

Evaluation report

Evaluated point	Grade	Comments
Scientific impact of research	Very good	<p>The Estonian Biocentre (EBC) is an independent research institute and provides a core facility for DNA and genomics research and analysis. It has a productive and close relationship with the Centre of Excellence in Genomics and the Institute of Cell and Molecular Biology of the University of Tartu which are located on the same site. The collaboration and understanding between these entities is outstanding, and the published work overlaps such that there does not appear to be any clear line between the research of the centre, and related research in the University. It is scheduled that EBC merges with the University of Tartu, which appears to be very reasonable given the existing interconnections and the overlap in personnel. The scientific impact of the EBC is significant through its services in DNA sequencing to other institutions and also through many high impact scientific publications. The EBC participates in major international research programmes and has contributed to significant advances in understanding, for instance, of human demographic evolution. The scientific work involves collaboration with top institutions worldwide, and has high visibility internationally. Significant contributions have been made in the areas of functional genomics, genomic studies of toxin synthesis by marine snails and construction of population history from analysis of ancient DNA. In addition, staff collaborate with archaeologists and use DNA for archaeomaterial to identify characteristics of populations. This has given rise to spectacular results.</p>
Sustainability and potential of research	Very good	<p>The EBC, with its partners in the University, has established itself as a significant player in major international research collaborations, and is excellently positioned to continue to produce high quality science. There is also emerging research on topics such as medical genetics that should have excellent potential for further development. Sustainability and potential of the research is enhanced by recruitment of new principal investigators from outside Estonia confirming the international visibility of the institute. The EBC is able to secure funding from a number of sources including those accessible to academic institutions and industrial contractors. Laboratories are very well equipped for the work to be carried out, and research programmes are led by experts in their field. Future research potential is enhanced by the connections with the Estonian Genome Centre and the Institute of Cell and Molecular Biology of the University of Tartu. A significant number of staff and PhD students from diverse international backgrounds carry out their research in the EBC.</p>

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Societal importance of research	Very good	The EBC provides expert training in modern DNA technologies for new generations of PhD students. The high impact research findings have provided new societal understanding of human population migration and evolution of human societies. Public understanding and promotion of science has been enhanced by involvement in development of a permanent exposition for the new building of the Estonian National Museum. Genomic data has been made freely available on a public website and in public repositories.
Scientific basis in the field is sufficient to conduct doctoral studies. (This question should be answered only if: a) institution being evaluated is conducting doctoral studies and; b) The field being evaluated is proposed to grant positive evaluation. If these conditions are met then: a) If the level of scientific basis is sufficient for conducting doctoral studies in every structural unit being evaluated, then the answer should be „yes“; b) If the scientific basis is not sufficient in some structural units, then those units should be listed.)		Yes. Currently PhD students depend on the university. EBC has an agreement with the Institute of Molecular and Cellular Biology of the University of Tartu to supervise and under this agreement EBC has regularly hosted PhD students. Other PhD students work partially in EBC. It has clearly the capacity to do this in excellent conditions.

Summary assessment

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Areas of special note as appropriate (Where necessary indicate sub-fields, assessment criteria, and/or structural units which, in the committee's opinion, were of a notably high level.)		The EBC benefits strongly from its co-location, and close collaboration with the Genome Centre and other University groups. There is a great sense of cohesion in the centre. Staff in the EBC are committed and highly motivated for the research carried out, and future development and success. PhD students are happy to be in this working environment and receive dedicated supervision and mentoring from experts in their field. The extensive international collaboration with world-leading institutions leading to high quality publications is highly commendable.
Areas in need of improvement as appropriate (Where necessary indicate sub-fields of the field being evaluated, assessment criteria, and/or structural units which, in the committee's opinion, revealed significant shortcomings.)		NA
Assessment proposal to the Minister of Education and Research	To grant positive evaluation	This institute plays a central role in genetics by giving access to high technology and conducts international research of very high intellectual interest. The merger with University of Tartu seems a very reasonable development. Naturally, there are some concerns over loss of research identity and independence, increased teaching/administrative tasks and financial changes through the impending merger. One should take care that a reasonable transition time allows the EBC to adapt to its new role.

Feedback

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Feedback for institution (This question should be answered only if the institution asked for feedback from the evaluation committee in the self-report (about up to three specific areas of R&D which it finds to be currently important, e.g., related to its development plan).)	NA
Suggestions for unit, institution, state etc. (As appropriate, committee can give additional feedback for the structural unit, the institution, or the State (please specify whom feedback is directed to) according to the directive assessment criteria for regular evaluation (article 7).	During the discussion, staff and leaders of the EBC were showing some reluctance in respect to giving up the independence of the EBC in the merger with Tartu University. To make this process as successful as possible they should instead embrace it and seize the opportunity wherever possible.