

FNP Executive Board's response to main recommendations of evaluation panel

- ❖ **Recommendations regarding FNP in the new research system: strengthening its role through a strategy of growth and organising its constituency**

➤ **Recommendation 1:**

The panel strongly supports the continuation of the FNP's successful work. In the spirit of its guiding principles (peer-review and excellence as funding criteria, responsive mode), the FNP should continue spearheading developments by setting standards and new models. The panel recommends that the FNP adopt a strategy of growth, which will enable it to enhance its impact and avoid being relegated to a marginal role in the new funding system. The Foundation should look for new opportunities to expand its services to the Polish scientific community. This can be achieved in particular by expanding its management of third party programmes including, but not limited to, managing government's funds in areas in which it has built critical competences.

Overall, the panel is unanimous in its opinion that the Foundation for Polish Science is an exceptionally successful organisation, which enjoys the strong support of the Polish scientific community.

In the course of its existence, the organisation has played a leading role in the modernisation and reform of the Polish science system. It has been an experimental platform for new ideas on research funding and it has set the highest standards in its funding operations. Those standards often serve as reference when other Polish funding structures are assessed by the Polish research community. The Foundation introduced competitive features into the funding landscape in Poland using an independent, peer-review based selection process. After the closure, in 2002, of the public independent funding agency, the FNP was the sole funding body where researchers could apply for funds in areas of their choices without fitting their research ideas in pre-determined research topics. The panel was in no doubt that the FNP has been instrumental – by providing a model to aspire to - in the new developments which lead to the re-establishment of a publicly funded independent funding agency: the National Center for Science.

➤ **Recommendation 2:**

The panel recommends that the Foundation strengthen its independence especially in its management of third party

programmes (including management of government funds). In all those activities the Foundation should have as a core criterion for engagement with third parties the retention of its independence both in strategic (setting the agenda) and operational (design the delivery mechanism) sense ['No strings attached'].

The newly created publicly funded research funding institution is mandated to support basic research and is required to apply the same principles the FNP uses: independent and transparent peer-review based selection process. Moreover it is requested to address – at least partially – the needs of the younger generation of researchers in Poland. This raises the question of how overlapping the activities of the two institutions (FNP and NCN) will be and invites reflections on the general strategy of FNP in light of those changes.

The panel strongly believes that in the new research funding system the Foundation has its place and should play an even bigger role in the support of Polish science. All robust national funding systems which promote the principle of competitive research funding rely themselves on complex funding structures which - in an interplay of cooperation, coordination and competition – complement each other and, together, achieve the best services for the research communities they serve. The panel recognizes that it will take the new agency a number of years before it is functioning at its full potential. The possibility of the FNP going beyond an advisory role and acting as the deliverer of the programmes new agency would be viewed positively by the panel. In the short term, the Panel recommends the FNP to adopt a strategy of growth in order to enhance its impact and, to avoid an unplanned gap in the system, should not curtail its activities in areas of potential overlap with the new agency until that entity is fully functioning.

The panel is aware of the potential conflict between the recommendation to manage third party programmes and the independence of the Foundation. Indeed the independence of the Foundation has been decisive for its success. The panel believes that this independence should be preserved in the future and should remain an important guiding principle in the governance and management of the Foundation. However, the Panel sees no inherent contradiction between the independence of the Foundation and the management of external funds including government funds. It believes that it is possible to design arrangements in which the Foundation delivers high quality services without compromising the very principles which make it a successful organisation. FNP should be open to broader funding of international collaboration (e.g. doctoral schools, academic exchanges ...), provided that external funds – ideally governmental funds - are secured.

As regards the management of external party funds, the panel wishes to highlight the experience and success of FNP in implementing EU projects and more recently in the management of parts of the EU structural funds earmarked for research. It should be noted that managing external activities by the FNP is beneficial both to the Polish research community: researchers get good, tested and trusted services as well

as to the FNP: synergy has been created between the activities supported by its core funds and externally funded programmes. For example science management infrastructure (e.g. peer review) benefits from scale effects and possible fruitful cross-fertilization and sharing of "lessons-learned" between the programmes.

Response to recommendations 1 & 2

The Executive Board of FNP also believes that the Foundation should seek out opportunities for growth in order to avoid being marginalised by the new research funding agencies. It does not rule out the use of public funding in this respect; however, past experience in the use of public funding demonstrates that generally it is tied to various types of pressures and threatens the independence of the Foundation. While agreeing with the recommendation by the evaluation panel, the Executive Board will actively seek the proper model for FNP's use of public funding.

