

Lodz University of Technology

Assessment report in the first competition under the “Excellence Initiative – Research University” programme

1st criterion - substantive quality of an application:

- a) the quality of a SWOT analysis with respect to the objectives referred to in paragraph 4 of Communication from the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 26 March 2019 on the first competition under the “Excellence Initiative – Research University” programme, including the quality of the analysis used to identify priority research areas;
- b) conciseness and concreteness of the SWOT analysis and the plan;
- c) relevance of the identification of the specific objectives referred to in paragraph 6(2)(a) and paragraph 8 of Communication from the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 26 March 2019 on the first competition under the “Excellence Initiative – Research University” programme in relation to the SWOT analysis results;
- d) appropriateness of the indicators chosen to describe the university’s potential and to measure the extent of the objectives’ attainment;

Substantiation

a) The efforts made towards a detailed SWOT analysis are appreciated. However, the analysis is not self-consistent, and its “summary” is somewhat deficient. It turns out to be difficult to deduce, from the analysis, the strong and weak points of the university, although some of them appear clearly. It is opaque how the analysis leads to the five POBs: how did they go (in their own words) from “over a dozen strong and unique research specialisation to five priorities”? During the interview they failed in clarifying this issue. Priorities are too wide in scope. The objectives are mostly relevant, but very general, like “Continued support for high quality in research” without real novelty. The SWOT analysis is very long and meticulous indeed. The reviewers are convinced that the best parts of the university have been identified. However, the Excellence Initiative is about future plans, goals, visions and a dedicated management to carry out the necessary changes. We recommend orientating the results of the SWOT precisely in this direction.

b) The Plan and the SWOT are neither concise nor concrete. Therefore, it is considered that they are not sufficiently well explained to give the proposal the necessary quality.

c) The TUL Plan follows the six key areas indicated in the proposal guidelines and define, and describe, objectives for each of the six areas (14 objectives in total). They are reasonably well written. 32 specific actions are described, including timing and resources. The objectives fail in focusing.

d) The mandatory and the optional indicators describe the potential of the university. Indicators are sometimes too ambitious; even unattainable. Others seem fine. Choosing 11 “extra” indicators is exaggerated. However, they refer to employee exit, employee engagement, training intensity, and other issues of interest.

2nd criterion - relevance of assumed objectives to enhancing the international significance of the university's activity:

- a) the extent to which specific objectives contribute to attaining the objectives referred to in paragraph 4 of Communication from the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 26 March 2019 on the first competition under the “Excellence Initiative – Research University” programme;**
- b) sustainability of specific objectives after the plan implementation period, taking into account, in particular, actions to be carried out in 2026.**

Substantiation

a) LUT proposal points to its update at the national level and their wish for continuity of the actions already in progress. There is too little information on how they will implement the actions and they show a lack of internationally renowned researchers working at the university in the POBs. The objectives are mostly relevant and could be given support. However, they seem to be too general to induce real changes. An objective like “Seeking to identify new areas and opportunities for research cooperation with internationally renowned scientific institutions, and their pursuit” can be called relevant. However, it is unclear what it is really meant. The same applies to the objective “Continual improvement of the teaching staff skills and competencies.” “Increasing the number of staff with great research competence, in particular of young scientists” deserves support, but the application, in the Plan section, does not give specific actions about how they want to do it. Taking into account the limited amount of resources one would have expected, more focussing in a few issues that could really facilitate one step forward towards a higher quality of research, including internationalisation and education. For these reasons specific objectives will contribute only partly to attain the objectives of the Excellence Initiative.

b) The sustainability of the objectives remains unclear from the 12 actions described for 2026. The proposal uses a language as if this support would be a simple research project with concrete research goals. A comprehensive ex-post evaluation is obviously the first step. Other actions like “Continued dissemination of project results” and “Continued promotion of the project” indicate a misunderstanding of the goal of the whole Excellence Initiative.

3rd criterion - adequacy of described actions to the assumed objectives:

- a) appropriateness of the actions selected, including actions of ground-breaking and innovative nature, in the context of the specific objectives' implementation;**
- b) feasibility of the activities given the university's potential and budget;**

Substantiation

a) LUT application gives 32 actions to attain the assumed objectives. This makes the allocation of the funding spread over too many different actions. Actions like “Establishing conceptual framework for Centres of Excellence & Innovation Labs” will not contribute to the objectives of the Excellence Initiative. “Development and implementation of information acquisition and distribution system and a compatible IT system” are certainly not appropriate to make ground breaking research and breakthrough innovations. The most disturbing component of the proposal is Action 19, which is “Establishing Centres of Excellence and Innovation Labs (CoEIL)” using nearly half of the funding (47.3%) applied for. Since the concept of the CoEIL (action 1) is not yet clear, it is strange to apply for a significant amount of money for a non-conceptualised “Centre”. On top of this, most of the funding is labelled for buying equipment. Action 10 is a fund for knowledge transfer, which is a very important aspect of the proposal. The amount of resources devoted to it seems to be too low to be successful. In general actions are not innovative. Buying equipment may be necessary, but it is unclear how the application prioritises equipment and how TUL will cover the extra funding for maintenance, technicians and all that comes with new generation equipment. This aspect was discussed at depth during the interview.

