

## Summary

The Institute for Environmental Studies (IVM) at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam aims to conduct excellent interdisciplinary research and teaching with actionable outcomes for addressing sustainability challenges, in short '**science for sustainability**'. We are a thriving community of around 110 natural and social science researchers trying to create **an academic culture** characterized by **a flat organization** with **low bars for collaboration** fostering exchange of ideas across departments and levels of seniority. Our research is organized around **six thematic sustainability challenges**: biodiversity, climate, energy, food, land, and water, and **four scientific approaches**: system thinking & integration; cross-scale & multilevel; inter- & transdisciplinary; and, impact driven & actionable. The common thematic challenges and scientific approaches are operationalized within and across **IVM's four departments**: Environmental Economics (EE), Environmental Geography (EG), Environmental Policy Analysis (EPA), and Water and Climate Risk (WCR).

In 2021, **IVM celebrates 50 years of sustainability research**, making us the oldest academic research institute in the Netherlands working on environmental issues. The institute has changed considerably since the previous evaluation seven years ago. A reorganization in 2013 and 2014 put huge pressure on the organization, resulting in redundancies and staff leaving. Only by taking vigorous measures (e.g. increasing teaching, cautious hiring, exploring new grant opportunities) have we retained **financial and organizational stability**, establishing a harmonious and positive working environment for staff to pursue excellent and impactful research. As a result, **IVM has grown substantially** over the past three years in terms for staff, teaching and external funding. Marking the start of a new era in the institute's history, **IVM also moved** into the newly built 'New University' building in 2020.

The cutting edge **research quality** of IVM's team is demonstrated **by traditional indicators** such as high number of publications (about six articles per year per research FTE) in top journals (e.g. Nature and Science) with high citation numbers (e.g. four IVM researchers are among the top-1 per cent most cited worldwide). IVM's quality is also visible using **alternative indicators**, such as policy impact (e.g. reports with reference to IVM research is published by international organizations); high number of projects carried out with societal partners (e.g. Amsterdam Municipality, the Dutch Government, the European Union, the World Bank, companies and NGOs), and high uptake of our research in (inter)national press (e.g. the Guardian, New York Times, Dutch Television). We are also increasingly working towards mainstreaming **open science**, e.g. by co-creating projects, publishing open access articles, and creating freely available models, code and datasets. We consider research quality and **societal relevance** as mutually dependent **goals**: staff is encouraged to work together with societal stakeholders and IVM has strategic partnerships with companies (e.g. Deltares) and public agencies (e.g. KNMI and PBL), sharing professors and PhD candidates, collaborating on projects and arranging common events. We also integrate our research into the 58 master and bachelor courses that IVM staff are teaching at VU and other universities, **training the sustainability leaders** of the future.

Internally, IVM has worked hard to create **a conducive environment for PhD candidates, postdoctoral scholars and other talents to succeed**. We have an elaborate **PhD policy and training program**, ranging from tailor-made personal development plans and tight relationships between supervisors and candidates, as well as, fostering a positive social experience, e.g. by encouraging an active PhD community and arranging social events. For early career staff, our new tenure-track policy provides clarity and stability regarding expectations. We are also working towards a more balanced HRM policy on recognition and reward, acknowledging that different types of people are needed in a successful organization.

Looking ahead, IVM has a solid organizational and financial basis to stand on, and continues working on **becoming a future-proof and resilient organization**. The large influx of new people, new trends in sustainability research and external challenges, requires us to **revisit our governance model** and think about how we can **become more inclusive**. We also recognize that addressing **high work-pressure**, balancing research with teaching and administration, is essential to reach our goals of becoming a more inclusive and diverse organization, better able to address sustainability challenges of tomorrow.