

Manual for committees evaluating the research work of departments of the Silesian University in Opava

First of all, thank you for agreeing to serve as a member or chair of the committee. This document aims at introducing you to the whole evaluation procedure, its purpose, wider context, and some relevant practical matters.

Legal framework.

According to a new act of law effective from 2016, all higher educational institutions in the Czech Republic are required to regularly evaluate their research, development and innovation activities (throughout this document, for short, just “research activities”). At our university, this legal obligation is carried out by organizing regular evaluations of research activity of individual departments. The whole process is overseen by a designated body, called *Rada pro vnitřní hodnocení* (Council for Internal Evaluation). Details of the process are stipulated in one of the internal regulations of the university, called *Pravidla systému zajišťování kvality a vnitřního hodnocení kvality* (Rules of the System for Quality Assurance and Internal Quality Evaluation), which in particular stipulate the following.

- 1) The internal evaluation of the university's research activity takes place according to the groups of scientific and artistic disciplines at individual constituents¹ of the university.
- 2) Internal evaluation of research activity respects the specifics of individual disciplines.
- 3) Internal evaluation takes place on the basis of comparison with important foreign or domestic universities, research institutions and other relevant professional or artistic workplaces.
- 4) Internal evaluation of research activity at the university is usually based on:
 - a) annual reports of the university, its constituents and research and art centers,
 - b) self-evaluation report on the research activity of the evaluated department or departments (hereinafter referred to as “self-evaluation report on research activity”),
 - c) an overview of the results of research activities, if it is not part of the documents according to letters a) and b),
 - d) expert assessment by independent internationally, or in substantiated cases at least nationally, recognized experts.
- 5) The self-evaluation report on research activity, taking into account the specifics of the discipline and the size of the evaluated department, usually describes and evaluates:
 - a) focus and strategic goals in the field of research activity,
 - b) the level of management of the development of research activity,

¹ Faculties of the university or stand-alone university institutes.

- c) measures adopted for the purpose of supporting the development of research activity,
 - d) interconnection of the research activity with the educational activity,
 - e) research personnel and qualification growth,
 - f) research activity of students with special attention paid to students of doctoral study programs,
 - g) university, national and foreign scientific or artistic projects carried out by the department,
 - h) national and international collaboration in research activity,
 - i) societal relevance of research activity,
 - j) the most significant results obtained,
 - k) methods and results of internal evaluation of research activity by the evaluated department.
- 6) Details of the procedure for carrying out the internal evaluation of research activity according to paragraph 4 letter d) are determined by an internal norm of the constituent whose department is evaluated. The internal norm according to the previous sentence is issued by the head of the constituent after its approval by the Council for Internal Evaluation and by the scientific council of the constituent.
- 7) The self-evaluation report on research activity according to paragraph 5 and the result of the evaluation according to paragraph 6 will be forwarded by the head of the constituent to the Council for Internal Evaluation after their discussion in the scientific council of the constituent. Both reports mentioned in the previous sentence are also published without undue delay in the public part of the webpages of the relevant constituent.
- 8) Evaluation of the department's research activity is carried out at least once every 5 years.
- 9) Reports on the evaluation of research activity serve as a basis for the development of scientific and artistic disciplines, especially in relation to the preparation of the strategic plan of the constituents and the university.

The task of your committee is to evaluate the research activity of one (or more) of the departments in line with the stipulations above.

Evaluation report.

The outcome of your evaluation should be an evaluation report assessing the research activity of the given organizational unit (or units; throughout this document, for simplicity, we are just calling them departments"). Here are some things that should be kept in mind in this connection.

What the report SHOULD contain:

- In view of the above, it should above all contain an EXPLICIT EVALUATION of the level of excellence of the research activity (or, if you are more comfortable with the term, "scientific activity") of the department.
- It should be clear from the report how the department stands compared with similarly oriented departments at other universities or research institutions.
- This comparison should predominantly entail such universities and institutions worldwide (science and research being totally global in character nowadays); only in exceptional cases of research disciplines highly specific to the Czech Republic, for which it is impossible or difficult to find similar research organizations abroad, can the comparison be made solely with other Czech institutions. In these cases, the members of the evaluation committee are also allowed to be domestic experts, otherwise they should always be from abroad, to minimize the possibility of a conflict of interest and ensure the highest possible objectivity of the assessment.
- Ideally, the report should go down to evaluating individual researchers (with reasonable exceptions, such as short-time contracts or part-time positions below a certain limit); usually it

is left to the discretion of the committee completely in what form this will be carried out. It is of course fine not to fully publicize these individual assessments (due to personal data protection regulations etc.) – typically they are made available to the head of the department, the management of the faculty/institute and the management of the university, while only some sort of aggregated summary is released towards general public.

