



AVEPRO

DEVELOPING INSTITUTIONAL
STRATEGIES FOR RESEARCH AND
SCHOLARSHIP
IN ECCLESIASTICAL HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS

A POSITION STATEMENT FOR THE GUIDANCE OF ECCLESIASTICAL HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
THEIR GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP AND EXTERNAL REVIEW PANELS

PREAMBLE

This Position Statement (PS) is one of a series being developed by AVEPRO to give advice on specific aspects of the profile of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) within the orbit of AVEPRO, and which have particular relevance to the quality of the institution as it meets its evolving obligations to the Church and to broader society. It is not intended to be a rigid set of prescriptions and criteria against which HEIs will be evaluated but a statement of internationally recognised good practices, which will inform how the institution will go about its business, and how it frames its ongoing self-evaluation.

This PS is thus intended to be a practical document to be used by HEIs, and by AVEPRO's external evaluation panels as they seek to provide creative and expert advice to institutions, and also to institutional boards of governance, bishops, grand chancellors and the superiors of religious orders and congregations who have a responsibility for the health and wellbeing, and long-term sustainability of their institutions in very turbulent and troubled times.

The prime focus of this PS is on HEIs with faculties of Theology, Philosophy and Canon Law, and perhaps other specialisms but the contents are equally relevant to smaller freestanding institutions, and those who are part of a larger and more comprehensive ecclesiastical or secular university. The PS acknowledges that there are wide variations in the size, profile, scope, traditions and settings of the institutions under AVEPRO's jurisdiction, and the PS is framed to enable such specificities to be taken account of, on the principle of fitness for purpose.

This PS is framed as a series of eight main questions, which HEIs should be asking about themselves in this particular domain of Research and Scholarship, both as a matter of course and also in the context of AVEPRO's institutional review processes. This PS attempts to provide a series of possible answers to these questions, deriving from international good practice, and depending on the particular situation of the individual HEIs.

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- What is research and scholarship? Definition of terms and concepts, in relation to different settings.
- Why is it an important topic for HEIs in general?
- Why is an explicit Research and Scholarship Strategy desirable / necessary for HEIs in general and ecclesiastical HEIs in particular?
- What are the factors that need to be considered when developing a strategy and positioning of HEIs on the spectrum of research active institutions?
- What are the elements in, and what is the possible content of a strategy for research and scholarship and appropriate activities, relevant to the particular HEI?

- How would research performance be assessed and what outputs can reasonably be expected from ecclesiastical HEIs, given their specific purposes?
- How should the education and training of second and third cycle research students (licentiate and doctorate) be conceived and organised?
- Given the starting position of many ecclesiastical institutions in relation to research, what practical steps are likely to be helpful or necessary to initiate a scholarship or research strategy?

WHAT IS RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF ECCLESIASTICAL INSTITUTIONS?

Ecclesiastical Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are typically academic institutions that deliver canonical degrees and/or civil degrees. What distinguishes HEIs from those that offer professional education and training is that the teaching activity of the former category is research-based.

SCHOLARSHIP enables lecturers to share the latest developments in a discipline with their students, with members and the leadership of the Church and with society at large through their teaching, publications for a broader readership and Third Mission projects. This implies that lecturers at HEIs need to keep their expertise up to date, e.g. by informing themselves about the latest developments in their field and sharing them. Scholarship is a minimal requirement for all lecturers at HEIs. Consequently, lecturers need to be able to devote part of their working hours to scholarship.

RESEARCH is related to but also differs from scholarship. Just like scholarship, research relies on studying primary and secondary literature and sources, doing empirical research etc. As we shall see later, research is about generating original contributions to knowledge by filling gaps in the existing knowledge base. The readership and audience of research output in these disciplines is principally the specialized international academic community in these fields, but increasingly there is the expectations that there will be practical implications which will be of value to professional users of research, who are in positions of responsibility in the Church, professions, and public and private organisations. Thus, the impact of research is an increasingly important dimension, not only in secular research, but in research undertaken in RC HEI, as Pope Francis makes abundantly clear.

