

Research, Development and Innovation Council Approves Position on Proof-of-Concept Grant Projects Group

On 28 February 2025, a regular session of the Research, Development and Innovation Council (the Council) was held at the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. Council members discussed, among other matters, positions on programmes of the Czech Science Foundation, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Health, and the Czech Academy of Sciences. New members of the Council's International Scientific Advisory Board were also proposed.

At the start of the meeting, based on the results of a secret vote, the Council members proposed the appointment of new members to the International Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB). Profiles of the five internationally recognised experts from leading academic institutions are provided below.

The Council then approved a position on the **group of grant projects entitled Proof of Concept**, submitted by the Czech Science Foundation. The aim is to create tools for supporting innovation and the transfer of knowledge from excellent fundamental research. The purpose of this grant scheme, inspired by the well-established ERC Proof of Concept model, is to verify the practical viability and feasibility of original ideas and concepts arising from fundamental research, and to harness their potential in the form of technological or social innovations.

“Proof of Concept grants represent a key instrument in supporting the transition from cutting-edge basic research to innovation, thereby helping to valorise the outcomes of projects funded by the Czech Science Foundation. These types of programmes not only encourage businesses to increase private investment in research, but also contribute to the development of new products, technologies, and services. Ultimately, they enhance the competitiveness of the Czech Republic and bolster its economic growth. At the same time, they help researchers further develop their insights towards practical applications, which is crucial for future innovation and technological progress,” said Marek Ženíšek, Minister for Science, Research and Innovation and Chair of the Council.

Council members also discussed the position on the **Academy of the Future** programme, which, as one of the internal tools of the institution, focuses on further strengthening research quality and excellence at Czech Academy of Sciences workplaces. The submitted material contributes to the implementation of the Concept of Institutional Support for Excellence, developed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in cooperation with the Office of the Minister for Science, Research and Innovation.

Changes to the TREND industrial research and experimental development programme were also discussed. According to the proposal submitted by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the programme is to be extended by three years until 2030. The Council also addressed a proposal to expand the NW Programme with Sub-programme 4: Support for National Authorities in Priority Areas of Health Research. The material was prepared by the Czech Health Research Council in cooperation with the Ministry of Health. The primary aim of Sub-programme 4 is to support the development and sustainability of national authorities – top research capacities established between 2022 and 2025 under the EXCELES programme.

The Council also approved protocols on the evaluation results of research organisations based on Methodology 2017+, in cooperation with the Czech Academy of Sciences and the ministries of transport, defence, labour and social affairs, the interior, health, and agriculture.

At the close of the session, Deputy Minister for Science, Research and Innovation Jana Havlíková provided a brief update on the status of discussions surrounding the draft Act on Research, Development, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer. Deputy Minister Pavel Doleček gave information regarding the Competitiveness Compass document and ongoing negotiations concerning the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework.

Newly Proposed Members of the International Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB)

Prof. Michele Aresta is a Professor of Chemistry and CEO of Innovative Catalysis for Carbon Recycling Ltd. He specialises in small molecule chemistry and catalysis, as well as biomass utilisation, and frequently serves as an expert advisor in European and global chemistry initiatives.

Prof. Joseph Hamill is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA. He is also a research scientist at Shriners' Hospital for Children in Springfield, Massachusetts, and serves as a visiting professor at universities around the world, including in Ireland, England, Singapore, and the Czech Republic. He is especially known for his groundbreaking studies in the biomechanics of the lower limbs and has received numerous prestigious awards for his scientific work.

Prof. Sarah de Rijcke is Professor of Science, Technology and Innovation Studies and Dean of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences at Leiden University in the Netherlands. She studies the interactions between science governance and knowledge production. An internationally prominent figure in science policy, she focuses on research evaluation and the use of metrics, and frequently acts as an expert advisor in European and global scientific initiatives.

Prof. Joachim von Puttkamer is Professor of East European History at Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, where he also serves as Head of Department and Director of the Imre Kertész Kolleg. He is the author of numerous important publications on 19th- and 20th-century East European history.

Prof. Sebastian Scholz is a Professor at the University of Applied Sciences Zittau/Görlitz and Head of Department at the Fraunhofer Institute for Machine Tools and Forming Technology (IWU) in Zittau, Germany. He specialises in functionally integrated plastics technologies. He is an internationally recognised expert in mechanical engineering and plastics technology and serves as an expert advisor in European and global engineering initiatives.

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