

Joint Standpoint of Art Universities on the draft Methodology for Evaluating Research Organisations in the Universities Sector

We highly appreciate the idea of the Methodology for Evaluating Research Organisations which will replace the current “coffee grinder” assessment of the quantity of outcomes with the evaluation of the quality of an entire research organization, its results and its internal scholarly environment. This undoubtedly is a significant improvement which may have a considerable benefit for the development of the Czech research environment and enhancement of its quality.

At the same time, however, we have to point out that the presented proposal of the Methodology for Evaluating Research Organisations in the Universities Sector may be functional and beneficial for large research universities, but for art universities it is usable to a limited extent only and, in addition, there is the risk that its consequences will be quite the opposite than those intended: instead of giving motivation for improvement of quality it will lead to the destruction of the existing functioning models.

Characteristic of art universities is the fact that artistic creative work (reported and assessed in the Registry of Artistic Results – RUV) is the primary creative domain for them and research is a supplementary and minor activity, but no less significant or relevant. In our opinion it is very much needed and essential for the development of our disciplines that we also develop, in addition to the actual artistic creative work, its critical reflection and analysis, which is often performed by the artists themselves who are able to reflect art in a unique manner, taking into account their experience with their own art production as well as art in general. It is in this area, in the domain of artistic research, where we see a great potential for our schools, which fact is also confirmed by our colleagues from abroad where this field has been developed on a much larger scale and where its contribution to the development of knowledge has already been proven.

Another specific feature of research at art schools is that it usually does not take the form of large research centres and teams but is carried out by individual scholars, it does not require almost any special technical equipment and the fact

that it often focuses on national topic cannot be seen as a shortcoming because by reflecting the Czech arts and culture it contributes to their development and brings Czech art to the world.

However, the proposed evaluation criteria and their rating clearly show that these specific research workplaces of art academies, which have had a long tradition in this country and which have always been able to perform highly and deliver quality (see the numbers of our successful projects with the Czech Science Foundation, the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic and in the NAKI project, the numbers of publications in proportion to the size of institutional support and the number of awards given to our outputs by the Czech as well as foreign professional community), will not be able to prove their quality in the proposed system of evaluation because instead of respecting their specifics, they will be evaluated on the basis of their ability to fulfil criteria that for them are irrelevant or even totally unusable, and only applicable to the different environment of large research universities where disciplines other than humanities prevail.

This fact is most visible in the proposed criteria of the module M4 (table 4, p. 30) particularly in relation to the criteria 4.4 (Strategy for the establishing, financing and long-term development and sustainability of research centres and large research infrastructures), 4.5 (Training system for intellectual property protection and technology transfer), 4.22 (Conditions for setting up new teams and introducing new research topics (start-up strategy)), 4.24 (System for acquiring and renewing instruments and equipment for R&D&I) or 4.25 (System for sharing instruments and equipment for R&D&I) which can only be evaluated on the scale from “Unsatisfactory” to “Excellent” with great difficulty in our schools because those activities do not exist at our schools and considering the specifics of our research their existence is not even desirable, or take place on a scale which is entirely sufficient for our disciplines, regardless of how trivial this may seem in comparison to large research centres.

For instance, if we state that we do not find it desirable in our fields to set up large research centres and research infrastructure, will that be evaluated as “Unsatisfactory” or “Excellent”, or if we write that the system of renewing

instruments and equipment for R&D&I in our situation means the updating of standard computer equipment only, will that be evaluated as “Unsatisfactory” or “Excellent”? The five above-mentioned criteria can in total make up as much as 25 points and in the event that the evaluator concludes that our fulfilment of these criteria is “Unsatisfactory”, we would lose almost one fifth of the achievable score on the basis of what for us is totally insignificant or inapplicable criteria. In consequence of that we would lose confidence in the fairness of the defined rules and instead of being motivated to work on a further development and improvement of the quality of our research we would be forced to resign on the development of our uniqueness. Actually in this point, the research activities at our schools are identical to those of the majority of other humanities where these criteria are also totally irrelevant.

