



The Impact University as an Institutional Model

and Why Life Science Universities Must Go First

Prof. Dr. Csaba Gyuricza

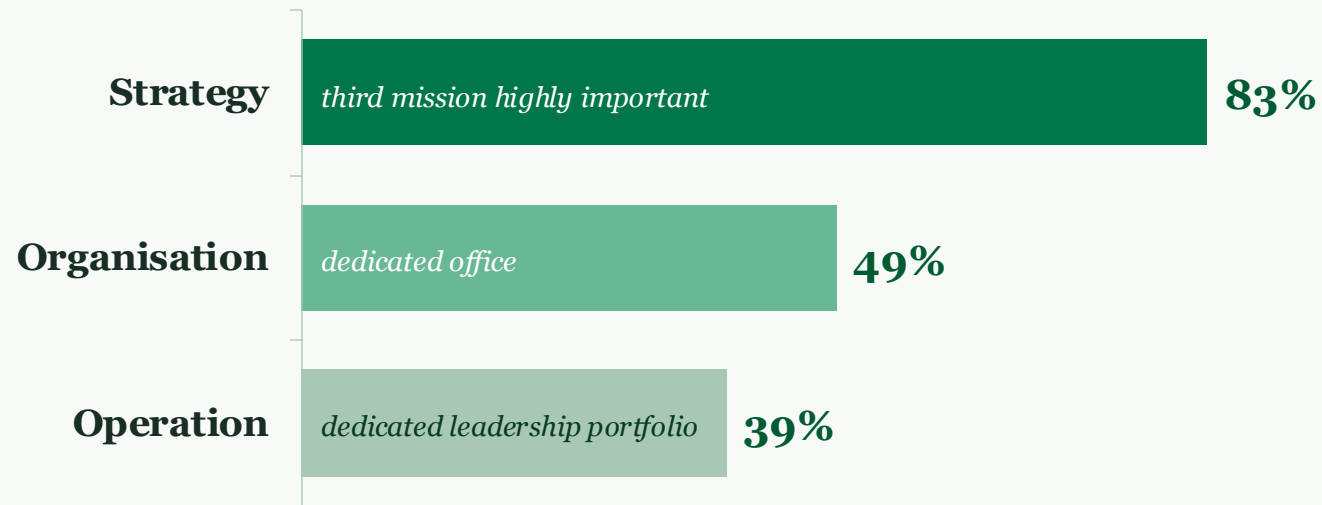
Rector, Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE)

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Impact is the organising language, but the playbook is missing

COMMITMENT THINS OUT FROM STRATEGY TO OPERATION

Share of European higher education institutions, 2024 (n = 489) ¹



THE THIRD MISSION

“Third mission and service to society are broad terms that are largely undefined regarding activities and approaches taken.” ²

44% of institutions say national reforms set only the direction – implementation is left to the university. ³

POLICY
LANGUAGE



INSTITUTIONAL
TRANSLATION

LEADERSHIP
DECISIONS

POLICY LANGUAGE



**INSTITUTIONAL
TRANSLATION**

LEADERSHIP DECISIONS

NEED

**Hungarian agri-food must catch up:
Low value-add, high climate exposure**



■ **31%**

from finished products

■ **69%**

from unprocessed and
primary-processed goods

~2% of GDP

- Lost to the 2022 drought
- Among the worst-hit countries of Europe

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

“Cselekvő Egyetem”

= a university in action



MATE



MATE 2030 strategy

Four action areas turn impact into an operating model



Holistic student journeys

What does impact mean for our students?

FIRST BUILDING BLOCK

Leadership for the Future



Transforming the research agenda

Who sets the questions the university pursues?

FIRST BUILDING BLOCK

**Flagship Research Groups ·
Impact Programme**



Renewing faculty pathways

What do we recognise, reward and build careers around?

FIRST BUILDING BLOCK

**Impact Awards ·
Anthropocene Award**



National impact making

How does knowledge shape decisions at scale?

FIRST BUILDING BLOCK

**National Centre for
Resilience**

UNIVERSITY PATHWAYS STILL FOLLOW DISCIPLINES

Discipline-based pathways are unfit for the world graduates enter

- » Environmental challenges cut across curricula
- » Public leadership needs holistic thinking
- » Opportunities emerge beyond the classroom
- » Student selection is based solely on academic merit



“Educating citizens to address and navigate complexity is one of the main missions of universities today.” – UNESCO, 2022 ¹

MATE'S BUILDING PATH

VISIBILITY

Leadership for the Future Programme

1

Agricultural sciences

Engineering and technology

Social sciences and business



Academia

Innovation

Management

Public Policy

SCALING

2

Personalised student pathways

Data-based guidance for every student journey

INSTITUTIONALISATION

3

Portfolio reform

Modular, interdisciplinary pathways across the whole curriculum



**Holistic
student journeys**



**Transforming the
research agenda**



**Renewing
faculty pathways**



**National impact
making**

RESEARCH FUNDING DOES NOT SUPPORT CAPACITY BUILDING

TODAY – THE GRANT CYCLE LEADS



IDEALLY – STABLE CORE FUNDING



“An increased proportion of competition-based grants can limit the institutions’ ability for long-term planning, forcing them to focus on areas where funding is available rather than on areas where the institutions possess expertise.” – OECD, 2020

MATE’S BUILDING PATH

STRATEGIC PRIORITISATION

Flagship Research Groups

1

13
groups

3 years
of support

€1M
internal funding per year

INTERDISCIPLINARY INTEGRATION

Impact Programme

2

9 institutes

5 joint project concepts

3 in international consortia

IMPACT AT LARGER SCALE

3

What can we do beyond the institutional level?



