

Statement of the head of the Educational Section

To the members of the Evaluation Commissions and CC to the members of the Academic Board of the Institute:

I would like to take this opportunity to both thank you for the report, which has brought inspiration for our future activities, and also raise several issues I find puzzling regarding your assessment of our activities. As the formal process came to an end with a finalised report, I had only one occasion to speak to you directly about my questions regarding the report, so I am bringing up these questions here. Though some individual reactions would be welcome, certainly do not feel pressured to respond.

Your recommendation for a transparent balance between pedagogical research and service to the community is a welcome impetus for a more explicit and refined definition of the mix of research, applied research and practical activities our section is involved in. I also fully embrace your assertion that educational activities (I would add especially the applied research and practical activities) should have their own indicators and system of assessment.

Still, I had great trouble understanding some of the passages and associating them with our profile as described by the relatively detailed [material](#) submitted to you. Perhaps you find this source inadequate and have instead relied on other sources to gain a clearer picture.

1. *“... But quality is as important as quantity, and we note the attentiveness of the section to problems of impact and readership.”*

I am not sure about the meaning of this comment, coming as it did after praise for the extent of our educational materials. I tend to read it as a suggestion of insufficient quality and our awareness of that. If my interpretation is correct, it would be helpful to have some more details and arguments regarding these insufficiencies, so that we could work towards remedying them.

2. *“We recommend that the section be understood as serving the research sections as well as the general public. Its goal should be to foster critical historical literacy through the dissemination of scholarly findings and interpretations. In this way, the section can achieve its aim of contributing to the goal of building an informed citizenship based upon pluralist understandings of the past.”*

This passage is particularly puzzling to me, as I read it as the suggestion of a direction that we should newly seek. This does not correspond at all with my understanding of the key role of service to the community in the mission of the section (see the “Combining academic ethos with the ethos of public service” part [here](#)). The centrality of public service is clear from some of the facts given [especially on pages 5-8](#) (such as “In the field of contemporary history the Section is the most active agent in the further education of teachers as regards the number of seminars held, and its seminars have by far the highest attendance numbers in this educational segment.”)

3. *“The Commission is less enthusiastic about the Education Section’s commitment to contributing to scholarship on pedagogy. While contributing to internationally-recognized journals in this field is of course admirable, and could further contacts with scholars outside the country, it is debatable whether this approach alone would further the Institute’s main goals or instead detract from them.”*

I would certainly agree with your doubts about pedagogy being the only focus of our international activities, if this were the case. I actually read your thought as a direct opposite to the message sent to you in the material. I have identified as a weakness the same area of our work you see as too extensive ([p.3](#)). No piece of general pedagogical research has been part of outputs submitted to Phase I and our actual research itself is far from solely pedagogical. I thus believe that your point could be some sort of misunderstanding. To make my standpoint clear: I firmly believe that a mix of applied research, practical activities and pedagogical research together is self-strengthening, and together they pave the way to better serve the public.

4. Finally, I cannot easily comprehend the assertion that *“Contributions to education-focused journals should be only one part of this section’s international strategy.”*

As the list of active participation at international conferences proves (see [selection](#)), we actually focus our international activities on fostering historical literacy within the boundaries of the 20th century. This is also demonstrated by our participation in international grant consortia focusing mostly on applied research, combined with practical educational service and other international activities (see [pages 7-8](#)). The sole focus on general pedagogy against which you warn has not been the case in the past, though I see it as a reasonable and modest complement especially in the future. Based on our ongoing activities, I cannot find any substantiation for this critical evaluation of our international strategy, apart from a few notes on pedagogical research in our [plan](#).

It has been a pleasure to meet you, and I look forward to potential future cooperation with some of you, despite our disparate interpretations of the section's approach.

Sincerely

Mgr. Vojtěch Ripka, Ph.D., head of the Educational Section

This statement has been sent by email to the former members of the External Review Commission and CCed to the members of the Scientific Council of the Institute on 15 May 2020.