

## Medical University of Lodz

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

#### 1<sup>st</sup> 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

This is a good quality application, with an extensive and clear SWOT analysis, and a clear plan, with a close connection between objectives, actions and indicators. The plan builds on 2 strengths: the CKD campus with state-of-the-art infrastructure and the established close interaction with 3 clinics. There is a good balance in the plan between support for research, core facilities, international research collaborations (66%) and other actions (33%). The two PRAs, healthy aging and civilization diseases and biomedical sciences and public health seem well chosen but are excessively broad. The application makes repeated reference to “core” membership of EIT Health consortium. (The university is indeed the only university member of EIT Health in Poland). It is not made clear what the tangible benefits of this membership have been, or how they might be achieved in the future (in terms of the excellence initiative). The list of the most important research grants in the years 2014-18 (not classified by the selected PRAs) show very heavy reliance on EIT. Several of the objectives have apparently very impressive levels of financial support from other sources (e.g. the CKD campus and the ŁÓDŹ LIVING LAB). The added value of the funding requested seems minor in comparison. It is not clear to us how the new model of PhD training corrects the perceived weaknesses and none of the proposed actions directly address this; it was not clarified at interview. Even after the interview it remains unclear what is the status of the proposed interdisciplinary teams, and how they will fit into the academic structure of the institution. Assessment of current

weaknesses acknowledges the need to develop schemes to incentivise researchers. Neither the written submission nor the interview made clear what these may be. Concerning deeper interaction with regional universities, there appears to be enthusiasm for project-based collaboration but not full integration/federation.

**2<sup>nd</sup> 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**

The proposal for an internal grant system remains somewhat confusing. The summarised plan is weak on sustainability, simply asserting that the actions obtained will improve international impact, quality of research etc., stating that maintenance of the proposed activities requires continued government funding after 2025. The UMED plan clearly focusses on translational research, for which a number of state-of-the-art facilities and core facilities are available/ will be set up. The advantage of this specific approach is its sustainability beyond the excellence initiative program. Much of the methodology described for monitoring progress is generic. Specific targets 1-3 (citation rates etc.) are based on extrapolations of historical performance—presumably implying that no beneficial effect is expected of the measures proposed in this application. Some of the indicators for success of proposed actions are weak; e.g. the improvement of educational provision, measured solely by the student/staff ratio. Improvements in personal development of staff are to be based on future reviews of best practice elsewhere. This should partly have been done already as any delay in conducting the review will substantially shorten the time available to achieve results. Plans for sustainability of actions assume continuation of the new programmes and indicate substantial funding gaps, with the University expecting to cover a small proportion from “its own” funds. Some of the figures in this section appear internally inconsistent. The underlying assumption is that all the new programmes will need to continue (except for “Programme Lean” and Business Intelligence Tools. Cooperation with other scientific institutions (Lodz Technical University, University of Lodz, Polish Academy of Sciences Institutes) is mentioned but not elaborated upon. A federation is proposed (not a merger) in the written proposal but it was clear from the interview that this was not a priority.

**3<sup>rd</sup> 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

The major action (research grant programme = 42M PLN of a total of 130M PLN) is clearly what is needed to address the objectives of the excellence initiative: an internal research grant system, based on excellence, with an external peer review board (SAB), with intentions to enforce existing teams AND start up new research teams, based on excellence. However, the interview was not convincing and did not clarify the intended process. Internationalisation of the scientist and PhD student demography is not ambitious enough and insufficient thought has been given how to address this. While some correlation is made between “content areas” and the specified objectives of the funding scheme, it is not clear why the proposal has been complicated by reference to three “activities”, three (different) “content areas”, and the objectives of the scheme. A Strategic Partnerships Programme is proposed with commercial companies – building on a handful of current agreements. The university has commercial income and a technology transfer ambition, which is positive.

**4<sup>th</sup> 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

In terms of the recent national assessment, the achievement of 4 A, of which one was A+, is impressive. Most of the prominent researchers, listed in the applications, are indeed prominent (very good to top). There is quite some potential present in the prominent young scientists listed in the application. On the other hand, the normalized citation index for the 2 selected PRAs are for the time being quite low: 1.1 and 1.3 respectively (vs 1.1 for the univ as a whole). It is repeatedly

asserted that “The Medical University of Lodz is the fastest rising medical school in Poland” without full justification. The data presented on (e.g. publications, citations, etc.) are related to other universities (including international comparators) only in terms of total publications. It is also claimed that “Outside of Poland, UMED in Lodz is the most recognized Polish medical university, thanks to the developed strategy of increasing the importance of international cooperation.”, but it is not clear what the evidence is for this. Elsewhere the claim is modified to “UMED in Lodz is one of the most recognized medical universities outside of Poland.” Amongst the eleven “greatest scientific achievements of UMED in Lodz in recent years” are listed some very routine achievements, e.g. accreditation of the Testing Laboratory of the Animal House.

### Summary of assessment

There are strengths revealed in this proposal and aspects of current activity provide a strong base for potential success, such as the recent major investment in the CKD campus. There are, however, substantial weaknesses to the proposal and important aspects that need more thought, for example, the recruitment ambition and strategy of international scientists are lacking. Overall, there is a sense that the university leadership believes that “more of the same” will achieve a significant rise in international stature while a bolder strategic approach is needed. The panel would encourage the university to continue its internal development towards becoming a research university, in this process it may become beneficial to form partnerships or strategic alliances with other universities.

### Total score

23.5 / 40

### Recommendation

Negative