

Pedagogical University of Cracow

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 SWOT analysis of PUC fits the scope of the present policy, paragraph 4. PUC's main mission is to educate teachers, its main plan is to raise the quality of teaching teachers by expanding and intensifying research efforts (now only 5% of the budget is allocated to research) and developing international relations (by ICAS and the visiting professors program). The SWOT analysis catalogues a good number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, although without any further explanations. The SWOT analysis is an honest assessment of where PUC stands and as such a strong motivation for change. Which is to be applauded. The priority research areas selected are a reflection of available relative strength and future potential. They are rather many given the size of the university, and only partly immediately linked to teacher education. Two out of seven. Behind this is the idea that a good up-to-date research performance in relevant disciplines in itself will contribute to a better and more up-to-date teaching of teachers.

b) The SWOT analysis is concise and its elements are taken up in the plan. It is, however, not very well structured and its elements are not being annotated.

c) The specific objectives chosen are mostly reflecting elements identified in the SWOT analysis. Due to the rather matter-of-fact presentation of the analysis it is not always easy to follow exactly how and to which degree objectives and SWOT elements are connected. The analysis mentions 'infrastructure restraints and insufficient laboratory facilities' as one of the many weaknesses. Yet

in the plan this is one of the few real priorities (30,000,000 PLN, by far the largest single allocation in the plan). At such an issue one would expect a much deeper analysis.

d) The indicators chosen are appropriate. It may, however, take more time to reach the indicated levels.

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) PUC's specific objections are in line with the objectives of paragraph 4. It is questionable, however, whether they will have the desired impact within the given timeframes. Substantially improving internationally visible research output by introducing a new internal grant system requires a long chain of improvements and a relatively long period of successful implementation. Similarly the realization of the internationalization agenda (i.a. via the ICAS platform and the Doctoral School) will take a considerable period of time, even if it were sufficiently attractive to partners and participants from abroad. Also in the case of staff development the expected impact of the move towards a strongly stimulating and supportive culture is certainly welcome. Yet it is probably overoptimistic to expect such effects to take place within the indicated timeline. On top of this, PUC plans to invest heavily in research equipment as a foundation for improved research. The indicated timeline of investments is 3 years. The impact will then follow, at a later date.

b) As to the sustainability in 2026 and afterwards the plan simply states that 8 actions will be continued with a reduced budget, while 2 budgets are being reserved for an audit of the university's performance in 2020-25 and the preparation of an application for the second edition of the present policy. No explanation is given how considerably reduced budgets will nevertheless warrant continuation at the same level.

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) The plan foresees 10 specific actions, the majority of which are to support grant applications, a number of excellence initiatives and the ICAS. The single largest budget, however, is reserved for equipment and facilities. It is unclear how these actions relate to the attractive set of success factors the plan lists: '1. Strategic management: efficient cascading and management of attainment of strategic goals. Consistent planning, organising, monitoring, assessment of effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of sub-strategies and completing tasks in the areas of teaching and research, as well as administration of the University. 2. High level of the main processes of the University: scientific and research process and teaching process – monitored on an on- going basis. 3. High level of the sub-processes supporting the main processes: professional management and leadership at the level of rectors and institutes. Competent and committed administration. 4. Efficient and active communication with all stakeholders: Internal: employees: vertical and horizontal, research staff – administration, staff – students, students – students (of all levels); With the University environment: university – alumni, university – stakeholders 5. Reliable and consistent promotion and conscious shaping of the University's image.' These are all developments of internal processes, attitude and culture. Given strong leadership and substantial support by the academic community PUC can certainly make progress. Surprisingly, among the 5 success factors the development of the research and teaching & learning to the next level - which is the aim of all actions - is missing.

b) The general direction of the plan is to be applauded. One would, however, expect more focus and cohesion, and a stronger sense of time. PUC clearly has quite a development to realize. This takes time, probably more than suggested.

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-b) PUC aims at growth and a quality boost in research by selecting 7 POBs. They are, however, of a rather different nature. And one may ask, What is the core of the planned research development

in POBs and ICAS? Only 2 out of 7 are education-related. It is difficult to see a clear and internationally attractive profile here. The research priorities do not seem to be reflecting the mainstream of comparable teacher training institutes abroad. The plans to better stimulate and support younger generation researchers and enhance international visibility are well conceived and will in due time certainly bear fruit.

c-e) As to the other goals (on quality of education, governance and management, and professional development) feasibility seems less of a problem. Realization of the plan does, however, require quite a turn-around compared to the status quo that the SWOT analysis depicts. It would be very good if PUC would definitely go into the planned direction, also when they will not be successful in the present competition. The present commitment would be a good starting point for future strategies.

Summary of assessment

There is no doubt that the planned development would be beneficial to PUC. In terms of first steps on a long journey. So one hopes that the institution does go into the direction indicated. For PUC to qualify in terms of the present policy instrument the plan is not strong enough, especially in terms of the research priorities chosen. The point of departure (the status quo in terms of research performance and international visibility) is far from where PUC is heading. So there is quite a lot to improve. In addition, the plan itself is not fully coherent. On both grounds one may question the achievability of the present plan. Additionally, one would wish there were better prospects for local collaboration with other high calibre research and teaching institutions in the interest of facility sharing, collaboration in research and international visibility. It would also allow PUC to concentrate on its mission as an up-to-date teacher training / educational research institute instead of going for two profiles at the same time: a teachers college and a research institution in its own right. So it is highly recommended that PUC continues to work with ambition towards a good international level of performance, rethinks its profile as a leading institution for educating teachers in a research-driven setting, and resets its plans to more realistic timelines and chains of impact.

Total score

20.5 / 40

Recommendation

Negative