

UiB: Becoming leaders in Europe

Rector Dag Rune Olsen wants the University of Bergen (UiB) to be one of the leading universities in Europe.

TEXT JENS HELLELAND ÅDNANES

You have now been UiB rector for a year, can you tell us a little about your first year in the rector's chair?

"My first feeling is one of pride in our strong international orientation as an institution of research and higher education. This is clearly expressed in the numbers collected by the Research Council of Norway for co-publication, in which the University of Bergen ranks highly; not least because of our many collaborations in the United States and Canada – but also with a strong presence in many countries in Africa and Asia. In total, we have between 700 and 800 international agreements with universities and research institutions, and these invaluable collaborations will be even more strongly embedded in the new UiB strategy we are currently working on."

When you travel in your function as rector, what makes the most impression on you?

"I was in Cape Town for the annual general meeting of Worldwide Universities Network (WUN), an outstanding example of our international outreach. Cape Town was a city of contrasts. Along with the other members of the WUN Presidents Forum, I got to visit a wonderful vineyard, whilst discussing future challenges with them. On the other hand, we were shown some of the informal settlements in the city. It was fascinating to see wealth and extreme

poverty in such proximity. It brings the social differences straight to you and makes you pause to think."

What do you feel is the general impression of UiB internationally?

"UiB is associated with the rich nation of Norway. I also find that people view us as an open-minded and medium-sized university with an international outlook. Some express concern about the weather and believe that we have snow all year long (laughs), but then I will usually show them a photo I keep on my mobile phone, which shows cherry blossoms in January! Bergen certainly isn't as wintery as some people may believe."

Are there any research environments you think have made particular headway internationally in your first year as rector?

"First, I need to point out that there are way too many research groups making their mark internationally for me to mention in a sentence or two. But if I have to pick one group, I would have to say that our climate researchers are in a unique position. They have clearly positioned themselves well internationally and regularly publish articles in renowned journals. They are also good at communicating their research, both to the general public and decision-makers. This means that they are having an impact in the public debate. Take their participation in the United Nations' Intergovernmental



PHOTO: ERVIND SENNESET

Dag Rune Olsen, Rector of UiB since 1 August 2013

Born 1962 in Røros, Norway.
PhD in medical physics from the University of Oslo.
Professor of Medical Physics, University of Oslo, 2000–2010.
Head of Institute of Cancer Research, Oslo University Hospital, 2004–2010.
Dean of UiB's Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 2010–2013.

International recognition:
Klaas Breur Gold Medal 2008.
Elected member of *Academia Europaea* 2011.

Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). They represent excellent research and present problems that go right to the core of one of the major issues of our age."

Fronted by researchers on this level, what are UiB's ambitions for the forthcoming years?

"We want to become one of Europe's leading universities and to be at the very top in the Nordic region. We are also ambitious in our outreach to the local and regional community that we are part of – our hinterland. If we are to achieve these ambitions, we need to be able to recruit the best researchers and students and foster their development. We need to have in place good collaborations with global research institutions, but also to maintain good relations with Norway's public sector and local arts and businesses. This duality between local and international, between

public and private sector, has always been a trademark of UiB."

Horizon 2020 is the EU's new research framework programme. How ambitious does UiB want to be about the Horizon 2020 process?

"Horizon 2020 enables us to meet our own research ambitions. This requires good relations with international actors and is an incentive for further international collaboration. The EU's desire for sustainable innovations fits hand in glove with our own research ambitions. Also, we are already good at interdisciplinary research, with researchers who are working on global challenges, such as climate change, public health and better use of natural resources, to name but a few. This interdisciplinarity is very much in demand in Horizon 2020."

There are around 14,000 students at UiB, of whom 1,500 are international

students. How do you stay in touch with all the students at UiB?

"On the last Friday of every month I have been inviting anyone who wanted to chat with me to meet me at the Student Centre. In the study year 2014/2015, I want to move this closer to where the students are. I now will meet them directly at their faculties, still on a monthly basis, but moving between the faculties. Like before, this is intended as a very informal, drop-by session, where I will gladly answer any question. I believe it's important to have this type of open dialogue on all levels, both with students and staff. I'm not sure if this is unique, but I enjoy it. It's fun discussing issues with the students – I find them to be open, honest and direct. And inquisitive. I don't want to lead from behind my desk. I want to interact with all those who have elected me as their rector." ●