Holistic
student journeys



Transforming the
research agenda



Renewing
faculty pathways

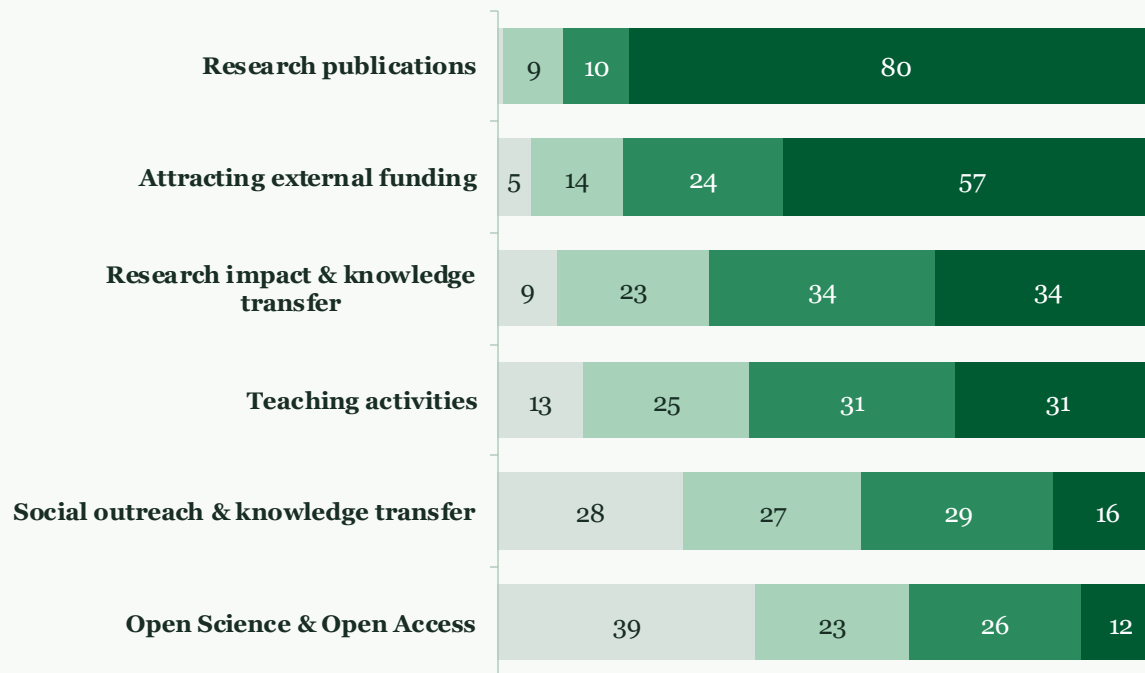


National impact
making

RESEARCH CAREERS STILL REWARD PUBLICATIONS

Importance of academic activities for research careers (% of respondents) ¹

■ Little / not important ■ Moderately important ■ Important ■ Very important



MATE'S BUILDING PATH

VISIBILITY

Impact Awards and Anthropocene Award (2026)

First laureates of MATE's international impact award

1



**LIFETIME
ACHIEVEMENT**

Prof. Butterbach-Bahl
Aarhus University



**EMERGING
ACADEMIC**

Dr D. Beesigamukama
icipe, Kenya



**INSPIRING
EDUCATOR**

Prof. Rahul Nair
Univ. of Manchester

INCENTIVISATION

2

Impact activities as a component of performance evaluation

INSTITUTIONALISATION

3

Impact career model

Third-mission work built into progression and long-term careers. We still have a long way to go.



Holistic
student journeys



Transforming the
research agenda



Renewing
faculty pathways



National impact
making

A SYSTEMIC GAP

8 Ministries with water-related responsibilities in Hungary



3 represented in the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Water Management

OECD – Water governance for climate resilience in Hungary (2026) ¹

MATE’S RESPONSE: NATIONAL CENTRE FOR RESILIENCE (NRK)



IT DELIVERS:

- Evidence-based policy advice
- Strategic guidance for agribusiness
- Impact-driven innovation programmes
- Incubation of start-ups and spin-offs



Holistic student journeys



Transforming the research agenda



Renewing faculty pathways



National impact making

Sources: ¹ OECD (2026), Water Governance for Climate Resilience in Hungary.

THE FIRST BUILDING BLOCKS AT MATE



Student journeys

Select broadly and learn through real problems



Research agenda

Create internal room for strategic questions



Faculty pathways

Recognise, enable – then build real careers



National impact

Bridge knowledge, decisions and implementation



Your institution

What else belongs here? What have you tried – and what did you learn?

None of us holds the complete playbook – but between us, most pieces exist



IMPACT UNIVERSITY PLAYBOOK

An invitation to this network

1

Share one initiative that worked

2

Share one that did not – or remains unresolved

3

MATE compiles the lessons and sends them to everyone in this room



Thank you for your attention!

Prof. Dr. Csaba Gyuricza

Rector · Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences

✉ rector@uni-mate.hu