- The ultimate goal of your report is to provide feedback to the department, the faculty/institute and the university about the level of research carried out at the department – its quality, its strengths and weaknesses, and so forth. Do not hesitate to include into your report any observations or insights that you may have about the department, including any comments on its current status as well as – most importantly – any recommendations for the future.
- In particular, your report should not just repeat the contents of the self-evaluation report of the department – your own input and factual assessment are the most important ingredient!
- Be critical when working with the self-evaluation report: for instance, all projects mentioned there should be projects carried out directly at the department, not e.g. those which a department member carries out at another university than ours! (These are of course fine from the point of view of the individual researcher, but of no relevance whatsoever for the department itself.)
- Keep in mind all the time that your report will ultimately be made public (except for possible personal data of individuals, see above) on the webpages of the university.

What the report should NOT contain:

- The scope of the report focuses solely on research activity. Hence no comments or assessment are needed concerning the educational activities of the department, level of excellence in teaching, study programs carried out, mobility agreements for student or employee exchange, student internships in practical sector, evaluations of teaching activities by students, etc. (a possible exception being the doctoral study programs, to the extent in which they directly relate to the research activities of the department).
- Popularization of science/research towards general public is definitely laudable and desirable, however does not represent research activity *per se*. If you insist on including it in your report, this should definitely be done only as an aside and as a matter of auxiliary significance.
- Collaboration with the practical sector, contract research, etc., are most vital for application-oriented fields, while making little sense for basic research disciplines. Therefore, definitely include these in case of “applied” or “vocational” departments (e.g. nursing, pedagogy, public administration, business accounting, hotel/spa/tourism management, historical monuments conservation and management, applied computer science), but put much less or zero emphasis on these aspects for “WoS” research disciplines (pure mathematics, theoretical physics, etc.).
- While it is a good idea to assess the department's governance or quality assurance work as long as direct connection with research activity is concerned, refrain from evaluating the general organizational work of the department concerning teaching, academic service, etc.

Some practical matters.

- The practical aspects and details of the evaluation process are governed by an “internal norm” of the faculty/institute, approved by its scientific council. These internal norms for respective faculties/institutes are available from their webpages, unfortunately only in Czech; however, you are free to ask the appropriate vice-dean or vice-director to explain them to you whenever some clarification is needed (see also the second item below).
- The dean of the faculty or director of the institute may stipulate some additional requirements on the evaluation committee, on top of what was described in the previous paragraphs: he/she may e.g. ask the committee to evaluate also some aspects of teaching activity, or collaboration with the practice sector, relevance of contractual research carried out by the department, etc. Since it is the faculty/institute (not the university) who is covering the costs of the evaluation, the dean/director has every right to ask for this; in that case, you should of course take these requirements also into account in your assessment and your final report. However, your assessment and final report must always contain all the items mentioned under “What the report

SHOULD contain” above (this is stipulated by the Czech legislation and official university regulations, which override anything that the dean/director has in his/her competence), and likewise any requirement which is in open conflict with the stipulations above should be ignored (and I will be personally grateful if you notify me directly, at the contact e-mail given a bit further below, if you think you have encountered such a situation).

- In view of the preceding item, it is also the responsibility of the faculty/institute to help you familiarize with the assessment procedure and to clarify any questions you may have. Typically, this may be done by assigning one of the vice-deans or vice-directors to “be at hand” to your committee for such matters (he/she may also introduce the faculty/institute to you in a wider context, mention the specifics of the evaluated department, and explain to you the principles of the evaluation procedure as well as its benefits and utility for the faculty/institute management and for future development of the department's research activity), or by appointing some kind of “scientific secretary” for your committee (a person who is not an official member of your committee – in particular has no right e.g. to vote or to be present at the meetings, unless invited by the chair – but who is familiar with the academic and research milieu in the Czech Republic and in the department and is able to lend his/her counsel on various matters). Do not hesitate to turn to this designated vice-dean/vice-director or to the secretary of your committee as needed.
- Finally, you are free anytime to contact the vice-rector for science and foreign relations, who is responsible for internal evaluations at the whole university (prorektor-vyz@slu.cz), or even me directly (rektor@slu.cz), in case of any questions, doubts, needs of clarification, etc.

Thank you again for agreeing to help us in this important endeavor, and my best wishes for your successful work in the committee!

Pavel Tuleja
Rector of the Silesian University in Opava