

1st Progress Review Conference of the Universities participating in the “Excellence Initiative – Research University” programme

PRE-EVENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Uniwersytet Przyrodniczy we Wrocławiu / Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences

1) Which of your university’s original objectives (when applying for a 10% increase in funding) have been chosen to retain having received a lower funding level? How is progress being reviewed?

UPWr step by step implements the actions described within the six goals of the project using both internal and external financial sources, including the 2% subvention increase.

The main focus is on:

- i. strengthening and supporting Leading Research Groups (LRG),
- ii. the development of the Doctoral School;
- iii. increasing international cooperation with scientific institutions and business.

For the next 6 years, starting in 2020, LRGs receive support including co-financing for scientific publications, internships and conferences (goal 1, goal 2), training supporting the development of individual career paths (goal 4). The LRG Committee assesses the applications and controls the expenditures. After two years the LRGs work will be a subject of external evaluation (goal 5).

Development of the Doctoral School (goal 3) has been implemented by two programs: 1) training and dissemination fund and 2) a research voucher, which are supervised by the Doctoral School Council. The UPWr financial support was also dedicated to the most talented Master students within the “Young Minds” programme (goal 6).

UPWr internationalisation has been implemented in research and business cooperation (goal 2, goal 6) by: joint research applications (mainly within H2020 Programme); post-doc offers (Ulama Programme by NAWA); UPWr joining the Bio-based Industries Consortium (BIC). In terms of administrative support (goal 5) the organizational structure has been changed, including creating new units.

2) Which measures have been added, deleted or modified following the recommendation of the reviewers? What changes to university strategy and policy have been made in the light of evaluation and the outcome of the funding competition?

The recommendations of the reviewers brought a critical look at the University strategy and allowed to position UPWr in relation to other leading research & educational institutions in Poland and, more importantly, in Europe.

Insufficiently monitored threats and obstacles that may emerge on the road to scientific and operational excellence have gained due importance and were a turning point to update existing and create a set of new Critical Success Factors (i.e. CSF1: Development of IT Infrastructure, CSF2: Systemic Local Academic Cooperation, CSF3: International Cooperation, CSF4: External International Evaluation, CSF5: Human Resources development).

New strategy and approach gained final endorsement by electing prof. Jarosław Bosa (Project Coordinator of the IDUB application) as new UPWr Rector which confirms that UPWr community identifies with the research-oriented vision of University.

To embrace the spectrum of activities, defining UPWr as a leading and comprehensive University, the allocation of financial resources (internal funds and 2% subvention increase) were assigned to continue structural reforms in UPWr management, research and education. The new University Statute is a basis for major changes (see point 6.) including financial policy. In order to meet the expectations of academic staff, doctoral students and students, a pool of research support funds has been created allowing for settlement projects in two-year cycles and fully covering the needs of each group.

3) Did the university change/reduce the Priority Research Areas (POBs)? What is the scope of such change?

The University is not aiming at reducing the number of disciplines – quite the opposite. At the present stage, the Rector of the University has taken steps to establish a new discipline Social and Economic Geography and Spatial Management in the field of Social Sciences. This has perfectly complemented the POB - Environment with social and urban dimension which is of great importance in climate change and environmental aspects.

The research projects (e.g. FoodSHIFT2030 - H2020) acquired by staff members representing social sciences and their high quality scientific publications have proved significant research improvement that led to establishment of the new Leading Research Group named "Sustainable cities and regions".

Therefore intensive activities were undertaken by UPWr authorities to support scientific research within the social sciences. UPWr management board is convinced that such a development model is suitable for implementation in other disciplines at university.

4) What concrete measures has the university taken to encourage cutting edge research? What evidence can you provide of continuing promotion of research excellence at the highest levels of the university? Has this been achieved using alternative sources of funding, apart from the 2% subvention increase?

New mechanisms for financing scientific research have been developed with an aim to support the cutting edge research on all stages of scientific career. Starting from the youngest adepts of science - a program dedicated for most talented Master students "Młode Umysły - Young Minds Project" has been set up.

Next, the wide range of financial support is intended for doctoral students: a) training and dissemination fund (e.g. workshops, conference and summer schools participation, increase of doctoral scholarship), b) "Voucher for a doctoral student" dedicated to doctoral students starting their scientific activity in the first 2-year period; c) "Innovative PhD student" - doctoral students and non-doctoral academic staff up to 30-year old may apply to finance a traineeship, research materials etc.

On the subsequent stage of scientific career post-doc researchers are supported within the "Innovative Scientist" Programme that includes financing publications, participation in conferences/training, fixed assets above 10k PLN business trips etc. These activities are financed both from the University own funds and from the 2% subvention increase.

