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Coordination Board CAS

Evaluation of the Research and Professional
Activities of the Institutes of the Czech
Academy of Sciences for 2010–2014

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Ref. UGN/2016/388

Subject:

Statement from the director of the institute on the course of the evaluation and the final evaluation report - Commission no. 5, Earth and related environmental sciences

In the name of the Institute we would like to thank the Coordination Board that complied with our request for reconsideration of the evaluation report provided by the Commission no. 5, Earth and related environmental sciences, which considered the Institute very strictly.

The Evaluation Commission left its report in its original state; hence we left our reply statement on the report also mostly unchanged. Still, we think that it is a pity that the Commission did not appreciate more the high application potential of the evaluated teams and higher part of their work oriented to applications, as well as the progress reached in the scientific research, which is measurable by the increase of the scientific outputs. Also the application areas expand from historical orientation to mining to new problems of deep geological deposition of nuclear waste or newly, to investigation of geothermal energy. The new application fields brought also new contacts and international collaboration.

We thank the Commission 5 for its work, external view on the Institute activities and valuable recommendations.

The Commission report starts with a description of the Institute location and its historical focus on mining. This focus was significantly extended mainly within the last 10 years and the Commission appreciated the advantage of the Institute, which can be seen in performing research in various directions (in-situ investigations, laboratory research and mathematical modelling) which can be combined and strengthen each other. The Commission mentioned poor English, probably mainly due to some presentations performed by the team leaders. We admit this is a problem, mainly for the older researchers, which needs to be overcome. On the other hand, this drawback of some persons is balanced by their knowledge and authority.

The evaluation report mentioned low quality of the scientific outputs. We accept that it is permanent great challenge for our work. But we can point out that the work of all the evaluated teams involves both scientific research and applications, the latter was appreciated by the Commission for their benefit for society. The proportion of scientific work in the evaluated teams has grown substantially, which can be documented e.g. by the fact that these teams produced 33 and 105 publications in journals with impact factor in two consequent evaluation periods 2005-2009 and 2010-2014, respectively. Also the average impact factor grew from 0,798 to 1,128 in the above periods. This trend continued in 2015. The proportion of applications can be higher than in other institutes focused on geosciences, but beside the benefit for society it also provides motivation for the research (e.g. thorough investigations related to the construction of deep repository of the spent nuclear fuel). The applications are also necessary due to a high proportion of project dependent financing in the budget of the institute.

The stress on quality of the research and its international dimension is a key issue and we have been trying to improve some points mentioned in the recommendations for a longer time. It can be documented by positive development trends, but we agree with the necessity of further strengthening of the recommended measures. We could also provide examples of the existing effort which were not stressed in our presentations sufficiently. The collaboration with the University of Kumamoto (Japan) on X-ray tomography, rock mechanics and stress measurement has lasted for more than 10 years and includes a both-sided student exchange programme. Another projects enabled us to invite and work with experts and postdocs from Poland, Australia and India.

The evaluated teams are internationally visible also via very active International Society of Rock Mechanics (ISRM). At present a member of one of the evaluated teams is engaged in the managing board of ISRM. The society also entrusted the Institute with organization of the forthcoming large conference Eurock 2017 which is of worldwide importance. Considering the recommendation for long term visits in top scientific institutions, we are proud to inform that a member of the Environmental Geography team has obtained the Fulbright Fellowship which enables him to carry out the research at Arizona State University in Phoenix, USA. This fellowship also follows collaboration which has been going on for several years.

The splitting of the Department of Environmental Geography, which was not positively accepted by the Commission and which also misrepresented the view on the Physical and Human Geography teams, was in fact a result of instructions provided for the ongoing evaluation. Here Physical Geography is explicitly put into the competences of Commission 5, whereas Social and economic geography is within competences of Commission 10 (Social sciences).

The recommendation for strong collaboration of both geography teams just strengthened our own opinion of advantage of coexistence of both teams in one department. Beside joint projects solved in the evaluation period, two new projects with participation of both geography teams have just started in 2016. The Environmental Geography as a whole has a well-balanced age structure and its international visibility can be documented e.g. by publishing their own international journal Moravian Geographical Report which is indexed in the Web of Science database, with growing impact factor (IF 0,872 in 2014 and about 1,0 in 2015). The consequences of the splitting give us a lesson for the next evaluation.

An issue, which also seems not to be presented enough, concerns links among Environmental Geography and other teams of the Institute of Geonics. The number of topics of mutual interests is increasing and involves e.g. landslides, flood consequences and their predictions, accidental pollution, brownfields, impacts of new renewable energy technologies, societal

acceptance of geothermal energy production or nuclear waste deposition, exploiting laser scanning methodologies.

In the light of the above described facts, some conclusions of the evaluation report might be considered to be too strict. Nevertheless, we thank the commission for valuable recommendations which can be utilized in the Institute management.

Prof. Radim Blaheta

Director of the Institute