The results of research are published primarily in international academic journals or by academic publishing houses, but other vehicles may well be used. Furthermore, the output of research is written in one of the international academic languages, mostly English, but also German, French and Spanish. Another difference between the lecturers who are involved in scholarship and those involved in research is that the former ones have a licentiate, while the latter ones will tend to have a doctorate. This distinction corresponds with the official regulations of the Church concerning the required academic qualifications for lecturers in seminaries and HEIs. HEI “on the move” will normally expect an upward trajectory in terms of expectations of staff.

WHY ARE SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH IMPORTANT FOR ECCLESIASTICAL INSTITUTIONS?

As previously indicated, scholarship is a minimal requirement for an HEI to qualify as an academic institution and, hence, to be part of the worldwide academic community. It is also an important criterion for the Holy See to recognize an HEI and allow it to grant a canonical baccalaureate. Furthermore, HEIs contribute through their scholarship and research to the continuation and enrichment of the longstanding intellectual tradition of the Church.

If an HEI grants canonical licentiate and doctoral degrees it is essential that its lecturers, apart from their scholarship in a specific discipline, are active researchers themselves, publishing regularly in international academic journals and with academic publishing houses. Only by being active researchers, lecturers have the expertise and skills that are required to supervise licentiate- and doctoral-students. Another reason why research is important for HEIs is that it enhances their academic prestige, thus enabling them to attract better lecturers and students, participate in (international) research-projects and obtain additional (external) funding. By actively engaging in research HEIs show that they want to be seen as full members of the wider academic community and can stand a comparison with research in other academic disciplines.

It is also clear that a perusal of some recent Papal Encyclicals leaves the reader in no doubt that Pope Francis is very explicit that research should not just be for its own sake and the generation of new knowledge, but should contribute significantly to the well-being and integral development of the user of the research: policy makers, NGOs, the Church and its constituent organisations, public authorities and business enterprises. By inference, this means the planet itself and its inhabitants, and God's Creation. This Papal expectation is well expressed in *Laudato Si*, *Veritatis Gaudium* and *Fratelli Tutti*.

Thus, the Church and society at large consider HEI's to be places of academic expertise, with the expectation that, through research, important ecclesiastical, spiritual and societal questions will be clinically defined and analysed, and responses developed.

It is important to bear in mind that ecclesiastical HEIs are also part of a global HE community, which embodies certain expectations regarding the motivations for undertaking research. These may be summed up as

- the intrinsic need of the academic to respond to the urge to undertake systematic and scientific enquiry to generate new knowledge
- its significance in enhancing institutional credibility, and possibly the chances of institutional survival and sustainability
- research enriches teaching, professional practice, the possibilities of contributing in an expert way to national policy debate, and possibly consultancy and community development

- research contributes to the advancement of knowledge
- research contributes to the global knowledge economy, and enhances the international profile and visibility of the institution, and has the potential to contribute to regional and national development.
- research, especially interdisciplinary research, contributes to understanding of significant global problems, for which these sort of HEI should be major actors in terms of the moral and ethical dimension, and such research is potentially of great use to non-academic users.

This is very much part of the impact and social responsibility agenda, where the question is not “What are we good at?”, but, “what are we good for?”

It is evident that many of the above, though derived from the secular HE sector, also apply to the ecclesiastical sector.

WHY IS AN EXPLICIT RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP STRATEGY DESIRABLE / NECESSARY FOR HEIs IN GENERAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL HEIs IN PARTICULAR?

Scholarship usually is closely related to the courses a lecturer teaches and therefore needs a lighter strategy than research in the strict sense. To ensure this and to position itself in the academic landscape in a structural way every HEI needs a scholarship strategy, stimulating all lecturers to be active in scholarship and stipulating the HEI’s expectations in this domain.

Although there is some overlap between a scholarship-strategy and a research-strategy, the latter is more detailed and demanding and includes various elements that are not relevant to scholarship. The distinction between the two depends largely on the greater amount of time that lecturers can invest in research, their academic qualifications (they should hold a doctorate) and on whether the HEI offers second and third cycle (licentiate and doctoral) programmes.

