.g. the tension between the IOB mission and the UA evaluation criteria). It could also contribute to the consideration of future topics and thematic groups within the IOB.

## 10. International and national cooperation

The IOB conducts an impressive number of collaborative projects with universities in the South, and it engages in considerable capacity building. Two thematic groups, PEG and PIP, are highly active in this area. The other thematic groups are not active in this regard. The result is that these activities are not seen as IOB activities, but activities of the thematic groups in question. When reflecting on an alternative thematic group structure, the creation of broader support for these cooperation projects could be considered.

The IOB occasionally collaborates with other universities, both domestically and abroad. There are no joint degree programmes, and it is not clear whether this type of objective would be realistic. As mentioned before, the strategy of inviting 'scholars in residence' has proven a successful means of achieving a more international staff. Both BAP and AAP staff include many foreigners, and the working language of the IOB is English.

## 11. Conclusions and recommendations

In general, the IOB is successfully fulfilling its mission, and the management agreement has played a role in this success. The merger of 2001 is now complete, and the IOB is in the process of consolidating itself. The complementarity between education, research and community service is stronger than it was five years ago. The division into four thematic groups contributed positively to this complementarity. Coherence is also being sought in relation to other IOB activities, including partnerships in the South and the doctoral programmes, although there is room for further reinforcement in this regard.

The embeddedness of the IOB within the University of Antwerp (UA) has advantages with regard to regulations for personnel management and the safeguarding of quality in education and research. This arrangement nonetheless entails a number of disadvantages as well. The UA evaluates all faculties, institutes and individuals according to the number of ISI publications and doctoral degrees. This generates tension with the mission of the IOB, which consists of three key activities: education, research and community service, with a focus on the poorest countries and the poorest population groupings.



Complementarity between the three key activities is essential. Nevertheless, individuals experience a contradiction between the advancement of their own careers and the advancement of the IOB objectives. The committee recommends that the IOB adhere to its mission, due to its relevance and proven benefits. Continued operational effectiveness will probably require action at the level of the Flemish government in order to address the tension between the IOB mandate and individual incentives. In addition, different career alternatives could be enabled within the IOB.

Another disadvantage of the embeddedness IOB within the UA involves the inferior legal status of the ATP within this facility relative to other UA departments. It is important to find a solution to this problem in order to prevent the outflow of employees.

The six ZAP vacancies that are anticipated in the coming years offer an opportunity for innovation – an ‘identity transition’ – within the IOB. The IOB is advised to begin engaging in structured reflection now concerning a new strategic positioning for the IOB, which could include the choice to integrate topics in the future. It is necessary to avoid taking decisions within the thematic groups regarding how the vacancies are to be filled. The interests of the institute as a whole should have priority. This also entails considering the possibility of a new structure for the thematic groups. The current division according to both region and topic is not entirely logical. A division based exclusively on topic would make more sense, and ‘less is more’. In concrete terms, the committee recommends drafting a policy plan for the coming five years in which clear choices are made regarding the content of the activities and topics for the new research groups.

Discussions concerning the new focus of the IOB should include as many people as possible. Internally, this includes all generations and all personnel sections. Externally, the newly planned advisory board could play a role. The discussion should not be allowed to centre on individuals. The process should start with the definition of decision criteria regarding the preservation/renewal of the topics (e.g. in terms of strategic value, international visibility, finance possibilities and the potential to increase coherence between the various tasks of the IOB).

The IOB should not focus exclusively on one region, but it should also not attempt to focus on the entire world. The committee recommends using the knowledge that is already available. Focusing on more than one region has many advantages in terms of both education and research, and it makes a comparative approach possible.

The decision to discontinue offering the master’s degree programme in French is understandable. It has consequences for the inflow of students, however, as there are now almost no students from the French-speaking countries. This decision also has consequences for the research profile of the Institute, as it rules out the possibility of an institution-wide focus on an exclusively francophone region.

The IOB has its own PhD programme. The current high number of PhD students is placing considerable pressure on the capacity to supervise them. More emphasis should be placed on the preparation of joint publications.

The consensus model within the IOB has both advantages and disadvantages. The workload with regard to meetings is high, which complicates the decision-making process. The committee recommends combining several decision bodies and strengthening the role of the chair.

The planned Academic Advisory Board does not yet exist. This provides an opportunity to redefine the advisory board and broaden its mandate. An external sounding board could be sought to encourage strategic reflection regarding the IOB's niche within a rapidly changing context and for each of the three IOB functions. Participation in the advisory board could be extended to include IOB partners (people in the South, clients).

Students are highly satisfied with their supervision, in both academic and non-academic terms. They are not satisfied about housing, however, and it is therefore advisable to invest a portion of the financial reserves to housing facilities.

The internationalization of the permanent staff is proven difficult thus far, although it has been successful with the temporary staff. The new policy plan for the coming five years should reconsider ways to achieve the objectives regarding the internationalization of the staff.

Given the present international composition of the staff, the committee recommends that the preparatory self-evaluation documents for the following management agreement be written in English.

## Abbreviations

AAP	Assisting academic staff
ATP	Technical and administrative staff
BAP	Special academic staff
CAP	Academic Personnel Committee
CERES	Research School for Resource Studies for Development
CIKO	Centre for innovation and quality management in education
IOB	Institute of Development Policy and Management
ISI	Institute for Scientific Information (part of Thomson Reuters)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NOOCI	New activities related to education, research and community service
OWC	Education Committee
UA	University Antwerp
ZAP	Tenured academic staff