These criteria would only be relevant for us if we were able to take into account the interconnection between artistic creative work and research: for us the large research infrastructure is our art laboratories (theatres and concert halls, film and art studios, record studios, etc.) where works of art are created in the first place but where research projects are performed as well; for our creative activities we also necessarily need highly demanding, in terms of technology and finance, devices and tools (such as camera, lighting and sound systems, as well as musical instruments or post production devices) which, however, are primarily acquired from the contributions or subsidies for the artistic and educational area, not in connection with research. But the proposed methodology forces us to view the wide and highly diverse spectrum of our creative activities through a very reduced perspective of narrowly defined research activities.

Therefore we suggest that the criteria for the module M4 should respect the specifics of our field (just like in the module M3) and that for artistic disciplines (or possibly also for the entire FORD Humanities and the Arts) these criteria are ruled out as “Not applicable” and that the overall evaluation or, more precisely, the rating for the fields is altered accordingly. Another option is that art academies are allowed for self-evaluation purposes to reflect all of their creative activities in their complexity and reciprocal synergies, not only the activities strictly classifying as

research and without considering their artistic and art research context, which domains are inextricably linked together at our schools.

We appreciate that the specifics of the individual scientific areas (indicative relevance) have already been applied in the evaluation of the module M3, nevertheless we consider the proposed rating in this category insufficient as well. Especially the criteria 3.3 (Contract research), 3.5 (Applied research results with an economic impact on society), 3.8 (System and support for technology transfer and intellectual property protection) and 3.9 (Strategy for setting up and supporting spin-off firms or other forms of commercialising R&D&I results) are not only “Marginally relevant” for us but in fact “Not applicable” because they too are unfeasible or contrary to the specifics of our fields. Thus in the proposed tabular rating of humanities certain schools cannot achieve ranking that is better than “Good” even though in all the relevant criteria they would have earned full scores. In addition, the outputs of applied research in humanities or art disciplines are totally different from natural sciences or technical disciplines (for example in artistic environment an art exhibition or a theatre performance with the participation of disabled persons) and the proposed rating is absolutely not suitable for them and therefore this rating is also totally not applicable to this segment. We also find absolutely inappropriate the decision that this segment will be evaluated strictly by faculties or other smaller units, which is going to significantly disadvantage smaller research teams that operate at our small schools.

We also have reservations as to the excessive complexity and demands (in terms of time and funds) of the proposed evaluation methodology which are totally disproportionate to the size of not only our institutions but any smaller research organizations in general. For example, in some of our schools/faculties there will have to be more members of the International Evaluation Panel than the research personnel actually employed. The very preparation of the self-evaluation report and the evaluation process itself will require a non-negligible (compared to the total amount) amount of our time and financial capacities—which could otherwise be expended on actual research. We would be willing to accept all this if only the results of the evaluation had a significant benefit for our schools and contributed to

their further development. However, we are afraid that the information value of the results for our schools will be absolutely marginal because, as has already been mentioned, the results will totally disregard the interconnectedness and the mutual synergies of our creative, that is, primarily artistic and research, activities. The evaluation of research activities only, without taking into account our artistic production and the interconnection of these domains, will always be limiting and almost useless for you.

We understand the efforts of the Research, Development and Innovations Council and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to enhance the quality of Czech science and support its development, nevertheless we would strongly welcome if all the forms of Czech research environment were taken into account and if the efforts to find a unified and universally valid methodology were moderated—if the specifics of art disciplines and humanities were given more respect.

Although research of art and art research cannot bring about direct economic effects and do not allow for the creation of large research infrastructure of international importance, we still are convinced that it is in the interest of the Czech state and the Czech society to ensure their further support and enable their further development. The objective of our artistic creative work and the research activities thereto related is to enrich the Czech (as well as world) culture and contribute to the cultivation and development of our society and to the enhancement of the lives of all people—we are convinced that the quality of our performance in fulfilling this objective is already very high. We will strongly appreciate when the resultant Methodology for Evaluating Research Organisations in the Universities Segment gives us the opportunity to continue our efforts.

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