

## **Gdańsk University of Technology**

### *FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION REPORT*

*June 2023*

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# 1. Introduction

This report is the result of the follow-up evaluation of Gdańsk University of Technology (Gdańsk Tech) by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP). The follow-up evaluation took place in 2023.

## ***1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme***

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The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of IEP are:

- a strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase;
- a European and international perspective;
- a peer-review approach; and
- support for improvement.

The focus of IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses on:

- decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management; and
- relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management, as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

All aspects of the evaluation are guided by four key questions, which are based on a “fitness for (and of) purpose” approach:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

## ***1.2 Gdańsk University of Technology (Gdańsk Tech) profile***

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Gdańsk Tech is a medium-sized technical university (over 13,000 students) situated in the historic city of Gdańsk. Gdańsk Tech is the largest and oldest technical university in northern Poland (re-established in 1945, as the successor to the original Technische Hochschule of 1904).

Gdańsk Tech has eight faculties: architecture; chemistry; electrical and control engineering; electronics, telecommunications and informatics; applied physics and mathematics; civil and environmental engineering; mechanical engineering and ship technology; and management and economics. These faculties support 36 first and 33 second cycle study programmes, including 19 fields

of study and specialisations in English, two doctoral schools (one general, one industrial) across 14 disciplines, and one MBA course. The university's main research areas reflect these major fields also, with a broad range of research laboratories, centres and other facilities to support these.

The city of Gdańsk has for centuries been a major trading centre by sea and by land, with a diverse and developed range of commercial, economic, cultural and scientific activities. Following the collapse of communism in the late 1980s, a major economic and social transition took place, including significant industrial restructuring. Today the Gdańsk urban agglomeration is home to more than one million inhabitants, and the capital of the Pomeranian region with a population of over 2.2 million people. Local and regional development is now driven by a range of new industries and businesses, including many indigenous start-up companies alongside significant and growing foreign direct investments. Through its teaching, research, innovation and engagement activities, Gdańsk Tech is a major contributor to this dynamic regional context, including through the international mobility of staff and students which the university brings.

This role has been strengthened through the creation, in 2020, of the Fahrenheit Union of Universities, linking Gdańsk Tech, the Medical University of Gdańsk and the University of Gdańsk, to strengthen their collective engagement with the city and region's civic, economic, social and cultural activities. This includes a significant focus on sustainability and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

### ***1.3 The evaluation process***

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The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a self-evaluation group, chaired by Prof. Jacek Kropiwnicki, and composed of nine persons from the main central university administrative functions, as well as a student representative .

The Gdańsk Tech self-evaluation report, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in February 2023. This self-evaluation report highlighted the main changes which had taken place since the 2018 IEP evaluation. The main sections of the self-evaluation report provided a SWOT analysis on each of the main themes covered in the 2018 IEP evaluation report, actions taken based on the 2018 IEP recommendations, additional reforms implemented, and any additional challenges faced. The IEP team found the self-evaluation report to be particularly useful in setting the scene for this follow-up evaluation of Gdańsk Tech, which took place from 20 to 24 March 2023.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) consisted of:

- Sokratis Katsikas, Professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, and former Rector of the Open University of Cyprus, team chair
- Carmen Stanciu, former Vice-Rector, National University of Performing Arts and Film "I.L. Caragiale" in Bucharest, Romania
- Matej Drobnič, PhD student at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Lewis Purser, director of learning, teaching and academic affairs, Irish Universities Association, team coordinator.

The team would like to thank all Gdańsk Tech colleagues and students who spent time and engaged in honest and open discussions during its visit; Rector Krzysztof Wilde for inviting and hosting the

team; the Vice-Rectors, and in particular the Vice-Rector for Organisation and Development Dariusz Mikielwicz who spent a large amount of time with the team; Jacek Kropiwnicki, the chair of self-evaluation report team, and Agnieszka Cholewińska for helping the team at every step of the way during the follow-up evaluation process.

## **2. Governance and institutional decision-making**

The IEP team found that an important number of substantial developments had taken place in the areas of governance and institutional decision-making, both in policy and in practice, since the initial IEP evaluation in 2018.

These include the establishment of the University Council as a non-statutory advisory body to the Rector, composed of very senior external stakeholders who are willing to support the strategic development of Gdańsk Tech. The IEP team learned that University Council was instrumental in helping Gdańsk Tech draw up its new institutional strategy framework for the decade 2020-2030, another of the major developments which have taken place since 2018, and in ensuring that a concise set of Key Performance Indicators are in place with which to monitor the strategy's implementation.