➤ **Recommendation 3:**

FNP should very actively create a network of alumni which will be a sounding board for the Polish research community. It can convey the wishes and problems of the scientific community and could help create a platform from which scientific cooperation could arise. In this way it could be a powerful support constituency for the FNP.

A critical factor in strengthening the role of the of FNP in the Polish science system will be to reinforce the ties of the FNP with the scientific community it serves and on which it relies in its activities such as peer-review. The Foundation has funded the best Polish researchers in recent years and they are its natural constituency, support base and connection to with the research community. It should build on it and create a mechanism which enables this community to provide feedback and support from the research community on current and planned activities of the Foundation. In this respect, examples of other organisations such as EMBO or the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, with strong alumni networks can provide inspiration.

Response to recommendation 3:

Actions of this type have already been undertaken by the Foundation. In the summer of 2010 a group for Foundation recipients, "FNP Club," was created on Facebook. The SKILLS programme, which has recently been created, is designed to foster integration among recipients, providing for training for researchers in communications skills ("communicating science"), cooperation, team management, and promotion of science. The programme is planned on a very broad scale, with a preliminary budget of about PLN 36 million, and should significantly improve the skills of recipients and strengthen the cooperation among them as well as contact between them and the Foundation.

❖ **Recommendations regarding FNP Programmes:
fitting its mission and scope of its portfolio**

➤ **Recommendation 4:**

The panel recommends that the FNP Charter be seen in a holistic manner rather than in discrete goals which should be addressed by dedicated funding schemes. In particular with respect to the chartered goal of *facilitating technology transfer*, FNP should consider not to address it in separate funding schemes, but to present its funding as "*research with consequences*" and highlight – in its reporting obligations - how the second chartered goal is addressed, indirectly, by existing funding schemes.

The panel finds that the programmes of FNP very adequately address the elements of its Charter. The first element of the charter ("to support excellent scientists and research teams") is addressed by a number of funding schemes and the panel believes that this objective should remain the prime focus of the FNP activities.

The panel noted that the second element ("to facilitate technology transfer") is addressed by a separate funding scheme: VENTURES which encourages young researchers (Graduate and Ph.D. students) to take up research projects which are oriented towards practical applications. This programme has been in existence since mid-2008 and has funded about 23 projects.

The panel was not convinced that this programme was achieving its stated goals and formed the opinion that it existed primarily to address this element of the charter. The funding levels that are required to address this challenge for Poland is beyond the means available for this strand of FNP activity. The establishment of the NCBiR is a more appropriate response by the Polish funding system and in this case the FNP has less to offer the new agency than it has to the NCN and hence disengagement is recommended.

The panel believes however that this element of the charter can better be viewed as addressed, albeit in an indirect manner by funding of excellent research projects. The basis of this analysis is the fact that frontier research of top quality inevitably generates novel and patentable results. These provide the basis for technology transfer and for engagement with industries directly or through the provision of highly skilled scientists and engineers. The panel accepted that this is succinctly summarized by the Science Foundation Ireland slogan: "research with consequences". It felt that this holistic view provided for better integration of the FNP programmes but also mandated the FNP to ensure that those that they fund are sensitive to capturing economically relevant outputs and translating them through to exploitation. It is probably also more effective than to set up a dedicated funding scheme. In the opinion of the panel, setting up successful schemes to translate research results into commercial viable products/services can be quite challenging as it requires capital and skills typically found in dedicated venture capital

funds and therefore beyond the means of even the biggest among the funding agencies. Specific provision may need to be made for Humanities and Social Sciences; the notion of "research with consequences" encompassing, for example, outreach components such as books, media coverage, exhibition, policy advice) or laying foundation for further innovative research teaching (e.g. editions).

The third element of the charter ("to support various investment initiatives serving science in Poland") is addressed by its activities of the funding in managing third party funding but also in its science policy initiatives listed in Table 1 (in Annex 1). Recommendation three above acknowledges this success and the confidence it gives the FNP to continue with such third party engagements and that it can do so without jeopardizing its independence.

Response to recommendation 4:

The FNP Executive Board agrees with this recommendation. An amendment to the statute of the Foundation is already under consideration which would provide for a restatement of the Foundation's purposes to express support for research leading to progress in science as well in the social, economic and cultural sphere.

➤ Recommendation 5:

The panel recommends that the FNP design the programmes in the category "grants and scholarships" to be broadly defined support schemes which target the four stages of research careers: Start; Boost; New Research Leaders and Reward. Those schemes should include – as an integral part of the support - elements to support international scientific cooperation and to enhance Polish competitiveness in Europe. The support should also include provisions for the reconciliation of family life and research career. The schemes should also integrate different elements corresponding on the one hand to the strategic needs it wishes to address and on the other hand the needs of researchers it support.