HEIs that meet these conditions potentially benefit a great deal from a specific research-strategy. A good strategy is a means for a HEI to demonstrate internally (to raise the profile of a research culture), and externally (to funders, potential partners, and users of its services), that its lecturers are seriously involved in research and can be legitimately (internationally) recognized or perceived as a centre of expertise. Given the enormous number of researchers, academic publications and the internationalization of research, an HEI needs a research strategy to define a limited number of thematic foci, depending on the size of the HEI, and to commit itself to investing in the required personnel capacity and infrastructure for a longer period (five to ten years is a minimum).

Although research in the humanities has traditionally been an individual affair there is a growing trend toward collective projects, larger intra-institutional research programmes and inter-institutional thematic research-clusters. This is already common practice in the sciences

(social sciences, physical sciences, medical sciences etc.). Obviously, these larger projects, programmes and clusters can only be realized if they are oriented and supported by a well-developed research strategy. Depending on the size of these projects/programmes/clusters, they consist of senior faculty, doctoral students, and postdocs from one or more disciplines and HEIs, who work on highly important but also complex questions, to which each member contributes from his or her specialized perspective. The success of this kind of collective research depends on the academic, ecclesiastical and societal importance of the research-questions, the cohesiveness of the project/programme/cluster as a whole, the academic quality of the individual members and the academic and managerial competence of its leader(s).

It may be argued that good research is simply the product of an inspired researcher, and does not need an overarching strategy. However, the received wisdom, adopted by universities in general, including the very prestigious universities, is that an explicit research strategy is needed in the contemporary world, for the following reasons:

- to align research activities with institutional objectives and mission
- to ensure that research has clear foci across the university, around which the efforts of individual researchers may reinforce each other.
- to respond systematically to external research opportunities and threats in a systematic manner, rather than via various ad hoc uncoordinated responses, especially in a highly competitive HE environment.
- to ensure that various university functional areas support the individual and collective research efforts, rather than hinder them, especially in relation to financial, personnel, and organisational support.
- to ensure that appropriate resources are dedicated to research and scholarship.
- to provide a generic framework in which individuals can undertake research I freely and creatively.
- to enhance the credibility of the institution in terms of bids for external funding and support and to attract other universities to become partners.

The alternative to an explicit strategy is one of organisational drift, ad hoc ventures, lack of coherent support for the researcher, and a failure to capitalise on opportunities. Such limiting characteristics may well be exposed by external reviews, the failure to generate external funding, and to recruit excellent staff and students. A robust and fir for purpose strategy tends to breed confidence internally and externally.

WHAT ARE THE FACTORS WHICH NEED TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN DEVELOPING A RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP STRATEGY, AND INSTITUTIONAL POSITIONING ON THE SPECTRUM OF RESEARCH ACTIVITY?

To develop a research strategy is not an easy task, especially given the variable nature of the institutions involved. What follows is a series of important considerations, which institutions are advised to discuss in order to clarify their assumptions, from which will follow the essential parts of a strategy.

The institution needs to be clear about its actual and desired positioning as an institution in terms of research activity. An idea of this positioning can be gained in terms of how active the institution is in the domains of:

- Number and proportion of research active staff
- Research publications and outputs
- Research income
- Research doctorates
- Well-functioning research partnerships.

This point is further expanded in later sections of this PS in terms of the normal accepted criteria of assessment, but it is important to be quite realistic and honest about positioning, as this will indicate whether the institution is, or could be, Research Intensive, Research Active or Research Informed (primarily teaching, where teaching and scholarship, rather than research is the principal focus)

- To undertake research and scholarship requires quality time for the individual. Time for scholarship and research is typically funded by the HEI itself as part of the working hours of the lecturers. The proportion of time devoted to teaching, research and third mission activities varies considerably among HEIs, depending on their profile and financial means, as well as on the academic qualifications of the lecturers (see the previous section). This should be clarified by the HEI concerned, so that expectations are explicit, understood and normative.
- While scholarship is a basic requirement for the lecturers of every HEI, developing a detailed research-strategy only makes sense for HEIs that have enough resources and qualified faculty for this activity. This strategy should not only comprise the amount of time that the faculty can devote to research but also detailed plans about investment in the necessary infrastructure for research (library and internet facilities, facilities for empirical research, subsidizing research-stays abroad, organization of and participation in international conferences etc.). In general, one can say that developing a research strategy makes only sense if lecturers can spend a minimum of 0,2 fte (one day per week) for every lecturer.