Since 2018, the university has also established two doctoral schools, one devoted to industrial doctorates, the other to more traditional PhDs, to strengthen and consolidate the work across the university in training junior researchers for future roles in academia, industry and other public bodies. The role of the doctoral schools will be addressed further in Section 5 of this report.

The senior management team at Gdańsk Tech has likewise been strengthened, with the inclusion of a new Vice-Rectorate for Student Affairs, and a number of additions or redistributions among the other vice-rector's responsibilities for education, research, internationalisation and innovation, and the Chancellor's office. As a result, in the opinion of the IEP team, while more decision-making power has now been concentrated within the university executive, this is done so in a more balanced way across a broader range of portfolios, corresponding to developments which have already taken place in recent years in many European universities. This also aligns with the 2018 IEP recommendation that Gdańsk Tech should consolidate the governance and decision-making processes across the entire university.

While these developments can be framed as having taken place in the context of the provisions of the new university law of 2019, they are also evidence of a new long-term strategic approach to governance and institutional decision-making at Gdańsk Tech, with a stronger collective focus on a smaller number of key objectives. The merger of the former Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and the Faculty of Ocean Engineering and Ship Technology, to form the new Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Ship Technology, can also be seen in this context. The establishment of the Fahrenheit Union of Universities in Gdańsk, another example of this strategic approach with huge potential, will be discussed further in Section 6.

This approach can be also seen through the development of a number of new or significantly restructured internal management or administrative units, as per the 2018 IEP recommendation that Gdańsk Tech should explore options regarding the creation of internal shared service structures to support decentralised decision making across academic, research, financial and human resource fields.

Significant progress has likewise been achieved in this area, including the Human Resources Centre, with an entirely new approach and new processes relating to HR issues, and an important focus on staff development, including for PhD students. The HR team now has a networked approach across the university structures and works in liaison with the faculties. Using its experience from other sectors, the new University Council has supported these HR changes and monitors them on a regular basis.

As is the case in many universities, Gdańsk Tech is a major employer, with large numbers of staff employed at the university for many years. It is therefore entirely appropriate that significant strategic attention be paid to ensure that the university's biggest asset – its human resources – is appropriately shaped and equipped to meet the university's strategic objectives.

At a time of rapidly rising costs of living and significant competition from the private sector for highly qualified staff, the university will continue to need to find ways to attract and retain staff, particularly younger staff. The IEP team was informed that a number of possibilities exist to facilitate this, including through the payment of increased salaries through successful research grants, but that this would not resolve the situation for all staff. The new approaches to HR management will have to grapple creatively with this very real challenge in order to ensure that Gdańsk Tech remains a workplace of choice, with the right staff to secure the strategic success of the university.

Other units which have been created at Gdańsk Tech since 2018 and which the IEP team would like to highlight as of particular relevance to the reform of governance and decision-making at the university, include:

- the Project Management Office, under the authority of the Vice-Rector for Research, with the aim of providing professional support for researchers at every stage of their project development, preparation, implementation and reporting. The role of the Project Management Office will be discussed further in Section 5.
- the Strategic Analysis Centre, under the authority of the Vice-Rector for Organisation and Development, created to provide an evidence base to support strategic decision-making across the university. The role of the Strategic Analysis Centre will be discussed further in Section 3.
- the Centre for Innovative Education, under the authority of the Vice-Rector for Education, created to support the teaching process across Gdańsk Tech. The role of the Centre for Innovative Education will be discussed further in Section 4.
- the Welcome Office for international staff and students, within the International Relations Office, under the Vice-Rector for Internationalisation and Innovation.

Further strategic additions since 2018 include the creation of the Ombudsman for Academic Rights and Values, while Gdańsk Tech's social responsibilities have been brought to the centre of attention through the development and early implementation of both a Sustainability Strategy and Climate Plan and a Gender Balance, Diversity and Inclusion Plan. These new strategic initiatives at Gdańsk Tech were mentioned positively to the IEP team by a number of stakeholders.

These are all very significant developments. The fact that they have taken place over a short period of time, including during the global Covid-19 pandemic, is testament to the leadership, energy and potential of Gdańsk Tech. However, based on its examination of the self-evaluation report and on the many discussions which took place during its visit, the IEP team noted that – despite all the good

progress across many areas - some improvements could be made to ensure that the implementation of these strategic changes is as effective as possible.

These include ensuring that the new governance and decision-making structures and processes are well understood across the university. For example, the IEP team found that the role of the University Council was not well known beyond the Rectorate, and that younger academic staff felt a decreased sense of ownership regarding the decision-making processes which affected them. Addressing these communication issues, among others which also exist, would be helpful in improving understanding of these new structures, how they work and why these changes have been made, and could lead to better alignment at functional levels across the university with Gdańsk Tech's key strategic goals and objectives.

