

## University of Gdańsk

### 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

The University of Gdańsk (UG) has quite a lot of potential looking at the selected POBs. They cover a wide range of disciplines in which cutting-edge research of international interest is possible. The University has chosen suitable indicators for its SWOT analysis. For the quality of research, they concentrate on national publication achievement and category normalized citation impact. The SWOT is overall rather balanced in its coverage of the four components and provides insight into how UG sees its own position. The weaknesses and threats have been stated open and honest. The opportunities are featured well and can be seen in the priority areas. At the same time, the detailed SWOT analysis is presented in a form of an extensive catalogue of mostly self-standing items and is language-wise not always clear. While the interviews contributed to clarifying the underlying structure, it remains unclear how the potential of the region and research environment is measured. With the chosen criteria, five priority research areas have been identified, which are in general convincing and realistic in relation to the size of the University. Each is well presented with five prominent, international visible scientists or scholars with high academic reputation as well as five early career researchers. To promote international science the nature and the proposed development of the POBs are of sufficient relevance. A central management system is important to coordinate the actions, to make use of the opportunities and to overcome the weaknesses. Most of the indicators chosen suggest a conservative development path of the UG, while for some optional

indicators, especially the internationalization, the plans are more ambitious and show rapid development.

**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

Internationalization has been addressed in nearly all areas of activities. However, it is of importance to acknowledge that the change trajectory from a national to an international research university is a long-term process. Important for the international visibility are the five POBs: 1. The marine and maritime research has a close relation to the region and is rather unique. It has a great potential. 2. In the biomedical research area major international competition exists and it depends very much on the topics covered. 3. Intercultural research is as important as fashionable. The interdisciplinary approach has a good potential but it needs very high quality to be internationally competitive. 4. The environmental research is extremely important for the society and very contemporary. The combination of biology and chemistry has a high potential but again there is much international competition. 5. The quantum information research seems to be highly ranked on national level. Its international level is hard to judge. Certainly, it is an area with potential. Unfortunately, the plan does not present how UG wants to develop its educational activities in relation to the POBs. In addition, inclusion of students, in particular international students in the research plans are of importance, as well as the use of digital technologies in education. The plan is concise in the way in which the five objectives mentioned in paragraph four are presented. However, the plan presents 49 objectives and 47 implementation actions in a fragmented, partly overlapping way. It is a long list, which does need strategic focusing and prioritization. It will be a challenge to finance all activities. The panel found it difficult to assess how the results of the SWOT analysis have been used for identifying the many objectives and the implementation actions.

**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 detailed 47 implementation actions are somewhat connected to the 49 objectives, but not in the same order. The actions are grouped in five different areas, but in general they are extremely compartmentalized. This is also visible in the fact that 18 of them have a budget of less than PLN 1 million. It is foreseeable that the fragmentation of the actions will lead to an increasing demand for coordination and governance. This can create problems in the strategic implementation of the actions. The actions planned for 2020-2025 include many suitable measures for internationalization. However, it is not fully clear what the criteria will be and who will decide (internal or external experts) on the distribution of support. The advisory expert teams are important but it has to be realized that it will not be easy to recruit so many experts who are ready to spend as much time as foreseen. The planned CIRC is a right measure, but here it will also be important to recruit the suitable staff – who might not easily be available. The approach to increase the number of international renowned researchers is important, but the aim to recruit 20 per year is extremely ambitious. In addition, the number of international students and English curricula needs to be increased. With the UG membership in an European University consortium this might well be possible in the future. There is no indication that UG wants to discontinue some of its academic areas, which raises the question how the leadership wants to enlarge its budgetary room for the ambitious objectives presented in the application. In summary: many of the 47 actions seem reasonable and adequate, but there is also overlap and fragmentation in the set of actions. Therefore, it is important to coordinate and integrate them to overcome the fragmentation and to prioritize and schedule a time line, since it will not be possible to start all at once.

**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

UG is a university with a clear potential to develop into an internationally recognized research university. Important arguments are the presence of some outstanding scientists, and its location in one of the most attractive and developed regions of Poland, which gives it the opportunity to

strengthen the cooperation with partners in the Baltic Sea area as well as some prestigious international research institutions. The priority areas are well chosen and the core of scientists or scholars presented in the application can be assumed to allow a positive development of the POBs. The success depends on many parameters in particular on the research environment and infrastructure, as well as the scientific culture, which needs to be further developed and coordinated. In the priority research areas, the potential to increase research-directed teaching is high, but this is not addressed in the plan. With its high national ranking for the number of international staff and the percentage of international PhDs there is a good potential to increase the quality of the education up to the level of an international research university. For this it is important to develop an adequate education strategy, including digitization. The necessary improvement of the institutional governance structures and the administrative staff depends on the initiatives of the leadership of the university. Here it would be very important to further develop an effective and transparent structure of leadership and decision processes. While acknowledging the potential of the UG, at the same time the application is not clear enough and not fully convincing when it comes to presenting a coherent and concrete development trajectory for the next six years. However, the plan does give an adequate foundation for developing a straightforward concept with the potential to become an international research university in the future.

### Summary of assessment

The University of Gdansk (UG) is a relatively young university with a rather high percentage of international students and research cooperation. It has a good place in the national ranking and is a member of one of the recently selected European Universities consortia. The position is well recognized, however, the low level of coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the 47 actions leaves some doubts on the current potential to develop the university's excellence strategy successfully. The POBs are mainly from natural science and technical disciplines. The role of the humanities in a full research university was discussed in the interviews. Humanities and social sciences need further support and they might be important for truly interdisciplinary POBs, as partly realized in the area of marine and maritime research. The application of UG currently lacks the focus and the vision to convincingly produce a coherent plan for its development towards an internationally recognized research university. The face-to-face meeting with the university team has not sufficiently helped clarifying the strategy and structure of the application. UG has implemented a new governance structure according to the new law, including scientific councils for the disciplines. These structures are important for the future monitoring process and the further development of the university. UG is apparently in the middle of a process for developing its strategy to become a research university and the Excellence Initiative might have come a little early for UG. A major activity for the near future, as discussed in the interview, is the active development of a federation with the other two universities in Gdansk. UG has already a stable and good cooperation with the Medical University of Gdansk, including a joined doctoral school. The cooperation with the

Gdansk University of Technology is realized only punctual and a more formalized cooperation might be a clear advantage for the further development of Gdansk as a potential excellent higher education and research region. The three universities together would be much stronger and far more visible internationally. Using the great potential of systematic cooperation with the two other universities, University of Gdansk has a very good potential to become a strong internationally visible university in concert with the partners, independent on the funding in this competition.

### **Total score**

23.0 / 40

### **Recommendation**

Negative