- The institution needs to decide on whether it wishes to let a thousand flowers bloom, and let a laissez faire approach thrive, or whether it should determine research priorities based on transverse themes. The research strategy should address this, and if it decides on a thematic approach, should include a well-developed plan about the research foci or clusters of the HEI and an (international) benchmarking to show the academic, ecclesiastic and societal relevance of these foci. Furthermore, a research-strategy needs to include a plan to materialize these foci in terms of personnel and material investment. Finally, claiming a research focus is only plausible if the HEI can substantiate this through (the results of) collective projects, research programmes and (established) collaborations with similar research initiatives of other HEIs or (secular) academic institutions. It is not for this PS to propose what such themes might be...this is for the institution to determine, based on its perceived and externally recognised strengths. However, recent pronouncements by Pope Francis (eg *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti*), certainly provide definitive examples.
- The institution needs to be realistic about its potential and capacity to acquire external research funding. Research can be funded by national or international research grants, awarded by national science funds, the European Research Council, or a private international fund like the Templeton Foundation. Many countries also have also private funds, which subsidize research. Competition for these grants is fierce and obtaining them is generally considered a sign of the excellent quality of a researcher or research-group. A research strategy should include a realistic vision of obtaining external funding, including the use of carefully selected international partnerships.
- Research has a long turnaround time, which means that the strategy needs to be long-term and stable.
- The different elements of a research strategy must form a cohesive whole. The research focus(es) of an HEI has to be in line with its profile and mission, should mesh with the HEI's general HR policy and the procurance of infrastructure, the offering of specialized study-programmes, strategic contacts with other research centres (at home and abroad), strategic contacts with societal and ecclesiastical stakeholders, a vision about interdisciplinary collaboration at an institutional level, and the allotment of doctoral students and postdocs to the research-foci of the HEI. The need for cohesion also includes the imperative of non-academic functions, like personnel, finance and marketing supporting, and not hindering the achievement of the research priorities
- An institution has the choice of whether to go for selectivity in terms of expectations of research activity, or whether to plan for a scenario where all departments and staff will be research active. This has consequences in terms of the allocation of research support, including whether all (senior) researchers and disciplines will have the same amount of time for research. Differentiation can be made based on the quality and quantity of the output of the researchers and their capacity to obtain external funding. It goes without saying that taking such a policy (together with the accompanying decisions and

processes) is a delicate matter and, therefore, it needs to be based as much as possible on objective data and discussed beforehand with the staff and faculties.

WHAT ARE THE LIKELY ELEMENTS IN, AND CONTENT OF A STRATEGY FOR RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP, SENSITIVE TO THE CHARACTER AND ASPIRATIONS OF DIFFERENT HEI?

It is not for this PS to be prescriptive on the nature and content of a strategy document, since this will depend on the assumptions discussed earlier, and on the traditions and academic profile of the institution. However, it is likely that such strategies might well include precise reference to, and action plans addressing the following broad areas.

- The context for research in the given HEI; external factors (HE; Church: trends in disciplines, funding); internal factors (performance to date; challenges and problems needing to be solved)
- The research mission and vision of the HEI: desired positioning; main research and scholarship priorities; what it wants to be; themes or foci
- Exposition of main themes and foci and how they will be progressed (project areas)
- Priorities re Research Degrees: types; number projections; training; QA etc
- Support to be provided in personnel /HR domain: recruitment of quality staff; training workloads and contract; mentoring; incentives; funds; research assistants and post docs
- Financial support for research and scholarship
- Information base: internal performance data and external comparisons and funding opportunities
- Organisational support structure for research and scholarship: Vice Rector /delegate; Research Office; Research Committee; Research Degrees Committee;
- Research QA
- Research Partnerships

These would need to be expressed in terms of the particular needs and circumstances of the specific institution.