With regards to the scope of the FNP programme portfolio, the panel noted that the current portfolio includes a relatively higher number of funding schemes in the category "Grant and Scholarships" [see Table 1 in annex 1].

The panel finds that some of those programmes are narrowly focused (small target groups) and small in scale (a relatively low number of grants). This could be problematic because multiple programmes can be difficult to manage efficiently; they may also may confuse the targeted audience (especially if they overlap) and they may fail to make a lasting impact if they are too small in scale.

A possibility to overcome this situation is to have broadly defined support schemes, with clear goals such as enhancing the excellence of Polish research which integrate support for other strategic goals of the Foundation.

Examples of streamlining include:

- welcoming all researchers from abroad who wish to work in Poland whatever nationality they are, instead of having two programmes separately targeting Polish or foreign nationals.
- integrating (international and national) short-term visits in other grants according to the needs of researchers. This can vary from the use of infrastructures (such as archives), attending research conferences and workshops, to learning new methods, cooperating with colleagues etc ...
- The Panel considered two possible implementing models:
 - (a) a single funding programme incorporating currently separate elements that target different career stages.
 - (b) designing a small number of different but complementary schemes each explicitly targeting a distinct stage of the research career.

In the view of the panel, the second model presents the best option. It can be structured in a way that it supports all critical stages of researchers. The panel suggest considering four career stages:

- **Start:** for Ph.D. students
- **Boost:** for postdoctoral researchers
- **New research leaders:** for starting an independent research course
- **Reward:** for advanced researchers

While the operational principles can be defined in comparative terms, the schemes can be designed to meet the specific needs of each career stage. In this respect, the level and content of funding support (i.e. what is covered by the grant, its size and duration) should be guided by the *needs of the researchers*. For some schemes there might be need for "more money, for longer period", and even within a scheme targeting the same career stages, there might be specificities of research fields to be taken into account. Key features that could be integrated into those schemes include:

- The fostering of "*international scientific collaboration*". For example the research funding could include the possibility and flexibility to collaborate with researchers abroad, to travel abroad for short or long stay etc ...
- Enhancing *Polish competitiveness in Europe*. For example, they could include elements of support to researchers who wish to prepare and qualify for European competitive research funding such as ERC Grants.

Another important feature of those schemes should be support for reconciliation of family life and research work. The panel believes that the issue should be defined broadly and go beyond common schemes targeting female researchers. Such support should include for example,

mechanisms to support all researchers with pre-school children or – when appropriate - dual research careers.

Response to recommendation 5:

The Executive Board is clearly seeking to limit the number of programmes carried out by the Foundation. In 2011–2012 it is planned to close out the following programmes: KOLUMB, FOCUS, KWERENDA, HUMBOLDT, Conference Grants, and Research Fellowships for Foreign Scholars. As a result, the structure of FNP's programmes should correspond to the scheme proposed by the evaluation panel:

- Start (START programme)
- Boost (planned mobility programme)
- New Research Leaders (planned "FNP TEAM" distinction)
- Reward (START, REWARD programme)

➤ **Recommendation 6:**

The panel recommends that the FNP rethinks the use of "biological age" in defining target groups and setting up eligibility criteria. It is recommended to follow the practice of other funding agencies which define the eligibility criteria in terms of research career.

The panel discussed the distinction between different target groups and believes that this should be defined in terms of "career stage" rather than in biological age. The current practice of setting age limits for specific schemes risks penalising unconventional research careers, ignores the specific patterns of different research fields and is at odds with practices of leading agencies in other countries which tend to use the "academic age" (e.g. years x after Ph.D. with corrections for parental leave etc.).

Response to recommendation 6:

During the last few years the Foundation has phased out the use of the criterion of biological age, replacing it with career stage, expressed for example in the number of years following the doctorate or creation of the researcher's (own) first team. The age criterion still appears in two programmes: START and MISTRZ. In the former programme, maintaining biological age as a condition for joining the programme (maximum 30 or 32 years of age) results from the fact that the programme is designed for persons at a specific, relatively early stage in life, when they are selecting their professional path and achieving their first successes. In this case the traditional distinction into persons before or after the doctorate is not relevant. The programme is designed to encourage young people to work in science. Eliminating the age criterion would threaten to obliterate the concept of the programme.