- *Continue to identify and address internal communications gaps, so that staff and stakeholders are fully aligned with the strategic developments underway at Gdańsk Tech.*

While state-owned institutions such as Gdańsk Tech must observe public administration rules, the IEP team noted that the university was working hard to improve efficiencies, including through the digitalisation of many internal procedures. The IEP team was however informed that unnecessary levels of bureaucracy still remain associated with many administrative procedures and processes, and which all detract from the progressive approach underway.

This may be linked to the ongoing situation identified by the IEP team, where, as previously identified in the 2018 IEP evaluation, in some cases faculty policies and rules still continue to prevail over any institution-wide approaches. Apart from the risk that these local variations may sometimes no longer meet new statutory or national administrative requirements, this non-alignment will inevitably also mean that efficient new practices are not necessarily implemented fully across all parts of the university, and will lead to unnecessary complications, delays and frustration. While the new Human Resource management structures and other developments are expected to improve these issues over time, it is important to continuously strive for administrative alignment and efficiency across all activities.

- *Continue to streamline and identify efficiencies across the full range of university administration, so that the best use can be made of staff time and other resources across the entire university.*

### **3. Quality culture**

The IEP 2018 evaluation devoted a lot of attention to the topic of Quality Culture, and a significant number of recommendations were made on this topic.

One of the principal issues discussed in 2018 was the need to ensure a common approach to quality assurance across the entire university, with a similar standard of procedure in place at all levels to ensure that academic programmes and support services are evaluated and improved on a regular basis. In 2023, the IEP team noted that Gdańsk Tech had in 2022 formally updated its internal University System for the Assurance and Improvement of Education Quality, and that the implementation and monitoring of these revised policies were taking place through the University and Faculty Committees for the Assurance of Education Quality.

The university committee reports to the Senate, and is composed of representatives from all faculties, from each of the main offices, of students and an external industry representative. The faculty-level

committees monitor topics relevant to quality assurance, such as the review of student grades; the review of teachers based on student grades; innovative methods for teaching and learning; the relevance of programmes, including the evaluation of new e-learning courses; the approval and introduction of small student-led improvements, the quality of infrastructure; and the quality of information provision.

The IEP team found however that, although these new policies were in place and beginning to take effect, additional effort and time will be needed before these result in a strong university-wide culture of quality. The team found evidence, during its visit, of the continuation of different quality cultures in different faculties and parts of Gdańsk Tech. Given that a sustained period of time, with consistent effort, commitment and leadership, is required to move from this situation towards a strong unified quality culture across the whole institution, Gdańsk Tech should continue to build on the good foundations already in place and extend these to all parts of the university.

- *Continue to build on the good quality culture foundations already in place and extend these to all parts of the university.*

In doing so, it would be important to keep in mind two other 2018 IEP recommendations, namely the need to assess regularly the relevance, coherence and alignment of the various quality assurance instruments and indicators at Gdańsk Tech, including those in place for research, to ensure that all essential issues are adequately covered, and that the phenomena of “evaluation fatigue” and “over-measurement” are avoided. This will help the university and faculty committees to identify priority measures and establish a clear workplan to address these. This will also be useful to Gdańsk Tech in ensuring that its education processes, structures and methods are kept fit-for-purpose, and that it is able to respond effectively to new and emerging external challenges, including new generations of students who behave and learn differently.

- *To assist with the implementation of the new university-wide quality assurance policies, identify priority measures and establish a clear workplan at both university and faculty levels to address these.*

The 2018 IEP evaluation likewise recommended that Gdańsk Tech should ensure that all students can contribute fully to the quality of their programmes, faculties and the university, and that all faculties and programmes are responsive to the issues these students may raise. It is clear from the evidence of the self-evaluation report and through the IEP team’s site visit that a number of important steps have been taken in this direction. These include student representation in both the university and faculty level committees, the modifications made in 2022 to the regular evaluation by students of their teachers, and notably by the introduction of the online “Need4Change” tool, as a go-to shop window for students and staff to seek solutions to their problems, to report issues or to make suggestions and obtain feedback and effective responses to these. The IEP team were informed by students themselves that, despite this being a relatively new facility, it has provided an outlet for most queries and a much faster response time, leading to a more “demand driven” quality assurance process.