HOW SHOULD THE EDUCATION, TRAINING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF 2nd AND 3rd CYCLE RESEARCH STUDENTS BE CONCEIVED AND ORGANISED?

This section, it is accepted, may not apply to all the HEIs to whom this PS is addressed. However, it should be noted that many first cycle degrees do also include an element of enquiry based study, mini thesis or dissertation, as well as that conventionally found in second and third cycle degrees. This is as it should be, since some expertise in conducting enquiries systematically is likely to be a very valuable skill in whatever profession the graduate chooses post-graduation, whether it be in the ecclesiastical or non-ecclesiastical domain. This expertise is a generic competency, whatever the degree may be. Discussion on how this training may be designed for first degrees will be informed by a consideration of the Guidelines being developed by AVEPRO for this purpose.

This particular PS is about general research strategy, but for a detailed consideration of research degrees per se, readers are referred to the Research Degree Guidelines, of which the principal headings are:

- the context of research degrees in ecclesiastical institutions
- the organisational framework for research degrees
- student admissions and support
- supervisors: appointment, training and monitoring
- the thesis
- student training
- monitoring and remediation
- examination
- graduation

It is emphasised that research students form a core element in the establishment and nourishment of a research culture and community, and contribute significantly to the research endeavours of faculty members. They may, of course, be associated with externally funded research projects, and benefit from the undertaking of some teaching at undergraduate level.

HOW SHOULD RESEARCH PERFORMANCE BE ASSESSED, AND WHAT OUTPUTS CAN BE REASONABLY EXPECTED FROM ECCLESIASTICAL HEI, GIVEN THEIR SPECIFIC PURPOSE?

Clearly, any assessment requires hard evidence and reliable data, which implies the institute is regularly collecting and analysing this evidence for decision making purposes. The process of

managing this data needs to be cyclical, systematic, open and transparent, and located in a Research Office or equivalent.

SCHOLARSHIP

Evidence of successful scholarship are whether the handbooks and other texts that lecturers use in their courses reflect the state of the art in a discipline, the participation of lecturers in the production of new handbooks, the presentation and publication of papers for a broader audience, the organization of internal or local study-days etc.

RESEARCH

There are a number of domains in which research may be assessed, and in certain settings, these may be determined, or conditioned by national HE research assessment regimes, which have the merit of being consistent, objective and impartial, because they are external. Nonetheless, HEI are well advised to carry out their own formative assessments to monitor progress year on year, and generate improvements. The normal domains used tend to be as follows:

- Research active staff: proportions of staff active as % of the total faculty, assessed through time spent on research; outputs; PhD supervision; generation of external funding;
- Research outputs: record of peer reviewed publications in the public domain; books and chapters; artefacts; refereed conference papers; patents (unlikely in ecclesiastical HEI, but certainly possible in more multi-disciplinary Catholic universities)
- Impact of research outputs: have they made a difference (other than in purely academic terms) to users of the research in society?
- Research Income: grants; contracts; coherence in terms of themes
- Research students: recruitment, completion and progression; employment.
- Research partnerships: the selection process; clarity of expectations; evidence of outcomes in above areas.
- Evidence of research impact on societal issues

Thus, for the assessment of research, ecclesiastical HEIs can rely on ratings of academic journals and so -called impact-data on their websites. It is important that HEIs have their own research portals on which the researchers can upload their publications and the results of their other research-activities (papers at international conferences, memberships of academic boards, prizes and other signs of academic recognition etc.) and stimulate their researchers to enlist on one of the existing ones (Scopus, Web of Science, Orcid, Google Scholar etc.). This can be used as an objective criterion to assess the impact of the publications of the lecturers since most of these websites include records of the number of reads and quotations of every publication. Other ways to assess the research performance of individual researchers or

research-groups are the number of delivered keynote-papers, research-prizes, participation in international research-projects or clusters etc.

These performance indicators should be brought together in a yearly overview of the scholarship and research of the lecturers and departments, and discussed with them in the yearly R&D-interviews. These interviews are an excellent means to enhance the quality of scholarship and research and to bring it (more) in line with the profile and mission of the HEI concerned.

