

University of Wrocław

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) UWr wants to support strong research groups and create ‘new areas of excellence, and a culture of quality among staff’, up to international research standards and well-connected to foreign colleagues. By creating 6 well-focused and thematic POBs, and setting up incubators of academic excellence, a visiting professors program, stimuli to research and support services to researchers these objectives will come within reach. In addition, UWr strives towards a more efficient and more strategic administration, laid out to support research and internationalization and to suppress unnecessary red tape. These objectives are well-taken and in line with the objectives in paragraph 4. Given the evaluations of the SWOT-analysis (on strengths and opportunities) they are achievable.

b) The SWOT analysis is partly a catalogue of some 30 assessment results, partly a deep analysis of the present research landscape of the university. The latter leads to the selection of priority research areas, the former informs further objectives and actions.

c) The selected specific objectives are all relevant (incentivizing research performance and grant application successes, enhancing internationalization, improving quality of teaching and learning, introducing quality driven HR policies, modernizing governance and management) and well-balanced. In general UWr is making rather realistic assumptions about what is needed and what it can accomplish in terms of change. Creating priority areas is one thing, one needs incubators of

academic excellence, a visiting professors program, support services to researchers and other stimuli to research to make them fly. None of this is likely to occur unless the university maintains focus on change management within the new legal framework for Polish universities. Similarly, the need for a re-setting of the HR assessment (more strategic and less lenient) is apparent.

d) The chosen indicators are appropriate and achievable.

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) Most objectives presented are clearly contributing to the goals of the present policy instrument. And achievable. In some cases within the plan the links are not entirely clear. A specific objective refers to maintaining and reinforcing top-quality research facilities (corresponding to an equipment fund of some 50 million). In the documents it remains unclear how exactly this connects to the broader strategic goals. Similarly, a gap exists in the presentation of the internationalization ambitions. UWr is relatively well connected internationally already. See SWOT analysis in the category 'strengths'. So one would expect the documents to demonstrate their existing network and the expansions they foresee and how they expect to accomplish progress in any detail.

b) Key features of the present plan are being continued (like the equipment fund and the academic excellence incubators). In addition, auditing and evaluating the adopted changes are foreseen. In general, many of the planned effects being a matter of attitude, mind-set and culture continuation is to be expected as a matter of course.

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) As noted above the proposed actions are relevant and appropriate in the present context, and achievable at the same time.

b) In terms of feasibility the planned actions and the targets set are throughout realistic, and modest rather than overoptimistic. One may have some doubts as to the support by the academic community. UWr is no exception to the rule that the culture of an institution is homegrown in the course of time, for better and for worse. The documents notice quite frequently that due to ever changing political preferences outside and loads of administrative burdens in house the general atmosphere hasn't been positive. The panel finds that it would be beneficial for UWr to fully explore opportunities for strengthened leadership and change management. The interview, however, pointed to a process of change that had started already some time ago and a gradual move towards support for the developments planned.

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) UWr's plans for strengthening its research portfolio are realistic, like most of their plans. It is important that the university makes a close connection between research ambitions and organizational interventions. Various stimuli, support services and administrative improvements are to ease and promote the aspired transitions. In this way the development plan is a coherent approach which includes most relevant academic and administrative actors and activities. It is hard, however, to with any precision ascertain the potential impact on the development of 'world science'. Given the existing international connections and visibility of research groups in the priority areas there is reason to believe that UWr international role will indeed be enhanced.

c) The quality of teaching & learning approach is a welcome one, especially its focus on tutoring and supervising rather than delivery mode lecturing. The idea of a university training center is crucial. The success of the changes foreseen will largely depend on a successful transfer from already leading groups to the rest of the university.

d-e) The gradual move towards a new culture and practice in HR and governance makes sense and seems achievable. Actions might be too timid, and, hence, the change process becomes too slow for the university to capitalise on the opportunities within the new law and the excellence programme. In any case success, however, requires continuous and well-focussed leadership.

Summary of assessment

UWr already is one of the relatively best performing universities in the country. It is relatively well-connected internationally and has an international course offering that in comparison is rather extensive. Its research performance is good, yet somewhat uneven. The present plan breaks away from a devolved practice towards joint action and synergies. By united actions UWr wants to work towards improvement and quality according to high international standards. It does this with a good sense of realism, which makes the objectives look achievable. There are some pretty innovative ideas in the plan (like the academic excellence incubator). For all of it to become a success, however, the university must proactively engage in changing a traditional academic- towards an open societal oriented culture. This requires years of strong leadership and university wide determination, and it will necessitate that the university leadership and the university council closely monitor progress and are prepared to take action in order to implement the proposed plan. The panel recommends to:

- Ensure that the plan is delivered, especially by supporting the cultural and performance transfer from already leading groups to the rest of the university.
- Ensure that the move towards a new culture and practice in governance and HR is delivered, whilst continuing to develop stronger leadership.

Total score

31.50 / 40

Recommendation

Positive

Position on the ranking list of positively assessed applications

10