However, notwithstanding these developments since 2018, and the increased prominence that student feedback will play in the next round of staff assessment at Gdańsk Tech, the IEP team was repeatedly informed, by both students and staff, that student feedback rates in the formal teacher evaluation process remained very low, that ensuring student engagement in quality assurance processes more generally, including in curriculum review and development, remained a challenge, and that quality assurance processes continued to be seen as burdensome by students.



These issues are well-known and recognised across the university. The IEP team learned that some initial discussions were underway to consider how the situation could be improved, with the objectives of ensuring reliable response rates to student feedback surveys and greater student awareness of the importance of their contribution to quality assurance at Gdańsk Tech.

The experience of the IEP team from a wide range of other European university systems is that the most effective way to achieve these objectives is to ensure timely feedback to students and other stakeholders of the results of quality assurance measures, thus closing the quality assurance loop. It is clear that, despite relevant reports to committees and publication of these on the university website, many students still do not see the value of participation, particularly when it appears so burdensome to them.

- *Simplify and improve the tools through which students contribute to quality assurance at Gdańsk Tech, making them more user-friendly, with better feedback loops directly to students.*

A major step forward for quality assurance at Gdańsk Tech was reached in late 2022, with the creation of the Strategic Analysis Centre. This centre, staffed by a small team of data analysts, is responsible for providing a data-driven evidence base which will allow it to monitor the implementation of the university's strategy and development opportunities, develop conclusions and recommendations for the university management, and support the university leadership in planning, coordinating and streamlining strategic processes.

In addition to serving the senior university management, the centre also operates an open platform where anyone at Gdańsk Tech can request an analysis. In the short time it had been operational up to the IEP visit in 2023, the centre had received around forty such requests from various parts of the university for different analyses such as bibliometric analyses, qualitative analyses (e.g. based on student feedback on teachers), and benchmarking and good practices (e.g. different ways to survey teaching performance). The Strategic Analysis Centre is supported by the IT Services unit, which also provides considerable amounts of data for analysis, but can also seek data from other external sources. Through this work, Gdańsk Tech has responded directly to one of the recommendations of the 2018 IEP evaluation, which stated that the university should undertake better analysis of the quality assurance data already available to it, both for internal decision-making processes and for better feedback to staff and students.

## 4. Teaching and learning

When Gdańsk Tech was evaluated by IEP in 2018, the main focus of the recommendations regarding Teaching and Learning was on strengthening the approach to student-centred learning, and ensuring greater consistency across the university, including the possibility for students to develop their own learning paths and address their own skills needs developments. It was noted that teaching timetables and the distribution of teaching hours should be designed primarily from a student-centred perspective, to ensure as supportive a learning environment as possible.

Other recommendations from 2018 supported the need for further development and mainstreaming of staff didactic training and staff appraisal practices, including peer observation and feedback, as well as encouraging and facilitating greater use of the Language Centre by students in order to enhance their competences across a broader range of relevant languages.

Since 2018, Gdańsk Tech – like all universities – has had to manage the significant disruptions to teaching and learning caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. From the feedback gathered from a wide range of stakeholders during the 2023 IEP visit, it was clear that Gdańsk Tech had responded effectively to this crisis, that the disruption was in fact minimised, and that during this same period a number of other important strategic developments were begun. These included the establishment of the Centre for Innovative Education in 2021, whose main objective is to support the teaching process across Gdańsk Tech and where a large range of supports for academic staff are now available, and the HR Centre in 2022 which also provides a useful range of professional development resources for teachers. The IEP team also learned of important internal administrative reforms which have taken place, replacing paper-based procedures with new digital ones, and the establishment of the Ombudsman function, which provides a new important recourse for students when other existing channels have been exhausted.

In terms of pedagogical developments, initiatives now being run by the Centre for Innovative Education include an ongoing series of certified training events to improve didactic and methodological competences, supporting the use of more student group projects, inter-disciplinary groups and student research projects, facilitating the adoption of a problem-based learning approach across a broader range of disciplines, and working with academics to develop more elective modules for students to explore their own learning pathways. The Centre also organises a rich programme of weekly meetings such as “Didactic Fridays” and “Mondays at Gdańsk Tech” to support staff in their teaching practices, and online workshops, which are open not just to all Gdańsk Tech staff, but to all university teachers in Poland. The week of the IEP team visit, the online workshop was on the very topical subject of Artificial Intelligence and ChatGPT.

While the Centre for Innovative Education is still a new initiative, it has become very visible across the university in a short space of time, thus effectively also working towards its second main objective, that of building a strong community of teachers at Gdańsk Tech and enabling them to find peers across other universities in Poland and internationally. The IEP Team found that the Centre’s pro-active approach in supporting teachers who are preparing for their regular staff appraisals is another effective way of embedding the quality of teaching and learning across the university.

