

# Evaluation des Departments für Integrative Biologie und Biodiversitätsforschung 2012



## Executive Summary

Für das vom Rektorat beauftragte und von der Stabstelle Qualitätsmanagement begleitete Verfahren zur Evaluation des Departments für Integrative Biologie und Biodiversitätsforschung, das mit April 2012 gestartet wurde, konnten ausgewiesene Experten der Universitäten Düsseldorf, Dresden und Wageningen, der norwegischen Universität für Life Sciences sowie aus dem außeruniversitären Bereich gewonnen werden.

Zu Beginn des Verfahrens, das die Anforderungen des UG 2002 sowie eine Reihe internationaler Standards erfüllt, erstellte das Department auf Basis eines Fragebogens sowie einer Reihe zentral zur Verfügung gestellter Daten einen Rückblick über die wesentlichen Leistungen der letzten 5 Jahre in den Bereichen Organisationsentwicklung, Forschung, Lehre und Weiterbildung, Personalmanagement sowie Beziehungen zur Gesellschaft; außerdem wurden Zukunftsperspektiven entwickelt. Dieser Selbstevaluationsbericht wurde neben einer Reihe weiterer Unterlagen den Peers zur Verfügung gestellt, die nach dessen Durchsicht das Department im November 2012 vor Ort besichtigten.

Im Rahmen ihres Vor-Ort Besuchs führten die Peers Gespräche mit der Departmentleitung, den InstitutsleiterInnen sowie VertreterInnen des Mittelbaus, Doktoranden, nichtwissenschaftlichen MitarbeiterInnen und Studierenden. Gegen Ende des Besuchs lieferten die Peers erste Rückmeldungen und diskutierten die weitere Positionierung des Departments.

Im März 2013 fand ein abschließender Workshop mit dem Head of Peers, dem Rektor, sowie mit VertreterInnen des Departments statt, in dem auf Basis der Empfehlungen der Peers konkrete Maßnahmen erarbeitet wurden. Die Ergebnisse der Evaluation im Form von Empfehlungen flossen in die Zielvereinbarung zwischen Rektorat und Department ein, die Ergebnisse dieser Evaluation wurden von den Peers folgendermaßen zusammengefasst:

The Department of Integrative Biology and Biodiversity Research (DIBB) of the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, (BOKU) is comprised of the Institutes for Botany, Zoology, Wildlife Biology and Game Management, Integrative Nature Conservation Research, and Mathematics. As such it forms the umbrella for the basic biological science institutes and mathematics of this university, which is devoted to agriculture, forestry, food science and landscape architecture research and teaching. This status, being focused on scientific basics, determines the specific situation of DIBB, that can be circumscribed by (i) far above average teaching commitments addressing almost all undergraduate students of this university, regardless of their later specialization, (ii) a broad spectrum of research areas, about half of them belonging to basic research in science and half of applied character, and (iii) a remarkable contribution to the outreach of the university to the public.

Teaching activities provided by the DIBB institutes considerably exceed the usual amount in universities and are, in our impression, very positively appreciated. They are provided profoundly, irrespective of the fact that the number of students has almost doubled during the evaluation period, whereas the teaching personnel has remained at the initial level or even

decreased slightly. The social impact and services to the public are linked with the teaching-trained communicative engagement of department members and contributes positively to the reputation BOKU has in the Austrian public. According to the performance indicators of BOKU, which particularly consider SCI publications and fund acquisition, DIBB scores below average with respect to research. A closer view of the details, however, gives evidence that this cannot be generalized, if we consider the research topics and the addressed readership, of at least some of the DIBB working groups. In several cases the applied research in the institutes has a regional focus, resulting in publications in non-SCI journals. But a considerable number of high quality publications at the international level have also been produced. Due to the topics of the studies, projects are often characterized by low-budget funding (which require similar application efforts as bigger projects). Nevertheless, the numbers of projects and the amount of their funding by the EU (and other over-regional third-party funded) are remarkably high.

We have reviewed the performance of the five institutes in detail in this evaluation report, and we have provided recommendations suggesting possible improvements in the future. The two overarching specific concerns expected to be answered by the peer evaluation were answered positively: the disciplines represented by the DIBB institutes are the indispensable basis for student education and research of the other applied departments of BOKU. This holds true for both the biological disciplines and mathematics. The structure and research directions of BOKU require such units devoted to basic research and teaching, and the DIBB institutes fulfill these requirements appropriately. Concerns that mathematics in particular might be insufficiently integrated in the DIBB and BOKU are unfounded: there are several cooperation projects between the working groups of the MAT institute and other institutes, both in DIBB and BOKU, and teaching in this discipline provides basic knowledge for students of almost all specialized studies in BOKU. Further, many researchers from other institutes within the university appreciate the consultation with their experts in mathematical problems.

Overall, we obtained a good impression from the standing DIBB shows concerning teaching performance, research broadness and quality, and outreach. This does not rule out demands for improvement concerning particular aspects at the institute level that are addressed in this evaluation report. At the department level, two aspects should be stressed:

A) DIBB must not degenerate into a university institution that is absorbed almost completely by teaching services in undergraduate education and providing only supplementary contributions to Master's curricula run by other BOKU departments. If the number of students increases further – what can be expected – this will exceed the presently available manpower and room facilities, which already now must serve twice the demands than existed at the beginning of the evaluation period. Here, we see need for action at the Rectorate level.

High numbers of Master's students in the Institute of Wildlife Biology and Game Management – with a Master's curriculum anchored in this institute – and below average numbers of Master's students in the other institutes – with supplementary teaching only for curricula run by other departments – clearly indicates the need to create a Master's curriculum addressing the core competences of these latter institutes. We propose the development of a Master's curriculum focused on “Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Cultural and Natural Landscapes”.

B) In order to develop a better corporate identity of the institutes under the DIBB umbrella and to improve efforts for cooperation, we suggest intensifying communication. The discussions during our on-site visit clearly indicated the need for an improved scientific and social exchange among the institutes, in particular at the lower and middle levels in the personnel hierarchy. There are, however, also demands for better information flow downwards and upwards, and this includes also the information flow between the Rectorate

and its administrative/technical units at the one hand and the department and its institutes on the other hand. In particular, people with top-level administrative responsibility should facilitate such information flow in both directions.

Although we identified some points that are open for improvements, the results of the department's self-evaluation and still more the on-site visit of DIBB impressed us and gave us a very good impression of the performance of DIBB and its institutes and members. We feel that they are fulfilling their mission in a good way, contributing to BOKU required tasks and to the reputed standing this university has in the Austrian public and in the international scientific community.

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