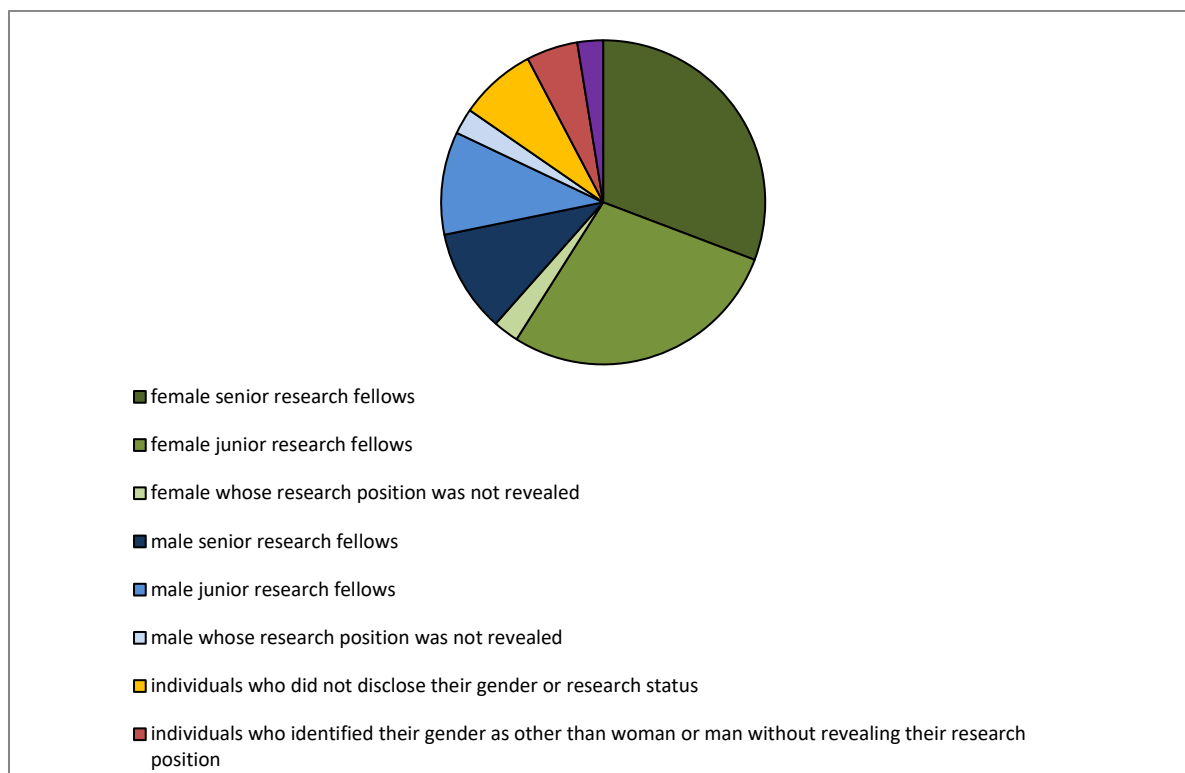


Survey results from April, 2023

In April 2023 a survey on working conditions at the W. Szafer Institute of Botany PAS was conducted. Over the course of this month, a total of 39 researchers participated in the survey. Concerning gender, the breakdown of participants was as follows: 24 respondents were female research fellows, 9 respondents were male research fellows, 3 individuals identified their gender as something other than woman or man, and 3 individuals chose not to reveal their gender or research status. In relations to the research position, 16 individuals represented senior research staff and the same number of persons represented junior research staff. Other employees did not reveal their research status. (see figure below).



As in the previous surveys conducted in 2016 and 2019, the questionnaire was structured around four main topics, each corresponding to the areas outlined by the *European Charter for Researchers* and the *Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*. This systematic approach allows for a comprehensive assessment of the Institute's practices and policies in alignment with these guiding principles. The results are summarized by identifying strengths and weaknesses, which are then presented graphically to provide a clear visual representation of the survey findings (see above). This approach helps to highlight both the positive aspects and areas that require improvement within the Institute's practices and policies.

ETHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL ASPECTS

Strengths

The survey focused on evaluating the ethical and professional aspects of working at IB PAS indicate strong adherence to ethical principles and professional responsibilities among the respondents. Overall, the survey revealed several strengths in these areas, including research freedom (No. 1 – 94,9% positive answers). One of the notable strengths is the high commitment to ethical practices (No. 2), with all (100%) respondents indicating adherence to recognized ethical principles during their research activities. This demonstrates a strong sense

of integrity and responsible behaviour within the organization. The respondents also showed a high level of professional responsibility (No. 3) and attitude (No. 4) (100% positive answers), as evidenced by their respect for intellectual property rights and adherence to the principle of joint data ownership when collaborating with supervisors, subordinates, or other researchers. This reflects a professional attitude and promotes collaborative and responsible research practices. Also, the survey highlights a positive and robust culture of accountability (No. 6) within the research community at IB PAS. Researchers are committed to sound financial management practices and are willing to collaborate with auditing organizations to ensure the integrity and transparency of research activities (100% positive answers). Good research practices (No. 7) were another area of strength, with respondents consistently taking necessary precautions to protect research data (100%), ensuring health and safety at work (100%), and being familiar with legal requirements on confidentiality and data protection (97,4% positive answers). These practices contribute to maintaining high standards of research conduct and professionalism. The survey findings also highlight the commitment to dissemination of research results (No. 8) within the scientific community, with respondents reporting efforts to share their findings among scientific community (100%) and outside academia (92,3%). Additionally, a significant majority of respondents involve in public engagement activities, making their research accessible to non-specialists (94,9% positive answers). This demonstrates a strong culture of knowledge dissemination and engagement with diverse audiences. The evaluation and appraisal systems at IB PAS were perceived positively by the majority of respondents, indicating transparency (97,4%) and adaptability to both senior and junior employees (94,9%). This is an improvement since last survey (2019) and promotes a fair and inclusive approach to performance evaluation and recognition within the organization. In conclusion, the survey highlighted several strengths in the ethical and professional aspects of working at IB PAS, which contribute to a positive working environment that fosters integrity, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing. This survey confirms that during past years ethical and professional aspects are continuously highly important for researchers at IB PAS.

Weaknesses

The survey also revealed some weaknesses. A small percentage of respondents (5.13%) expressed concerns about their research freedom, indicating a need for further support in selecting research topics and methods. Additionally, a small percentage (5.13%) showed reluctance in informing the public about their research in an understandable manner, suggesting room for improvement in encouraging public engagement. Addressing the identified weaknesses, such as research freedom and public engagement, will further enhance the ethical and professional environment at the Institute.

Remarks

The survey on discrimination (No. 11) included additional questions about mobbing and unwanted behaviour as part of the preparation for the Gender Equality Plan at IB PAS. This accounts for the differences from the surveys conducted in 2016 and 2019. As a result, the findings related to mobbing and unwanted behaviour are treated separately from the evaluation of ethical and professional aspects in the current report. The survey on mobbing and undesirable behaviour revealed important insights into the working environment at the Institute. According to the survey results, a small percentage of respondents (7.7%) reported experiencing mobbing during their employment at the Institute in the past five years. The survey revealed that a significant proportion of respondents (30,8 %) reported undesirable behaviour such as including harassment, humiliation, ridicule, insults, and isolating

colleagues in the workplace, particularly related to supervisors. This is a concerning finding that indicates the presence of negative interpersonal dynamics within the Institute. It underscores the need for further attention and action to address and prevent such behaviours. On the other hand, the absence of reported sexual harassment incidents is an encouraging indication but requires continued vigilance to maintain a safe and respectful workplace for all employees. A small but notable number of respondents reported instances of discrimination (10,3%) based on various grounds such as gender and age. Some respondents experienced behaviours such as gender-stereotyping comments or jokes (12,8%). These incidents raise concerns about the Institute's commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment. Regarding discrimination based on sexual orientation, all respondents answered negatively, indicating that they did not experience negative comments or discriminatory behaviour related to sexual orientation. Similarly, all respondents answered negatively when asked about experiencing sexual comments or jokes. The survey results indicate that there are concerns among a portion of respondents regarding the working environment's ability to resolve conflicts between employees (23,1%), effectively counteract mobbing (15,4%), and react early to undesirable behaviour (12,4%). This highlights a perception gap and suggests room for improvement in creating a supportive and respectful workplace environment.