While these achievements are noteworthy, and evidence of a significant focus and investment by the university leadership in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning at Gdańsk Tech, it will take time and resources to ensure sustainable change in both practice and culture in this key mission of the university. The IEP team noted that, of the 1,300 academic staff at Gdańsk Tech in total, at the time of the IEP visit around 300 of these had engaged in some way with the Centre. This shows what can

be achieved in a short space of time, but also highlights the ongoing challenges, both operational and strategic, in ensuring long-term change across the entire institution in order to deliver the university's ambitions for teaching and learning.

- *Continue to invest in the development of advanced didactic competences for all academic staff at Gdańsk Tech, so that all students benefit from high quality teaching and learning environment.*
- *Develop strategies to ensure that all academic staff engage with the range of staff development opportunities now available at the university.*

During the 2023 visit, the IEP team was also informed about the exciting recent developments underway at Gdańsk Tech in terms of innovative partnerships with other universities and stakeholders to enhance teaching and learning. An example of this is the new European University ENHANCE Alliance, of which Gdańsk Tech is a member with nine other Universities of Technology across Europe. The IEP team learned that one of Gdańsk Tech's overall objectives through this strategic alliance was to allow students to design their own study paths across the partner universities. This is also a long-term objective for the new Fahrenheit Union between the universities in Gdańsk. Indeed, the IEP team also learned of ambitions to improve collaboration with industry in the teaching and learning area, with scope for more inputs from industry experts and increased options for students regarding internships and placements.

These important initiatives all aim to develop a broader range of student learning opportunities and outcomes, designed to meet the learning needs of a more diverse student population and an increasingly complicated and unpredictable labour market. They will however all require a significant increase in academic and administrative flexibility, so that students have a greater choice of elective learning options, not just within one faculty or indeed just within Gdańsk Tech, and greater flexibility in combining these in an academically coherent manner to design a learning pathway which meets their own individual needs. This should be designed within a robust strategic and operational framework, which ensures that all students can reach the respective programme learning outcomes, while also developing their skills and entrepreneurial attitudes to prepare them for successful careers after graduation.

Reaching this objective obviously represents a significant challenge, but one which many universities across Europe are addressing. The IEP team repeatedly heard during its visit however that, in reality, there was currently very little flexibility in curricula across Gdańsk Tech, and that most students were unable to plan their own learning paths. This therefore remains a significant outstanding challenge for the university since the IEP 2018 evaluation. Furthermore, it was noted that the timetabling of classes across many parts of the university was not student-friendly, and that many activities which are supposed to support students in their learning at Gdańsk Tech, for example the first-year orientation and induction programme, would benefit by being redesigned from a student perspective.

- *Develop a university-wide framework which will allow students to benefit from the breadth of learning opportunities across the university and its strategic partners, and which enables students to develop their own learning paths within a coherent academic framework.*

A specific concern raised in the Gdańsk Tech self-evaluation report, and which was mentioned repeatedly to the IEP team during its site visit, was the challenge of ensuring the sustainability of the university's current 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle Master's level educational model. This challenge is partly a function of a very buoyant labour market at the moment in Poland, and in particular in the Gdańsk region in technology-related fields, resulting in less students seeking to take a traditional post-graduate

programme. But other reasons were also highlighted to the team, including the inflexible educational model, which makes registering for a Master's programme a very significant commitment for people working full-time and with busy lives. The IEP team was informed that efforts were underway, both at faculty level and in the central administration, to make these programmes more flexible – in terms of structure, delivery mode and duration, so that students can engage at a pace, rhythm and also location (e.g. online) which best suits their own situations. The IEP team would encourage Gdańsk Tech to pursue these efforts, including consideration of more innovative types of postgraduate courses for those in employment, such as microcredentials, if it wishes to grow its numbers of students at this level in the future and remain the provider of choice for graduates seeking to reskill and upskill in a broad range of professional areas.

- *In order to meet the upskilling and reskilling needs of university graduates and other learners already in the workforce, rethink the design and delivery of the full suite of Gdańsk Tech postgraduate programmes, to ensure that they respond to learner demand and availability.*

## 5. Research and Innovation

As previously mentioned, one of the major changes in Gdańsk Tech's operating environment since the IEP evaluation in 2018 has been its designation by the Polish government as a Research University, and the associated significant increase in funding through the IDUB programme for research and research-related activities.

This initiative was already in a preparatory phase during the 2018 IEP evaluation, and the recommendations in the 2018 report encouraged and supported Gdańsk Tech in this endeavour, noting that this was a transformational opportunity to build on the university's existing achievements and strengths and to improve and enhance its research profile and performance.