b) The feasibility of actions will be very difficult to attain. A too large part of the budget is devoted to actions without leverage on international development (e.g. IT system and buying equipment). The SWOT analysis and the plan indicate that actions, given the university's potential and budget, will not be entirely feasible.

4th criterion - potential of the university in terms of:

- a) the impact of the university's research activity on the development of world science, especially in priority research areas;**
- b) research collaboration with research institutions of high international reputation, especially in priority research areas;**
- c) the quality of education provision for students and doctoral training, especially in fields of study and disciplines of science related to priority research areas;**
- d) the solutions deployed for the professional development of the university's staff, especially young scientists;**
- e) the quality of university governance and management;**
- f) other specific objectives to raise the international significance of the university's activities if these objectives have been determined in the plan.**

Substantiation

- a) The impact of the university's research activity on the development of world science is rather low and the potential in terms of impact in research activity is weak. The university would need a very strong scientific leadership to get there. The most prominent senior scientists on – the otherwise too broad POBs – do not have high achievements. The mere fact that in the case of young researchers they do not name 5 on any POB is a sign of weak performance. In view of the proposals contained in the application, and the research staff indicated in the POBs, and other indicators, it is difficult to believe that TUL will become significantly better in terms of the objectives set up by "Excellence Initiative", including priority areas.
- b) Research collaboration with research institutions of high international reputation is rather low and they propose to use the funding they apply for internationally promote the university. So far TUL's level of internationalisation is not impressive. The actions proposed will not make the situation much better. Allocating some funds to invite foreign prestigious researchers for short visits will not make the difference.
- c) The quality of education provision for students and doctoral training is not very well addressed, therefore, it cannot be judged appropriately.
- d) The solutions deployed for the professional development of the university's staff, especially young scientists are addressed properly.
- e) The quality of university governance and management judging from the quality of the proposal has to improve significantly.

Summary of assessment

LUT has presented a proposal where some of the strengths and weaknesses of the university have been identified through the SWOT analysis. The SWOT analysis is very long and meticulous indeed. The effort is well appreciated, although the SWOT could have been sharper in identifying opportunities that the Excellence Initiative may provide, particularly in pointing at the actual potential of the university. Some hotspots of excellence within the university have been identified. The POBs in themselves are fine, but the process to choose them remains obscure. The reviewers are convinced that the best parts of the university have been pinpointed. However, the Excellence Initiative is about future plans, goals, visions and a dedicated management to carry out the necessary changes. The objectives identified by LUT are mostly relevant, but too general to induce real changes. The Plan to get to the objectives and its specific proposals (32 actions) are variable in quality. While some are well focused others are not. It is recognised, however, that according to the arguments expressed by TUL, the process to get to POBs and to the main objectives was rigorous and well elaborated. In consequence one would have expected a right balance between a wider scope issues and concrete goals. TUL is close to hitting the right balance, but the proposal did not get there. Some actions, and particularly the action proposed to establishing CoEILs, were discussed

during the interview. The panel was not convinced that this action is feasible, and it makes it difficult to judge whether the proposal is realistic. The panel questions as well the validity of the proposed equipment programme. It is unclear if new equipment will make any difference in quality of research in the short, medium and long term. The potential of the university in terms of the impact of the university's research activity on the development of world science is not yet sufficiently strong. There are not enough high quality research leaders to sustain the proposed POBs. With the exception of a few researchers in chemistry, the h-indexes of senior researchers are not high, and it seems that the university needs to develop a more proactive recruitment strategy for young researchers. The above arguments are not to say that the idea of "Centres of excellence and innovation labs" should not be pursued. It may be an excellent idea if developed conveniently, focused on research, and as a long term project within the university. It is the reviewers impression that the university would benefit from revisiting its governance and management system. The action proposed by LUT related to technology transfer and spin-offs development is good. This proposal must be applauded, but the resources allocated fall too short to have medium and long-term impact, and this activity seems to be too isolated within the LUT system. Overall the proposal does not convince the panel that LUT is yet among Poland's top 10 research universities. The panel recommends that the first priority for the university would be to focus on recruitment, and develop a cohesive improvement plan for the university to reach the higher national level. The panel encourages LUT to persist in its efforts to become a research university.

Total score

20.5 / 40

Recommendation

Negative