

Ocena końcowa

Ocena: Pozytywna

**Uzasadnienie:**

Through its self-assessment report and the presentations, discussions and meetings during the site visit, the Nicolaus Copernicus University (NCU) provided relevant information and insights into the progress it has made towards realizing its goal of becoming an internationally competitive research university. The site visit clearly showed that the University acknowledges the specific challenges it faces in fully realizing this goal; NCU being originally a regional university, in a rather peripheral location, and moderate in size. As emphasized during the site visit, the strategic decision to become an internationally competitive research university by overcoming these challenges was made in 2012, and the acceleration of the University's progress in recent years was made possible by its IDUB status. The strategic development of the University since 2019 has been a somewhat disruptive process. On the one hand the University has worked seriously within its IDUB units and groups (CoEs, EFs and priority research teams) on the implementation of its strategic goal to become a research university. On the other hand, some staff are not yet fully convinced that this strategic goal is the right ambition for the university.

The University's IDUB plan is well-structured with clear actions (15 in total) and milestones. Mainly because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the plan has been implemented only partly since 2019. Furthermore, it is not as ambitious as one might expect given NCU's strategic goal. Consequently, the actions and investments of IDUB funds that were successful in the first phase are no guarantee of further progress by the university in the coming period. Therefore, there is a need for the introduction of more ambitious IDUB goals and actions that would allow for a greater strategic concentration of research investments in, amongst other things, the much needed modernization and upgrade of the University's research equipment and infrastructure. This would also contribute to greater visibility of IDUB in NCU. A new IDUB plan would also provide the opportunity to agree on the question what it means for the University to want to become a research university.

**Impact of the university's research:**

It is important that the NCU leadership effectively addresses any internal resistance to the promotion and rewarding of research excellence among its academic staff. Such resistance is in part enabled by the current organization of the University, the core of which consists of 16 Faculties. The organizational structure differs from Faculty to Faculty, resulting in a rather opaque set of institutes, departments, and other units and structures, such as centers, laboratories, and research groups. Alongside this central organizational structure, NCU has established, in the implementation of its IDUB action plan, 5 Centers of Excellence (CoEs), as well as Emerging Fields (EFs) and priority research teams. These were identified and supported with IDUB funding with the aim of having a flexible and dynamic organization of research excellence. While many staff are involved, there is a clear risk that this approach spreads the IDUB funds somewhat thinly, and thereby hinders the full development of the CoEs' potential.

Within the CoEs there is provision for support of staff through reduced teaching loads, and clear evidence of impact in the form of enthusiasm on the part of involved researchers, with increased research output and enhanced international collaboration.

IDUB funds have been used effectively to offer extra support to international scientists choosing NCU as host. To attract external researchers with MSCA and ERC grants, the University has committed to a co-fund which will result in 3 post docs under MSCA in 2023. The 'Grants for European Grants' initiative

has had impact and the number of applications to Horizon increased. These initiatives have contributed to the enhanced research performance as visible in the University's growing success in the competition for external research funding, including two ERC starting grants acquired in 2022 by NCU staff, the increase in the production of top 10% academic publications, and the improved normalized citation impact values.

International collaboration:

The 2022 data show an increase in incoming and outgoing mobility at the University. Furthermore, there has been a strong focus on developing more English language course offerings and increasing international collaboration for making NCU a more attractive university for international students. Collaborations in higher education range from dual degrees to summer schools. Through participation in YUFE since 2020 the University has received funding in Erasmus+ and YUFE has proven an effective mechanism for attracting foreign students. The YUFE European alliance application was successful in 2022, and as indicated the University has benefited from this in several ways. At the same time, the full potential of YUFE as a research collaboration network has yet to be fully exploited.

These developments require a reformulation of NCU's internationalization strategy and adaptation of the intended outcomes. For the coming period NCU might want to focus more on international comparisons of its research performance by identifying international benchmarks.

University governance and organization:

For the coming period the University would need to develop and implement more proactive and innovative IDUB programs and other actions aimed at making NCU more attractive for highly productive established and young scholars, both Polish and international. This needs to include a more strategic postdoctoral policy. In addition, the traditional NCU organizational structure which keeps the CoEs separate from the rest of the university, results in unclear leadership and reporting lines. This concerns, for example, personnel policy decisions and can exacerbate tensions between the interests of CoEs and of the involved Faculties.