Annual reviews are important, especially if assisted by external reviewers, as they identify areas of weakness requiring attention; questions of why staff may have not produced despite having time for research, and thus, identifying areas of remediation, investment and encouragement, and enabling a reset of objectives, if needed.

GIVEN THE STARTING POINT IN RESEARCH OF MANY ECCLESIASTICAL HEI, WHAT PRACTICAL ELEMENTS MAY BE HELPFUL OR NECESSARY TO INITIATE PROGRESS IN ESTABLISHING AND REALISING A RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP STRATEGY?

Many ecclesiastical institutions may be considered “late starters “in terms of research and scholarship development and a proactive research culture, compared with very well established centres with a long track record. This may be because

- they have traditionally been primarily teaching institutions, with little obligation or resources provided to do research
- staff may not have higher degrees
- there may be heavy teaching loads which do not give quality time for research
- what research there is largely the result of individual commitment, rather than institutional expectation, and consequently the research effort varies widely across the institution in terms of the quality and quantity of the output.
- there may be little encouragement or systematic support from institutional governance or leadership.

It follows that any strategy for research and scholarship needs to overcome these hindrances.

The differences in scholarship and research among HEIs are therefore substantial, and the same holds for their strategies in these domains. This section is meant for HEIs that have limited expertise in devising scholarship and research strategies and aims to provide them with some suggestions to make a start with developing such a strategy.

SCHOLARSHIP DIMENSION

- The first element in a scholarship strategy would be to specify that all lecturers should hold (at least) a licentiate in one of the relevant disciplines of an HEI. Furthermore, this strategy should define the minimal amount of time that every lecturer has to keep his or her academic expertise up to date and comprise a realistic estimate of the investment in infrastructure (library, internet facilities etc.). It is crucial that the HEI commits itself to maintaining these investments for a period of at least five years. This is also the standard period for a scholarship strategy.
- A second element would be to take stock of the existing scholarship and their qualitative and quantitative outputs, and of the plans and ambitions of the lecturers in this domain. The aim of this is that the HEI and its lecturers set themselves some realistic targets, which can be assessed in yearly R&D interviews, and directions for projected achievements set for the following year, including personal development activities. The above implies that staff members are likely to benefit if attached to a designated mentor with experience, and a track record of good personal research or scholarship. This person might be internal or external.
- A third element of a scholarship-strategy would be to list realistic new initiatives that go beyond keeping the academic expertise of the lecturers up to date. These initiatives can include the participation of lecturers in the production of new handbooks, the presentation and publication of papers for a broader audience, the organization of internal or local study-days; presentations and attendance at relevant conferences etc.
- The fourth element of a scholarship strategy might consist of establishing strategic relations with other institutions in the same region or internationally, perhaps in the same charism, with a similar size, profile and mission. These partnerships, properly managed, can result in joint study-days, publications, exchange of lecturers, co-supervision of theses, agreements on investment in and use of common infrastructure, setting up collaborative projects,

RESEARCH DIMENSION

- A research-strategy makes only sense if (most of) the elements of a scholarship-strategy have been realized. The first step toward a research strategy would be to specify that all lecturers should hold a doctorate in one of the relevant disciplines of an HEI. The assumption would be that the HEI formulates a clear action plan for this to cover relevant staff Furthermore, this strategy should lay down that every lecturer has at least 0,2 fte for research and the budget should provide for investment in infrastructure (academic library, internet facilities, subsidies for participating in international conferences, a budget for the organisation of conferences etc.). It is crucial that the HEI commits itself to maintaining these investments for a period of at least five years. This is also the standard period for a research strategy.