The 2018 IEP evaluation also recommended that the Research Office should be strengthened as part of the central administrative services, in order to provide dedicated and specialised support services for grant applications and grant administration. It also noted the importance of supporting greater numbers of young academic staff to become doctoral supervisors, in order to enhance Gdańsk Tech's capacity to increase its PhD student numbers across a broader range of research fields.

In addition to the Research University status and the improved IDUB funding, a lot of important decisions and actions regarding research and innovation have been taken since 2018. Two Doctoral Schools (one of which is focused on Industrial Doctorates, where the student is already employed by an industrial partner, this also facilitating wider research and innovation links with industry) were created in 2019 and 2020 respectively, and are having positive effects across the university, along with a generous suite of PhD scholarships and other supports for young researchers. Four university-wide interdisciplinary Research Centres in priority research areas (BioTechMed, EkoTech, Advanced Materials and Digital Technologies), as well as R&D Centres for Offshore Wind Energy and for Hydrogen Technologies have been established. Additional key investments in research infrastructure have taken place and are planned, and the Excento and Proto-Lab research facilities are now in place.

Gdańsk Tech has likewise performed well in the more recent national evaluation of research disciplines, the second round of which was about to get underway following the 2023 IEP site visit. And the Project Management Office has been created, with decentralised hubs also in the faculty project offices, with the aim of providing professional support for researchers at every stage of their project development, preparation, implementation and reporting. Given that the Project

Management Office is still quite new, and feedback was already available regarding areas where researchers were looking for more support, its work and resourcing should be carefully monitored to ensure that it continues to meet the growing needs of the university, in line with the expansion of research and innovation activity and the rapidly changing external research policy and funding environment.

- *Monitor the progress of the Project Management Office over time, to ensure that it continues to be meet the needs of the university as these grow and evolve.*

As a result of these significant developments, Gdańsk Tech has improved in both the national and international ranking tables, the profile of research has grown within the university, and Gdańsk Tech has become more attractive for international postgraduate students and staff. The IEP team was informed that, as a result of the Fahrenheit Union, there has been a significant increase in research collaboration between the three universities in Gdańsk, starting from a relatively low level, all leading to increased visibility and quality, the improved ability to generate external research funding, better awareness of the need for research infrastructure and investment, and knock-on benefits for the region, raising awareness of the importance of research and innovation, and making existing infrastructure more available to external partners who may wish to collaborate with the university in a research or innovation project.

While these are undoubted successes, there remain however a number of challenges if Gdańsk Tech is to become more competitive at the European level in terms of successful participation in Horizon Europe and other major funding programmes. The IEP team learned that many staff are still not engaged in research, that some disciplines at Gdańsk Tech are significantly less research-active than others, and that the salaries remain uncompetitive, even when additional income from research projects and other sources is included.

- *If it is to continue on its current successful trajectory in terms of improved research performance, the university will need to find a way to address these challenges, notably the challenge of attracting and retaining young researchers.*

The IEP team found significant developments at Gdańsk Tech in the area of doctoral education. The two Doctoral Schools operate as umbrellas, under which each department can accommodate and educate PhD students. This is a much more coherent structure than previously, and also enables more structured collaboration with other bodies, for example the Academy of Sciences. The team learned that there is now considerable international interest from doctoral students to come to Gdańsk Tech, and that this is supported by a generous scholarship scheme.

However, the rapid growth in doctoral students is stretching the capacity and resources of the new Doctoral School structures, and – as in 2018 – the IEP team heard the need for more PhD supervisors, who are trained to support – in conjunction with the Doctoral School - a more diverse range of students with a broader range of needs. An increase in capacity and in the number of experienced academic supervisors (Polish and international) would allow Gdańsk Tech to recruit larger numbers of national and international PhD students, thus supporting the ambitious research developments currently underway.

These growing pains are signs of success but present a number of challenges which the university will need to address in the near future.

*These include:*

- *the need to provide greater clarity regarding the rights and responsibilities of PhD students and supervisors,*
- *the need for PhD students from different disciplines to meet each other on a more structured basis,*
- *the need for a transparent relationship between the disciplines/departments and the Doctoral Schools, with clear rights and responsibilities of each,*
- *and the need for sustainable resourcing of the Doctoral Schools.*

## 6. Service to society

In 2018, the IEP evaluation made a number of recommendations regarding how Gdańsk Tech could better serve society through greater awareness of the university's third mission, including a better overall coordination of this mission, and supports for students and staff in their engagement in such activities. The 2018 evaluation also recommended a more systematic integration of ECTS credit-bearing student service-learning activities into the curriculum, and that staff who are active in outreach and service to society should be rewarded.