The contribution of the CoEs to the University's research performance has varied. Therefore, it would make sense now to critically evaluate all groups that are part of the CoEs and identify and restructure those that are underperforming. This could include the discontinuation of one or more CoEs and the establishment of one or more new ones. Furthermore, there are convincing arguments for seeking to integrate - wherever appropriate and possible - Emerging Fields and priority research teams into the CoEs, and possibly rename them. This move towards larger organizational units would facilitate to embed IDUB research units into the university structure and allow the CoEs to evolve into more flexible and robust structures for research excellence.

To strengthen the foundations for further progress towards its overall strategic goal in the coming period it will be essential to embed the IDUB program more strongly into the university's organizational and governance structures. Such structural changes, which would require a modification of the university's statutes, would show a serious commitment to the idea of NCU becoming an internationally competitive research university. Without such structural modernization, the IDUB program runs the risk of functioning mainly as an internal funding agency with a limited influence on the long-term development and profile of the university.

Quality of educational provision:

Doctoral education at NCU, consisting of one interdisciplinary and four disciplinary schools, is mainly linked to the University's Faculties. Strengthening the relationship of doctoral education to the CoEs needs to be addressed in the recommended reform of the University's organization.

Three majors in English have been assigned to priority areas. NCU wants to further strengthen the research orientation of its masters programs through a support system for its most talented students. However, It is not sufficiently clear in how far this action will contribute to enhancing the research basis of the University's masters programs, nor if any other actions have been initiated for this purpose.

For talented students, support ranges from the IDUB Master Class program with extended paths of study and co-op, to enhancing the international mobility of students by providing student grants to support study semester abroad. IDUB funds are being used effectively to recruit PhD scholars from abroad.

Professional development of staff:

The University has successfully implemented an incentive system and a competence building program for the academic staff, while it has also introduced a code of conduct for recruitment and staff assessment.

NCU can be expected to profit from a more explicit and proactive institutional postdoctoral strategy and practice.

To strengthen institutional management, NCU intends to establish new integrated offices for internationalization, grants and human resources, and recruit well-trained and experienced staff. While new staff has been recruited, the offices are not yet fully established.

The introduction of a Copernicus integration center is an important initiative to provide critical support to international staff.

The first IDUB phase has been successful in parts of the University wherein it has contributed to the enhancement of a research culture. To continue progress towards the status of an internationally competitive research university more comprehensively, there is a need for a structural reform of the University organization and governance, which would include a full integration of research excellence into NCU's overall organizational and governance structures. Furthermore, a reorientation of the IDUB plan is required, with the aim of IDUB actions in the coming period having a lasting impact on the university.

**Zalecenia:**

The following recommendations are made to enable the Nicolaus Copernicus University (NCU) to implement a substantial revision of its IDUB programs. These actions are required for essential further enhancement of the quality and impact of the University's research and degree programs:

(i) There is a need to produce a new, more ambitious IDUB action plan for the coming period, which would present the key IDUB project actions of the University.

(ii) The University requires a new, more transparent organizational structure with larger organizational units, and a firm integration of the CoEs in the University's overall governance and organization structures. This should diffuse any internal resistance against the excellence orientation of the IDUB program, and could be expected to lead to a gradual integration and institutionalization of the IDUB related excellence strategy into the university structure as a whole. Interdisciplinarity should be supported as part of the structural changes towards larger organizational units.

(iii) There is a need for further developing the University's educational strategy, especially concerning the research orientation and foundation ('research-based education') of its Master's programs. In this the YUFE alliance can be expected to play a major role.

(iv) The Copernicus center should be enabled to support international students and staff to enhance the profile and attractiveness of the University as a destination of choice for visiting scholars.

(v) It is also recommended that the University further strengthens the impact of its research both in its collaboration with the private sector and its engagement with civil society by selecting key private and civil collaboration partners.

**Rekomendacje dotyczące zmiany planu:**

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