In the case of the MISTRZ programme, the reason for retaining the age criterion (a candidate may not be over age 60) was the social context of the programme. In Poland the research community is significantly more hierarchical than in most Western countries, and the average age

of professors here is clearly higher. Because the programme is based on the principle that candidates are nominated by the research community, there is a concern that without this type of formal restriction the nominations would chiefly be for persons at retirement age. The purpose of the programme is to recognise and provide financial support for persons who are not only active researchers, but also at a stage of dynamic career growth

➤ **Recommendation 7:**

The FNP Prize has achieved a high standing both in Poland and abroad and should be maintained. The Foundation should consider establishing a similar prize for earlier career stage researchers.

Any further development or indeed redesign of programme portfolio should build on support schemes which have proven to be successful and if needed should expand them. This is particular true for the **FNP research prize** which has high recognition in Poland and abroad and sometimes referred to as the "Polish Nobel Prize". Its 'brand' is strong and any new organization emulating it would need time to build up the legitimacy and prestige the current prize has.

Response to recommendation 7:

Formally, the FNP Prize is not reserved for scientists in the latter stages of their career. In practice as well, there have been winners in this programme who did hold the title of professor or even a habilitation degree.

➤ **Recommendation 8:**

The FNP support to enhance visibility of Polish research/scholarship should be continued whereby attention should be paid to specificities of different research results. For other research fields, the Foundation should support open access for the Polish Scientific Community.

The FNP has played an important role in increasing the international visibility of Polish research by its support for publication charges. In particular this has proven to be highly relevant for Humanities and Social Sciences. Extending this process by engagement in the Open Access movement would be timely for Poland and appropriate for the FNP as a funding agency. The costs associated with a carte blanche approach to this should be monitored but, as a minimum, the research grants awarded should make provision for the cost of paying for Open Access.

The FNP should continue to monitor best international practice in mandating that research it funds should be available in a central database and freely available after a time delay of at most twelve months. In doing so the FNP should respect the different attitudes that prevail in different fields of learning.

Response to recommendation 8:

The Foundation has also taken efforts toward financing publications of its recipients in the Open Access system, an option that was created for the winner of the MISTRZ programme. So far, however, the recipients have not shown much interest in it. Some of the recipients justify their unwillingness to pursue OA by the claim that the journals in their field that are included in the system are of low quality.

The FNP Executive Board considered creating a mechanism for financing OA publications for other groups of researchers, outside of the MISTRZ programme, but because of the very uneven quality of these journals it was decided not to pursue this approach.

FNP's efforts to publicise the achievements of its recipients are not limited to encouraging them to publish in the OA system. Publications by scholars in the humanities and social in the MONOGRAPHS programme are publicised by FNP on its website.

❖ Recommendations regarding FNP Programmes: new funding areas

➤ Recommendation 9:

The panel recommends that the FNP explores the possibility of developing a funding scheme to support outstanding researchers engaged in collaborative research undertaking in form of "FNP Research Groups". The FNP is recommended to seek external funding for this scheme.

Without specifying the *modus operandi* and being prescriptive about the practical implementation, the panel believes that there is an opportunity to enhance the services of FNP to the Polish scientific community by establishing a research scheme to support **FNP Research Groups** in excellent host institutions in Poland. It should be noted that this is distinct from the traditional act of supporting research in groups that are already in place.

The panel is of the opinion that embedding research groups in excellent institutes with adequate support from their hosting environments and giving them a high level of independence can contribute to the improvement of Polish scientific environment. The scheme would reward institutions which are excellent both in scientific research and in offering good working conditions. This could have structuring effects on the research environment and excellent research groups could also have "ripple effects" on the hosting institution. The scheme could be an enhancement of HOMING Programme and it could encourage mobility (internal or international) and reinforce the cooperation between researchers in Poland, creating centers of critical mass and high quality. The need to stimulate mobility is a further motivation for this proposal,

particularly in light of the statistics that show that most PhD students stay in their alma mater and presumably have a tendency to promote 'inbreeding' by extending their career in that location also. These groups could be selected to ensure that they increased the interdisciplinary possibilities for research in the host institute through internal collaborative research actions in Poland. In its initial thoughts, the panel estimated the size of the scheme to be 10 research groups each about 500,000 € per year. As this will be an expensive scheme, the FNP Research Groups would be encouraged to seek extra funding. The Foundation should seek external funding to operate this scheme.

Response to recommendation 9:

A programme of this type is a very interesting proposal for FNP. However, the cost clearly exceeds the Foundation's current financial capabilities. The most feasible option appears to be to finance the costs of salary and stipends for such research groups, but the funds for financing the research would have to come from sources other than FNP. The Executive Board is considering creation of a programme that would enable not only financing of the activity of such research groups, but also recognising and rewarding the best of the best (FNP TEAMS).