Among notable strengths are awareness and reporting. The survey indicates a high level of awareness among employees regarding mobbing and undesirable behaviour. A group of respondents reported experiencing such behaviour, and a majority of them took the step to report it to supervisors, disciplinary officers, or the Institute's director. This demonstrates an active effort to address such issues. Among those who reported experiencing mobbing or undesirable behaviour, a notable proportion received help and support from the Institute. This suggests that appropriate mechanisms are in place to address such issues and provide assistance to affected individuals. In some cases, the reported problems were successfully resolved, indicating effective problem-solving measures. The survey examined the occurrence of unwanted behaviours, specifically focusing on inappropriate invasion of personal space, persistent attempts to contact individuals in private matters, and sexual proposals. The survey results indicate that 100% of respondents answered negatively, indicating that they did not experience these types of unwanted behaviours while working at the Institute.

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Strengths

The survey results indicate that there is consensus among all respondents regarding certain aspects of the recruitment process at IB PAS. Firstly, 100% of the respondents agreed that the recruitment procedures (No. 30), particularly for researchers at the beginning of their careers, are clearly defined. This indicates that IB PAS has well-structured and easily understandable recruitment processes in place. Furthermore, a significant majority of the respondents (97.4%) reported being familiar with the principles outlined in the *Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* (No. 31). This demonstrates a high level of awareness and understanding of the ethical guidelines associated with recruitment processes. Additionally, an equal percentage of respondents (97.4%) believe that the Institute as an employer adheres to the principles set out in the *Code*, reflecting its commitment to maintaining ethical standards in its recruitment practices. Also, all respondents (100%) expressed positive views regarding the openness, transparency, efficiency, and supportiveness of the recruitment procedures at the Institute (Nos. 32-33). This suggests that the Institute has established processes that prioritize fairness and equal opportunities for all applicants. Regarding the clarity and explicitness of guidelines for the recruitment and appointment of postdoctoral researchers (No. 39), the Institute received 100% positive responses. In addition, it can be concluded that the selection process involving judging merit at IB PAS does not primarily

focus on assessing researchers based on bibliometric indices. The data shows that 48.7% of respondents answered negatively, indicating their belief that other criteria such as teaching, supervision, teamwork, knowledge transfer, management of research and innovation, and increasing public awareness are not considered important. These findings suggest that a significant portion of the respondents does not perceive the selection process to prioritize bibliometric indices as the main criteria for judging merit, which is a change compared to the previous surveys (20% and 33%). This question serves to gather insights into the perceived balance between bibliometric indices and other important factors in the selection process. Finally, the survey highlights positive perceptions regarding the recognition of mobility experience (No. 36), evaluation of qualifications (No. 37), and alignment of qualification levels (No. 38) at IB PAS. These findings suggest that IB PAS places value on mobility, appropriately evaluates qualifications, and aligns qualification requirements with the needs of positions.

Weaknesses

While the majority of respondents (84.6%) believe that the Institute considers gender balance when appointing employees (researchers) to the recruitment committees, a notable portion expressed uncertainty or dissatisfaction in this regard. This indicates a need for closer attention to ensuring diverse representation in the selection process. Another weakness concerns feedback on recruitment results since some respondents (10.3%) reported that candidates do not always receive feedback on recruitment results. Providing feedback to candidates can enhance transparency and improve the overall recruitment experience. Regarding recognition of career variations in the chronological order of CVs, while a majority of respondents (64.1%) believe that the Institute considers career variations as valuable contributions to researchers' professional development, a significant portion expressed uncertainty or dissatisfaction in this regard.

Remarks

The Institute has recently developed a comprehensive “*Open, Transparent, and Merit-based Recruitment Strategy at IB PAS*” document, which serves as a central resource for all recruitment procedures. This document encompasses a step-by-step outline of the recruitment process, starting from the announcement and the formation of a committee that operates with openness, transparency, and impartiality, ensuring no conflicts of interest. It further details the committee's functioning, the evaluation of candidates based on their merits and qualifications, the interview process, and the provision of feedback to all candidates.

