

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

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

The Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun (NCU) has prepared an extremely well structured and convincing application resulting from a well-defined analysis of the current situation and leading to a clear strategy for the six years to come. The application is based on a vision with a coherent plan. The SWOT analysis is comprehensive, balanced and honest. It comprises a detailed analysis followed by the presentation of a procedure used to identify the five POBs as well as a set of 12 emerging fields as potential future POBs. Each of the five POBs will lead to a ‘Torun Centre of Excellence’ with an international advisory board. The five POBs were selected via leading scientists and active research groups and the use of parameters like citation impact, international cooperation and interdisciplinary work. The weaknesses demonstrate some features, which need to be addressed seriously. The described deficiencies in motivation and satisfaction of academic staff together with the lack of organizational flexibility and suboptimal allocation of resources have been met, to some extent successfully, already in the preparation for the application. Opportunities and threats have both put emphasis on the regional environment: the old city and its charm described as an opportunity and the weak economic environment seen as a threat. In the application, additional specific objects in the frame of the ‘third mission’ are described, which will introduce systemic support for new employees and knowledge transfer as well as entrepreneurship and innovation at all levels. These actions will be important to influence the regional development positively. The

application has some informative graphs, providing a good picture of the general concept, the POBs and the project management. The whole plan is comprehensive and well organized, following the 4xI's on identified POBs as well as the project management and the newly developed governance structures.

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

There is a clear vision behind NCU's plan that shows how it wants to move in the direction of an internationally recognized research university. The specific objectives presented in the application appear ambitious but they are sound and complementary. All together, they provide a relevant and convincing strategy that will undoubtedly enhance the quality of research and stimulate the further development of the international significance of the NCU. The POBs presented are very interdisciplinary, with carefully selected outstanding internationally renowned researchers. It has, however, not been shown, whether the researchers in each of the POBs have already produced joint publications. Complementary expertise and active and fruitful cooperation are important for reaching the scientific goals, which are expected to lead to an internationally visible cluster in this area. To allow the development of emerging fields is in general an important strategic measure. In the NCU, however, the five POBs should preferably be developed to international visibility before new focus areas might be fully supported. The mobility of students and young researchers is considered as a key point for the internationalization and the creation of an innovative PhD school is a relevant measure to increase international exchange. A special welcome culture is necessary to attract international researchers and the use of the English language has to be promoted in the university and the region. The objectives, which are formed on the foundation of the 4xI@NCU concept, are the backbone of the plan. Several of the objectives proposed will lead to the establishment of structures or working practices that can be expected to have a long-term impact on the quality of the research conducted at the NCU. Overall NCU has done a very convincing job in identifying and elaborating relevant and appropriate objectives for enhancing the university's international standing.

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

The actions planned for 2020-2025 are in general suitable to reach the objectives. A convincing and well thought through set of 15 implementation actions is presented in the plan and follows consistently the specific objectives. These actions are not only meant to allow the POB implementation but also potentially involve each and every member of the NCU in the implementation. Two actions, with limited budget, address educational objectives. Education and training approaches should become more project-oriented as well as more flexible and open to the global world. Promotion of entrepreneurship for students and graduates are planned to be put in place, as well as the development of soft skills and contacts with industry. A comprehensive professional training system will be implemented for academic staff, especially in areas of the POBs. The idea of supporting emerging fields is valid, but taken into account the current situation and the ambitious aims in the POBs, the development of emerging areas should be approached with care to make sure that they do not unnecessarily compete with the development of the PBOs. To spend 30 Mio PLN for the emerging areas before the POBs and the other actions have been successfully implemented might be contra-productive, unless the areas contribute to existing POBs or replace an unsuccessful POB in the future. Publication strategies, advisory boards and mobility programs are certainly the right actions, as much as motivation and competence building measures. The set of implementation actions altogether follows consistently the specific objectives and it can be expected that these actions will provide a solid foundation for achieving the objectives.

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

The NCU can be considered as having a high potential of becoming an international renowned research university. It has a very good understanding where it is now, where it should be in six years, and how it wants to get there. The way in which the objectives and actions are presented in the plan and the detailed information on their implementation strongly suggest that the NCU will make considerable progress in all five POBs. To increase the international visibility, the scientists involved in the POBs need to create collaborative research with unique topics and joint interdisciplinary strength. The number of very good researchers is a prerequisite for the development of an internationally competitive research profile. To recruit international PhD students and guest scientists, next to offering fellowships and reasonable salaries, an appropriate welcome culture should be developed. This should include English services in the city and public organizations. NCU is located in an environment with great opportunities in its traditional attractiveness. At the same time, the weak economic situation in its region could be improved with startups and should be supported by the university and the government. The direction in which the NCU already started to cooperate with industry should be further developed. The planned actions for the 'third mission' are important for the positive development of the region. In summary, with the comprehensive and thought-through concept, including the right objectives and actions, the potential to reach the level of an internationally competitive research university in the next six years is very high. Whether the NCU will be able to realize all actions and achieve the objectives will depend, amongst other things, on the strength of its leadership and governance structures.

Summary of assessment

The application of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun (NCU) is well structured and the strategic concept convincing. The concept is adapted to the fact that NCU is a non-metropolitan university with special challenges. The application clearly shows the future structure of the university and the inclusion of the POBs. The POBs have been selected in a university-wide well-performed process and in a serious internal competition. In the clear and efficient research organization of the university, the POBs will receive an independent position as interdisciplinary units. Moreover, a convincing strategy for the implementation of four PhD-Schools will make the university more attractive for international PhD students. NCU is partner in a national physics network and participates in the national medicine register. The university clearly realizes the importance of national cooperation. NCU is not yet recognized as an international research university, but has already interesting international partners (YUFE) and convincing concepts for the internationalization in research, education and administration. In the interview, the very convincing new governance model was presented and discussed very competently. This model has been included in a Charta for the NCU, which has been widely accepted by the various bodies of the University. Moreover, it found support by a majority of the members of the university. These steps are very important for the success of the change process. In the application and the interview NCU

presented excellent concepts for change management with high motivation and an academic spirit, which clearly overcomes any doubt that the ambitious goals can be reached. There is high potential for development to an internationally recognized research university in the next six years. The program proposed by NCU is extremely ambitious but necessary to put the NCU at the best possible excellence level. The overall quality of the application is very good and this assessment was confirmed in the interview with the competent university delegation. We are confident that with the excellence strategy and plan convincingly presented in the application and interview, the university will be successful as one of the ten candidates to become an internationally recognized research university. Criteria for the success are:

- delivery in the Priority Research Areas identified in the application,
- successful delivery of the 4 new PhD-colleges,
- full implementation of the change program, including the new governance structure,
- establishing additional new international institutional cooperation.

Total score

32.5 / 40

Recommendation

Positive

Position on the ranking list of positively assessed applications

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