During its 2023 visit, the IEP team noted that stakeholder expectations of Gdańsk Tech remain very high, and that this represents a significant opportunity. The university has maintained strong collaboration with the local and regional authorities and is providing leadership in the field of sustainability, with a strategic and coherent response to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and an eco-innovation centre. During the IEP visit, the alumni association and other business networks were vocal in their support for the university, and indeed keen for the university to exploit this support further.

Regarding Tech Transfer, the university has strengthened its work in this space through various initiatives such as a suite of micro-grants, new performance awards, a start-up school, and a number of external accelerator projects. These positive developments were recognised by societal stakeholders themselves, with better resources for cooperation with industry, especially for students, now available, and some of the new labs now accessible on a 24/7 basis.

While these developments are welcome, the IEP team heard from both internal and external stakeholders that there is still considerable potential to improve further. The lack of an over-arching university framework for strategic collaboration with industry, including a systematic approach to providing continuous education for industry and wider society was noted, and the ongoing under-resourcing of the Tech Transfer and Project Management Offices, particularly in professional support staff. This would enhance Gdańsk Tech's commercialisation capacity, and also ensure the university is well prepared to respond to the new EU funding calls which are expected as part of Horizon Europe and other major programmes.

- *Building on the core strengths of the university, develop a strategic university approach to upskilling and reskilling for Gdańsk Tech's industry and societal partners.*
- *Continue to invest in professional support staff to enhance Gdańsk Tech's capacity to engage successfully in tech transfer, commercialisation and innovation projects.*

A major development since 2018 has been the creation of the Fahrenheit Union, involving Gdańsk Tech, the University of Gdańsk, and the Medical University of Gdańsk. These three universities have come together strategically as a union of universities, to strengthen the role they collectively play in the city and region, with the public authorities and organisations as well as with the private sector.

Opportunities for collaboration and consolidation across the three universities in teaching and research, as well as in terms of organisational structures, were being actively explored at the time of the IEP 2023 visit.

Early achievements include joining up the library systems across the three universities, enabling access for students and staff from each university to all resources through one access card; and providing joined-up grant schemes for younger researchers across the three universities, so that they can work together in more innovative ways. Other longer-term opportunities have also been identified and will be actioned in due course.

## 7. Internationalisation

The IEP team found that Gdańsk Tech had invested significant resources since 2018 in strengthening its internationalisation efforts and structures. This is especially visible through a number of strategic international networks and projects of significant potential, including its membership of the ENHANCE European University Alliance, of the CESAER network of universities of science and technology, and through the impact of the IDUB national research excellence programme.

The IEP team noted that international students now comprise 5% of the total student body at Gdańsk Tech, and within this there has been a significant increase in international PhD students. The team also noted increased levels of teaching through English throughout the university, increased numbers of visiting scientists, and a significant increase in double degree programmes, with 30 such programmes now in place.

In a number of ways, the university has therefore responded positively to the 2018 IEP evaluation, which recommended that Gdańsk Tech develop more double degrees, increase the numbers of visiting international staff, and ensure the diversity of international students across the university.

The team however also noted that the university's internationalisation strategy was still under development, and that different understandings and perceptions of the importance of internationalisation remained across the faculties, including regarding Erasmus+ mobilities, to the extent that in some faculties students were rarely made aware of the opportunities available.

From the perspective of the IEP team, these various levels of importance accorded to internationalisation contribute directly to the ongoing problems experienced by students in the recognition of the ECTS credits they have gained abroad. Ensuring that ECTS credits from all approved student mobility periods abroad be fully recognised, as per the ECTS learning agreements signed by Gdańsk Tech and the partner university, was a key recommendation from the 2018 IEP evaluation, and remains an ongoing challenge. The incompatibility of Gdańsk Tech's ECTS structure with that of many European universities is doubtless contributing to this, and remains a clear obstacle to the university's efforts to ensure high quality student mobility.

- *Ensure that ECTS credits from all approved student mobility periods abroad are fully recognised, in all Gdańsk Tech programmes.*

The IEP team also remarked that, despite improvements since 2018, English language competences remain low among Gdańsk Tech staff. Although the Doctoral Schools operate with a significant level of English, the overall low level of English is holding the rest of the university back from greater cooperation in research, innovation and teaching, and from much greater international visibility through publications, joint projects, and other collaborative research activity, including in the flagship

ENHANCE and CESAER partnerships. It is certainly also a contributing factor in the ongoing very low numbers of permanent international staff at the university, and results in a low level of teaching through English at Master's level, where Gdańsk Tech should be ideally positioned to recruit large numbers of international students. The team likewise noted that Gdańsk Tech's internal university processes are not bi-lingual, and that this continues to present challenges to international students and staff.