- A corollary would be to define the expected qualitative and quantitative output of the research time of the individual lecturers. The focus should be on the qualitative rather than on the quantitative output, with a focus on publications in high-ranking international academic journals or with academic publishing houses. A priority should be participation in (internal, national and international) research-projects or programmes, presenting papers at international conferences. Achievement in these elements can be assessed in yearly R&D interviews.
- The third element consists of finding out how the individual projects and their output relate to the profile and mission of the HEI. This inventory should be a first step toward defining and realizing one or more institutional thematic research foci, resulting in one or more intra- or interdisciplinary research programmes. These programmes should reflect the profile and mission of the HEI, should be of prominent academic, ecclesiastic and societal relevance, should have an innovative character and generate a number of specific research questions. To be sustainable it is essential that a substantial number of senior researchers participate in these programmes, as well as doctoral students and post-docs.
- The fourth element would be to define challenging qualitative and quantitative targets for every research-programme and to appoint a programme leader who is responsible for realizing these targets, developing new initiatives, establishing and maintaining contacts with other research groups or programmes in the same field. This would include the recruitment of research degree students.
- A fifth element of a research-strategy would consist of establishing strategic partnerships with other national and international institutions with common interests. The criteria for the selection of such partnerships is crucial, and should not end up as meaningless MOYs with little or no consequence, these partners may be of a similar size, profile and mission, but not necessarily, as partnership with a more prestigious university for development purposes, or one containing disciplines absent from the given HEI, is likely to be much more useful in the long term. These partnerships should be conceived and planned to deliver such possible initiatives as joint international conferences, joint research and publication projects arising therefrom; a joint doctoral school or programme; co-supervision of doctoral theses; agreements on investment in infrastructure; staff and student assignments and residential periods in partner institutions etc appropriate to the needs of the research strategy as a whole, and the positing of the HEI.
- Throughout all the above, the role of a supportive HR policy and practices is clearly critical. This includes hiring criteria including possession of a doctorate, personal contracts embodying research as a formal expectation, and timetabled hours to achieve this, provision for staff mentoring, appraisal of performance annually and associated

personal development and support mechanisms, a comprehensive staff training programme in research methods, publication and supervision.

- A supportive research organisation is needed to sustain the continuity and momentum. This might well include Vice Rector (Research and Scholarship); central Research Office; Vice Dean Research at Faculty level as link persons.

CONCLUSIONS

The above discussion is intended to constitute a framework of possibilities for institutions to consider how they might develop their research and scholarship strengths and profile. It is not intended to be prescriptive in any way, but to offer a series of options for development, if there is a will. Whether there is a will depends on a number of factors.

One is that the expectations for a robust research and scholarship profile (appropriate to the traditions and academic profile and positioning of the institution are made quite clear and unambiguous by the governing authorities, (Chancellor, the governing Order, and Governing Board if there is one). In this, they should acknowledge and accept the very strong directions on the importance of research and scholarship, given by Pope Francis in his various Encyclicals, referred to earlier.

Another is that the Rector would be expected to create a favourable and supportive internal climate and culture to facilitate and encourage research and scholarship, by giving out strong messages, and paying especial attention to the personnel factors discussed earlier in this PS. This reinforces the importance of a coherent personnel development policy and activities, rather than a laissez faire attitude, beloved of rather negative collegial cultures, which are often a cause of inertia.

The Rector clearly has a critical role to play in facilitating the evolution and collective drafting of the strategies discussed. In this, the designation of a Vice Rector for Research and Scholarship would signify an explicit commitment to this domain, as the implementation of strategy does not happen by itself, together with a committed Research Committee.

The tenor of the entire PS is that the creation of a research culture appropriate to the institution is fundamental in providing a stable set of operating beliefs and behaviour, in which research and enquiry for Truth is a *sine qua non*. All the above are contributory factors to this end.

It is emphasised that the evolution of a strategy should not be a bureaucratic burden, but something of genuine support and assistance to the institution and its staff, and owned by, not imposed on the academic community. The process by which it is put together thus requires careful thought and consultation and involvement, to avoid subsequent rejection, or lack of use. It therefore should be kept succinct and to the point, and emphasise actions to be achieved, rather than woolly sentiments or long unattainable, unprioritized wish lists.

In this whole process, and to this end, the Rector and institution could well benefit from the appointment of a systematically chosen external mentor, adviser or consultant , on a continuing basis , to help sustain momentum , and bring experience of good practice elsewhere for the consideration of the institution. This would require a clear brief and specification of the experience sought. AVEPRO would be pleased to act as a broker to bring possible names to the attention of the institution, if desired.

AVEPRO

Emeritus Professor John L. Davies

Emeritus Professor Peter Jonkers

Prof. Slawomir Nowosad