

Summary and Recommendations of Advisory Board to the Eötvös Loránd Research Network Governing Board

Budapest, 24 & 25 August 2020

On the invitation of the Director in Chief, Prof Eörs Szathmáry, the External Advisory Board of the Center for Ecological Research (CER) met to assess and evaluate the recent work of CER, at the mid-term of the leadership and to make recommendations for further developments. Five members of the Advisory Panel were present in Budapest, and two members joined the meeting by Zoom (see below).

During the meeting, Prof. Szathmáry gave an update on the situation at the CER after their transition to the newly established network of the research institutions, formerly under the auspices of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. With the directors of the four member institutions, they gave a summary of the progress during the period since the directorship change at the CER: Dr László Zsolt Garamszegi (Institute of Ecology and Botany), Dr Zsolt Végvári (Danube Research Institute), Dr Tamás Czárán (Institute of Evolution), Dr Ferenc Jordán (Balaton Limnological Institute).

The Advisory Board makes the following overall observations:

The excellence of the CER endorses the progressive developments during the first half of the appointments (i.e., lasting 1.5 years). If this progress is further supported by the leaders of Eötvös Loránd Research Network, the CER will likely be a regional leader in environmental research.

The integrity of the CER should be maintained and further developed for reasons:

- a. to strengthen national infrastructure, competitiveness and excellence;
- b. CER provides the critical size and integrity for cutting edge science including major funding applications including Horizon 2020 and other EU applications;
- c. environmental issues are usually complex and thus solving them requires concerted efforts by multiple institutions.

The strengths of CER:

1. generates excellent scientific outputs;
2. secures strong and prestigious research grants both nationally and internationally;
3. performs essential environmental monitoring services for Hungary including key water bodies such as Balaton, Danube and Tisza: this service needs to be done at the highest possible quality;
4. has become part of national and international scientific networks, often taking leading roles;
5. conducts outstanding media output and public outreach.

Taken together, the CER makes huge contributions to science, society and environment both in Hungary and abroad.

The weaknesses of CER:

1. collaboration between different institutions has significantly improved over the last 1.5 years, nevertheless, further improvements are possible;
2. productivity and achievements of scientific staff and research groups are uneven;
3. infrastructure problems, including inherited old buildings and outdated equipment;
4. personnel issues and organizational concerns including unproductive researchers.

Specific recommendations:

1. collaboration between different institutions should be further improved: joint seminars and research projects to create shared knowledge base;
2. uneven productivity and achievements of scientific staff and research groups should be addressed by regularly evaluating the performance of each researcher at the institutions with subsequent organizational actions;
3. the CER needs substantial financial support to refurbish old buildings and update equipment to implement cutting edge techniques;
4. address personnel issues and improve organizational efficiency, replace underperforming researchers with young talented and skilled researchers, and reward productive and well-performing scientists.

The members of the Advisory Board (*present at the meeting in Budapest):

*Tamás Székely - Professor, President of Advisory Board. Royal Society Wolfson Merit Award Holder, Foreign Member of Hungarian Academy of Sciences

*Nils Christian Stenseth - Professor, former President of Norwegian Academy of Sciences, Honorary Member of Hungarian Academy of Sciences

*János Balázs Józsa - Professor, Rector of Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Full member of Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Péter Poczai – Dr, Curator of University of Helsinki

*Gábor Lövei – Professor, Member of Academia Europaea

*Béla Tóthmérész – Professor, University of Debrecen

Robert Ptacnik – Dr, Universität Wien

Appendices

1. Agenda of the Advisory Board meeting 24 & 25 August 2020
2. Reports of the 4 institute directors
3. Publication lists of CER