As was the case in 2018, Gdańsk Tech students still express frustration about the levels of foreign language support available to them, including the range of languages and regarding higher levels of English proficiency. At a time when the university actively seeks to encourage more student mobility, language learning needs to be made more accessible for those students who actively want it, through better use of the resources currently available. This could also be linked to appropriate orientation for students prior to their mobility periods, for example in the language and culture of their host country.

- *Ensure that the new Internationalisation Strategy includes an objective to significantly improve English language competences among Gdańsk Tech staff, with targets and resources to achieve this, and better supports for students who wish to improve their competences across a range of foreign languages.*

## 8. Conclusion

At the conclusion of this follow-up evaluation, the IEP team would like to confirm that there has been a lot of progress across many areas at Gdańsk Tech since 2018. This report highlights some of the most important of those, but there are others. There are also areas where, naturally, progress has been less rapid, or where more significant challenges remain. The IEP team is confident that the Gdańsk Tech leadership is aware of these, and most of them have already been identified during the university's self-evaluation process.

From the perspective of the IEP team, the following are the priority areas where there is still most need for improvement:

- Building ONE institution;
- Strengthening quality culture;
- Developing a suite of flexible 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle programmes;
- Consolidating the doctoral schools;
- Embedding an institutional approach to working with industry;
- Developing a new approach to foreign languages, to support internationalisation.

The IEP team is confident that there is significant ongoing potential for and commitment to further change throughout Gdańsk Tech and wishes the university every success in pursuing this.

### ***Summary of the recommendations***

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*In terms of governance and institutional decision making:*



- *Continue to identify and address internal communications gaps, so that staff and stakeholders are fully aligned with the strategic developments underway at Gdańsk Tech.*
- *Continue to streamline and identify efficiencies across the full range of university administration, so that the best use can be made of staff time and other resources across the entire university.*

*In terms of quality culture:*

- *Continue to build on the good quality culture foundations already in place and extend these to all parts of the university.*
- *To assist with the implementation of the new university-wide quality assurance policies, identify priority measures and establish a clear workplan at both university and faculty levels to address these.*
- *Simplify and improve the tools through which students contribute to quality assurance at Gdańsk Tech, making them more user-friendly, with better feedback loops directly to students.*

*In terms of teaching and learning:*

- *Continue to invest in the development of advanced didactic competences for all academic staff at Gdańsk Tech, so that all students benefit from high quality teaching and learning environment.*
- *Develop strategies to ensure that all academic staff engage with the range of staff development opportunities now available at the university.*
- *Develop a university-wide framework which will allow students to benefit from the breadth of learning opportunities across the university and its strategic partners, and which enables students to develop their own learning paths within a coherent academic framework.*
- *In order to meet the upskilling and reskilling needs of university graduates and other learners already in the workforce, rethink the design and delivery of the full suite of Gdańsk Tech postgraduate programmes, to ensure that they respond to learner demand and availability.*

*In terms of research and innovation:*

- *Monitor the progress of the Project Management Office over time, to ensure that it continues to be meet the needs of the university as these grow and evolve.*
- *If it is to continue on its current successful trajectory in terms of improved research performance, the university will need to find a way to increase levels of research activity across the entire university, improve academic salaries and attract and retain young researchers.*
- *Provide greater clarity regarding the rights and responsibilities of PhD students and supervisors.*
- *Enable and support PhD students from different disciplines to meet each other on a more structured basis.*
- *Ensure a transparent relationship between the disciplines/departments and the Doctoral Schools with clear rights and responsibilities for each.*
- *Ensure a sustainable resource plan for Doctoral Schools.*

*In terms of service to society:*

- *Building on the core strengths of the university, develop a strategic university approach to upskilling and reskilling for Gdańsk Tech's industry and societal partners.*
- *Continue to invest in professional support staff to enhance Gdańsk Tech's capacity to engage successfully in tech transfer, commercialisation and innovation projects.*

*In terms of internationalisation:*

- *Ensure that ECTS credits from all approved student mobility periods abroad are fully recognised, in all Gdańsk Tech programmes.*
- *Ensure that the new Internationalisation Strategy includes an objective to significantly improve English language competences among Gdańsk Tech staff, with targets and resources to achieve this, and better supports for students who wish to improve their competences across a range of foreign languages.*