

University of Silesia in Katowice

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 shows a thorough and good understanding of the challenges and opportunities, strengths and weaknesses, and how they might interact. They have a clear strategic vision and reasons for choosing the 5 priority research areas (PRAs) and justify choosing the PRAs by reference to bibliometric data, the university's mission, the region's, Poland's and the EU's development goals, as well as the UN sustainable development goals - but may be too diffuse and ambitious in nature. Would the University be able to make an internationally visible contribution?
- b) The lengthy SWOT analysis and plan identifies a large number of specific objectives. The plan requires a change in culture, organisation and management for the University. The leadership explained in the interview that the change programme was already underway in the University. The plan does not explain how the university would go about establishing enough critical mass in order to tackle the tasks set out in PRAs. It is not clear that the proposed actions to strengthen management are sufficient in order to change the culture of the institution, although it was clarified that the recently introduced HR system should help enable these actions.
- c) The objectives identified are relevant to the plan and meet the objectives of paragraphs 6(2)(a) and 8.

d) The indicators chosen by the University are in some cases too ambitious (e.g. 33% increase in top 10% publications and citation rate by 2025), whereas some indicators, such as for international staff and students, seem rather limited.

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) The specific objectives set by the University are relevant to enhancing the international significance of its activity and address the objectives of paragraph 4. They are laudable but not realistic within the given timeframe and projected resources. The analysis and planning process has not been clearly described and shown in the report, which makes it a little opaque to understand how conclusions were achieved. The university intends to strengthen cooperation with the best international institutions and scholars, which is of course right, but how would it make itself a partner of choice? There is a lack of focus on foreign accreditation and the challenge of finding international partners, especially outside of Europe. The SWOT shows that University currently recruits its students from the region and that recruitment and collaboration with other institutions in Poland are limited. The specific objectives are fine, but some are unlikely to be met based on the past track record and the uplift required.

b) The plan describes how the University will monitor implementation with audits of the academic staff performance and development of new research project strategies, revision of the and teaching alignment with PRAs controlled. This will need significant culture change and performance management, which is not discussed in any detail in the plan, but were expanded upon in the interview. In terms of sustainability, which concrete actions will continue beyond 2026? The longer-term plans would benefit from greater clarity, and it is hard to judge if the plans would be sustainable.

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) University has developed a comprehensive set of actions to support its development plan. However, the scope of actions is so wide that it is very hard to judge whether the sum of interventions will actually lead to major changes that the SWOT demonstrates necessary and the selected priority research areas identify. The plan relies on changing the behaviour and attitudes of the staff and on implementing organisational change. However, even with strong leadership this would take time, even allowing for the fact that the change programme is underway (as explained in the interview). The plan lacks sufficient detail and clarity in places. It appears that if additional resources are being granted these will be spread rather thinly across existing units which would operate under new headings aligned with UN development goals.

b) It would appear that the individual actions are mostly feasible within the projected budget. However, it is not clear that there is the necessary leadership and focus to deliver this ambitious plan, even though the intentions are very good. The plans fall short in providing a working roadmap to achieve the goals that have been set and although all these development areas are worthy, the plan does not demonstrate that they are developed in an actionable way. The proposed activities may be feasible within the budget, but there is only limited information available to judge the viability. The key issue is whether the activities would be sufficient to deliver the change needed from the SWOT and identified in the specific objectives, in the time available.

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) In the timescale to 2025, the university may impact world science in a few areas such as polar research and Earth Sciences which fall under one of the selected priority areas, and the plan demonstrates willingness to prioritise the best performing scientists within the university. However, in general the potential appears low in the timescale and the University is placed 1001+ in the THE

2020 World Rankings, although the reviewers recognised the high standing of UoS in Earth Sciences (and related areas).

b) The plans do not clearly set out how they would achieve research collaboration with institutions of high international reputation on a scale which would influence reputation. It would require a significant change from a national to international perspective by staff in the University. How would it become a partner of choice?

c) The university has potential to better realign educational offerings with priority research areas, however, the selected PRAs are so general, that it may prove difficult to do so in practical terms.

d) The university understands that recruitment and rejuvenation of its academic staff must become a priority, and measures are included in the plan. The methodology appears to lack innovation and is very similar to its competitor universities, although the HR processes (HRS4R) would contribute strongly here.

e) University governance and management seems traditional but the SWOT demonstrates willingness to set very high goals. It is a strong vision but it is not clear that there is the capacity to deliver. The recently introduced HR processes may help this to happen.

f) Other specific objectives in the plan include hosting international conferences to raise its international profile, which is a good idea, but there is an opportunity for wider engagement and recruitment. The Panel also encourages further international engagement as demonstrated by the existing UoS/Beijing collaboration.

Summary of assessment

The University of Silesia at Katowice has provided a detailed analysis and an objective assessment in its SWOT of its current position and made a number of good recommendations. The ambitions of the University are very high and possibly higher than the current and prospective resource envelope can justify. The Reviewers understand that the basis of the proposal is around the vision and transformation of essentially a teaching-oriented university into one with a much greater research focus. The Panel remains keen to encourage the UoS to follow this new path. The next step for the university would be to realistically appraise how it would implement the recommendations in the SWOT and possibly revisit the selected research priority areas in light of the university's actual capacity rather than a plan based on perceived international mega-trends. This is an ambitious plan, with five priority research areas, which are internationally highly competitive and aligned with national, international and UN goals. This is laudable with respect to the intentions of the University, but very challenging. Although they are ambitious and have chosen relevant areas of research, that carry the promise of potential contributions to current social and technological problems, there are significant gaps in the proposal. There is little information that allows reviewers to understand how they plan to develop the research capabilities to make an efficient use of the budget, build competence in the staff, improve Internationalisation and quickly raise the quality of research and

education. The SWOT analysis objectively identifies the way forward but the plan lacks detail and clarity in some areas. The plan is based on a substantial change programme, strong leadership and a willingness by the staff to change the way they work. It was understood from the interview and response that this change programme is well underway and the University is clearly making progress in its cultural transformation, shift in emphasis to research and has developed a suitable HR process. A significant shift in international recognition for the University would need to be achieved from the specific plans and objectives given, and it is not clear that this would happen. All this would have to be delivered whilst simultaneously improving the quality of research and education and meeting the specific objectives within a five-year time period. Overall, in its present form, based on the information provided, it is hard to see how these ambitious plans could be delivered and achieve the performance shown in the indicators in the timescale. It is recommended that the University continue to implement its change programme and clarify its plans to move to a position where its capacity to achieve its future goals could be met within the timescales of subsequent funding competitions and this would then ensure a far higher likelihood of success. The reviewers recommend:

- The University is encouraged to continue to develop its research and evolve the culture to allow the University to further raise its research performance and further build its international position.
- Increasing the number of areas of excellence (within the suggested Priority Research Areas) to gain international recognition and strengthen the University's competitive position.
- Research collaboration with other international universities will help develop the University.

Total score

25.0 / 40

Recommendation

Negative