In addition, this document includes all the necessary forms required for the recruitment process, such as the announcement template, the committee protocol, and information addressing the avoidance of conflicts of interest among committee members, among others. While IB PAS has been adhering to the principles outlined in the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers in previous years, this new document was formally accepted by the Scientific Council in 2023, consolidating and further enhancing the alignment of recruitment procedures with established best practices.

Overall, the introduction of this comprehensive recruitment strategy document demonstrates the Institute's commitment to transparency, fairness, and merit-based recruitment. It provides clear guidelines and ensures that all necessary measures are in place to promote equal opportunities and objective evaluation of candidates throughout the recruitment process.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Strengths

The Institute demonstrates a high recognition of researchers as professionals and treats them accordingly, with 97.4% of respondents acknowledging this recognition (No. 12). The Institute is committed to stability and permanence of employment (No. 15), as indicated by 97.4% of respondents. Adequate and equitable social security benefits, including sickness and parental benefits and pension rights, are provided in accordance with national legislation, according to 97.4% of respondents (No. 16). IB PAS has formulated a clear career development strategy for researchers at all stages of their career, recognized by 87.2% of respondents (No. 18). Researchers receive guidance from mentors on developing their professional careers, as reported by 100% of respondents. The importance of geographical, intersectoral, inter- and trans-disciplinary mobility (No. 19) for enhancing scientific knowledge and professional development is recognized by 97.4% of respondents. Intellectual property rights are protected through adequate legal measures, including copyrights, as reported by 100% of respondents (No. 20). Co-authorship is viewed positively during the appraisal of research staff, with 97.4% of respondents acknowledging this recognition (No. 21). Researchers are allowed to publish their own research results independently from their supervisors, according to 92.3% of respondents. IB PAS has a robust system in place for handling complaints and conflicts between employees, with 92.3% of respondents indicating the presence of a responsible person (No. 23). Furthermore, 84.6% of respondents affirm that IB PAS has procedures aimed at providing confidential and informal assistance to all research staff in resolving complaints and work-related conflicts (No. 23). In terms of research environment (No. 13), there is a commitment to creating a stimulating research and research training environment, as reported by 79.5% of respondents. Researchers at IB PAS are provided with appropriate equipment, infrastructure, and other necessary resources to conduct their research, according to 84.6% of respondents (No. 13). Flexible working conditions are ensured in line with national legislation, with 71.8% of respondents affirming this provision (No. 14). The majority of respondents (84.6%) believe that the working conditions at the Institute enable both women and men to balance family and work responsibilities, promoting a supportive work-life balance (No. 14). Researchers at IB PAS are provided with fair funding and salaries (No. 16) at each career stage, commensurate with their legal status, performance, and qualifications/responsibilities, according to 84.6% of respondents.

Weaknesses

While the majority of respondents believe that IB PAS is actively involved in creating a stimulating research and research training environment (No. 13), there is room for improvement. Only 48.7% of respondents answered positively when comparing the Institute's funding, salaries, and conditions with other employers on the national job market, suggesting the need for further enhancements (No. 16). In terms of teaching activities being taken into account in the appraisal system (No. 22), only 64.1% of respondents agreed, indicating a potential area for improvement. The involvement of senior research staff in training early-stage researchers, as considered in the appraisal system, received positive responses from 53.8% of respondents, suggesting the need for greater emphasis (No. 22).