Additional funds obtained from international programmes at national and European level: H2020 Programme (Societal Challenges, Widening Participation, Industrial Leadership), NAWA (e.g. International Academic Partnership, PROM), NCN (e.g. ALPHORN), NCBR (e.g. ERA-NET initiatives), INTERREG (Central Europe, Poland-Saxony) confirm scientific excellence and promote the research not only internally at the University, but most of all increase UPWr visibility in the University rankings on the local and international arena.

5) What progress has been made regarding establishment of a federation or merging with other institutions from the region, particularly in case of universities which received relevant recommendations?

As one of the universities from the local academic community participating in the IDUB competition, UPWr has taken the initiative to cooperate with the Wrocław University of Technology (WUST) and the Wrocław Medical University (WMU) by creating the nucleus of the "Wrocław Centre of Technology and Prevention of Cardiovascular and Cancer Diseases (Wroc-Net)" - an initiative towards a future university federation.

UPWr intensifies activities aimed at confederation with public higher institutions in Wrocław: University of Wrocław - Research University (UWr), Wrocław University of Technology (WUST), Wrocław Medical University (WMU). The steps taken are related to recognize common areas of research and education that aim to define joint priority research areas (POB) as well international joint graduate programmes for Wrocław academic community.

UPWr is already experienced in joint projects for doctoral students: i) Interdisciplinary Environmental Doctoral Studies in Biotechnology and Nanotechnology "BioTechNan" - joint project with WUST, UWr, Institute of Immunology and Experimental Therapy Polish Academy of Sciences; ii) ProHum joint project with WMU - dedicated to PhD students conducting research in veterinary and medical sciences, including groundbreaking pre-clinical research on an experimental animal model.

6) What steps is your university taking in order to increase the likelihood of enhanced levels of funding being secured in future rounds of the IDUB programme?

UPWr authorities are consistently following the strategy outlined in IDUB project concerning all aspects of University: research, education and management & administration.

The structural reforms are being performed based on the new University Statute and other specific regulations. The major change in the management is establishment of new bodies next to the ones currently operating: University Council and Scientific Disciplines Council. Moreover, the new "Organizational Regulations" improve internal UPWr organization and refine the powers and responsibilities of the UPWr administrative units, giving also a space for new entities (e.g. Centre for Project Implementation & Finance Management) that are aimed at creating a research-friendly environment. The new "Employee remuneration regulations" elaborated in line with HR Strategy (HRS4R) ensure attractive and stable working conditions.

The series of structural reforms resulted in organization of research around scientific disciplines and 16 Leading Research Groups (LRGs) whereas education rests within faculties and recently guidelines have been prepared for the establishment of Leading Didactic Groups (LDGs).

The undertaken actions include among others: international short- and mid-term visits aiming at joint research applications that have reflected in the co-authorship of recent scientific publications; recruitment of international doctoral students for each discipline.

7) The worldwide impact of measures and limitations introduced as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic should be taken into account in the implementation planning, and institutions should be driven by the will to maintain strategic development as planned. The good use of digital means of communication has a crucial role to play. Thus, universities should see to it that they are up to this challenge. What actions have been taken by your university in order to reduce the negative impact of the pandemic on the implementation of the university development strategy?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many actions have been taken to improve the functioning of the University in many areas, including both research and student education. In response to the ongoing situation, a fund has been created to sustain research capacity. This provides an opportunity to spend resources actively, especially those related to international mobility on a two-year cycle. A number of activities have been undertaken to annex all projects financed from external sources.

All activities within international projects have been implemented with the usage of remote communication. UPWr conducted a number of training courses dedicated to employees within the framework of innovative e-learning and redefined current resources. New directions of activity were set out by engaging own resources and those obtained within the POWER project. The activities focused on on-line conversion of the didactic resources and development and modernisation of the university's own platform for remote work.

Uniwersytet Przyrodniczy we Wrocławiu
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During spring semester 2019/2020 the number of online courses increased over 10 times (from 160 courses up to over 1750-almost 1400 on G-Suite platform and about 230 on different Moodle platforms). Most of the final exams (with the exception of those verifying practical skills) and the diploma exams, were conducted in remote mode on the basis of procedures created during this semester.

The UPWr Main Library made its resources available in an online system and was the coordinator of a series of professional trainings conducted under the auspices of Elsevier BrightTALK.

In the pandemic period, the electronic management system related to the circulation of documents, including financial documents, ensured continuity of all processes. UPWr also implemented the new electronic system Syllabus for management of study programmes documentation with additional analytical tools and quality check. All the curricula and syllabi are available online and can be modified remotely in real time.