❖ Recommendations regarding FNP strategies with those of other actors

➤ Recommendation 10

FNP should remain true to its guiding principles and continue on a path that recognizes the emergence of new agencies but awaits their development before dramatically altering its Programmes. In doing so the Independence enshrined in its statutes is seen as a major asset.

The panel found a key distinctive feature of the FNP to be its focus on excellence and that it cannot be defined in terms of "target group" which other funding bodies also target. A distinction will be that the public funding agencies such as the NCN and will have to engage in "broader funding", ensuring that the whole system is well funded. The FNP focus on the "best" is still a relevant strategy in this new context. The panel recognises that the context, in which the FNP operates, is changing rapidly and that the FNP should constantly monitor the activities and plans of other actors in the funding system and adapt its portfolio accordingly. The panel believes that, in the mid/long-term, the emergence of new funding agencies (especially the NCN) provide the FNP with new opportunities to redesign its offer to the Polish scientific community. In the short term; it would be premature to abandon well established funding schemes in anticipation of activities of an agency which will need time to develop its own portfolio. The impact of the NCBiR should be more immediate as it is already in existence and addresses an area of the FNP portfolio that the

panel would not view as most central to the FNP or most dependent on the skills associated with the FNP. The panel is of the opinion that an eventual division of labour between different actors in research funding will evolve gradually, in negotiations and discussions and as a consequence areas of distinctive activities will emerge.

In this context, its legal status will give the Foundation the necessary flexibility to respond to new challenges. In the past, it has enabled the Foundation to use competitive funding mechanisms based on excellence, whereas other funding modes opted for an even, *juste retour* based spreading of funds. Not being bound by administrative rules of public bodies, but having a reputation of very good governance, the Foundation has the possibility to continue significantly improving the support of the most outstanding researchers in Poland.

Response to recommendation 10:

The Executive Board shares this view of the evaluation panel, particularly since it will be necessary to wait at least several years before there is dynamic activity by the new agencies.

➤ **Recommendation 11:**

The panel recommends that the FNP position itself to help in the process of creating the new funding agency. It has the experience and skills in designing and running funding instruments based on an independent peer-review system. It is in a unique position to assess what works and what does not (and why) in the competitive, peer-review based research funding in Poland. The FNP should assist in all possible ways the new agency with those assets and if asked, arrange for knowledge transfer in organised way.

The successful establishment of the NCN is the success of the Polish research community and the FNP. The panel recognises the difficulties any country would face in setting up a new funding agency. It will take time to be launched and even longer to be fully operational and mature into an established agency. Developing a balanced portfolio of funding schemes which meet the needs of the targeted research community and take into consideration its local specificities requires knowledge and experiences which the Foundation has accumulated over the years, through trials and tests and enriched through the feedback it has received from its grantees.

Response to recommendation 11:

The Foundation is prepared to play this role. It has already participated in consultations concerning possible programmes of NCBiR. It is not ruled out that the Foundation may handle the implementation of pilot programmes of the new agencies until they are fully prepared to operate independently. A guarantee of FNP's independence would be a condition for this approach, however.

Another form of support for the new agencies would be training for their staff provided for under the SKILLS programme.

❖ **Recommendations regarding a strong international network**

➤ **Recommendation 12:**

The panel recommends that the FNP continues to cultivate collaborative networks with international partners, especially leading funding agencies, Foundations and international organizations and explore ways to set up fruitful collaborative activities. External funding, including State, private and European funds could help to broaden this approach and improve its impact.

The FNP programme portfolio includes schemes which are based on collaborative agreements with international partners – both excellent research institutions and leading funding agencies and Foundations. The panel believes that these partnerships have contributed significantly to the success of FNP. The panel believes that the Foundation should continue in this line: renewing and deepening existing partnerships and broadening its ties, in line with the overall recommendations aimed at focusing the funding portfolio.

Response to recommendation 11:

The Foundation seeks international cooperation and will continue to do so. Such cooperation is intended to be a component of the programmes for supporting researchers at successive stages of their career. The Executive Board does not anticipate creation of a separate programme devoted to international cooperation. It does not exclude, however, funding joint awards together with foreign partners. International cooperation will also be a key element of the SKILLS programme. The Foundation will continue to cooperate intensely with foreign experts in review of applications and evaluation of its own operations. It will continue to participate actively in international organisations and conferences related to the promotion of science. The Foundation also intends to become a signatory of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.