Remarks

The survey results regarding gender balance (No. 17) at IB PAS included new questions compared to the previous surveys, which was related with a development of the Gender Equality Plan. The survey results indicate positive perceptions overall. In response to whether the Institute aims to ensure a representative gender balance without compromising quality and qualification criteria, 94.9% of respondents provided positive answers. Similarly, when asked

if the institute prioritizes equal opportunity policy in recruitment over competence criteria, 89.7% of respondents answered negatively, indicating that competence criteria are not overridden by gender considerations. In terms of gender representation in committees at the institute, 89.7% of respondents expressed positive views and indicating a balanced gender representation. However, there were a few respondents (10.3%) who answered negatively, suggesting room for improvement in achieving gender balance in these committees. Regarding the development of women's scientific careers at the Institute, the majority of respondents (92.3%) answered negatively, indicating that they do not perceive a phenomenon inhibiting the development of women's scientific careers. However, a small percentage (7.7%) responded positively or "rather yes," suggesting that there may be some concerns or challenges related to the advancement of women's careers that need to be addressed.

Compared to the previous survey conducted in 2019, there is a worse perception of the research environment (No. 13) in the 2023 survey. While there is still a commitment to creating a stimulating research and research training environment, as reported by 79.5% of respondents, and researchers are provided with appropriate equipment, infrastructure, and resources to conduct their research according to 84.6% of respondents, the satisfaction levels have decreased. In the 2019 survey, only 8% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the research environment, whereas in 2023, the percentage of respondents dissatisfied with working conditions increased to 20.5%. Similarly, in terms of resources provided, only 3% of respondents were dissatisfied in 2019, compared to 15.4% in 2023. This decline in satisfaction may be attributed to a decrease in funding at IB PAS, which has likely impacted the availability of resources, infrastructure, and training opportunities for researchers. When comparing the results for teaching activities being taken into account in the appraisal system (No. 22), there has been little improvement observed between 2019 and 2023. In the 2023 survey, 35.9% of respondents indicated that their work as teachers is not adequately acknowledged, whereas in 2019, 34% of respondents had a negative response. Similarly, the involvement of senior research staff in training early-stage researchers, as considered in the appraisal system, received negative responses from 46.2% of respondents in 2023, compared to 54% in 2019. These results suggest that being a supervisor of young researchers is still not sufficiently acknowledged within the appraisal system at IB PAS.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Strengths

The survey on training-related aspects at the Institute revealed positive aspects regarding relation with supervisors (No. 25): A majority of respondents (94.9%) believe that researchers in their training phase at the Institute establish structured and regular relationships with their supervisors and make the most of these relationships. In addition, the majority of respondents (94.9%) believe that supervisors at the Institute possess the necessary expertise, knowledge, experience, and commitment to provide appropriate support to research trainees, monitor research progress and results, and offer necessary feedback mechanisms (No. 29).

Also, the majority of respondents (97.4%) believe that senior researchers at the Institute perform tasks related to supervision, mentoring, career advice, leadership, project coordination, and management with the highest professional standards (No. 26). This indicates that there is a level of confidence in the abilities of senior researchers in these roles. A significant percentage of respondents (92.3%) believe that researchers at all career stages at the Institute actively seek opportunities to continually develop themselves by updating and expanding their skills and qualifications (No. 27). Regarding access to research training and continuous development (No. 28) the majority of respondents (84.6%) believe that researchers at all career stages at the Institute are provided with opportunities for professional development.

Weaknesses

The minority of the respondents (5.4%) expressed doubts or negative views about the quality of their relationships with supervisors as well as a small percentage of respondents (5.4%) expressed doubts or concerns regarding the adequacy of supervision. This indicates the need for closer attention to the experience and needs of junior research fellows and ensuring that their training experiences with their supervisors align with their expectations.

Regarding continuing Professional Development, a small portion of respondents (7.7%) expressed some hesitation or reluctance in this regard, while a notable portion of respondents (15.4%) expressed doubts or negative views about the accessibility of measures for continuous skills and qualifications development. This suggests that there is room for improvement in providing accessible and comprehensive measures for continuous development of skills and qualifications.

This aspect (No. 28) was better assessed by the researchers at IB PAS in 2019, but this deterioration of conditions undoubtedly has been related with a lack of financial support for research training development involving travel opportunities such as workshops or participation in expensive specialized courses.

In summary, areas such as access to research training and the perceptions of supervisors by junior research fellows require further attention and improvement. Addressing these weaknesses will contribute to enhancing the overall quality and effectiveness of training programs at the Institute, ensuring that researchers receive comprehensive support and opportunities for professional growth throughout their careers.

