

October 2020 virtual meeting of the International Advisory Panel (IAP) of the Research, Development, and Innovation Council (RVVI)

The IAP met virtually for two hours on October 8, 2020, at 13:00 Universal Time (7:00 Mountain Daylight Time in Colorado, 15:00 Central European Summer Time in the Czech Republic, and 21:00 China Standard Time in Singapore and Taiwan) to deal with a two-point agenda: (i) response by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic (GAČR) to IAP suggestions made over the years, (ii) initial report of a working group (Jiříčný, Pacák, Konvalinka, Jurajda, Michl) on the activities of the Agency of Medical Research of the Czech Republic, AZV ČR. Written summaries of material currently available on both points had been sent to AIP members.

After a brief welcome and an introduction of a new member, Prof. Sood from India, and the two new contacts with the RVVI, Professors Jurajda and Konvalinka, the material was presented to the meeting participants in an abbreviated form by (i) the IAP chairman Prof. Josef Michl and (ii) the chairman on a working group on health-related research, Prof. Joe Jiříčný. Each was followed by an extensive discussion.

The discussion can be summarized and conclusions stated as follows.

(i) GAČR. The spirit of the IAP recommendations can be stated briefly: *Support and reward quality of research results and de-emphasize their quantity* in the evaluation of both proposals and reports. The recommendations made by the IAP in English and responses obtained from the agency in Czech were presented (we would prefer that Czech not be used in communication with the IAP). Many of the specific recommendations have been fully adopted by the agency, some have been adopted in part, and some have not been adopted.

The general principles most emphasized as crucial were to involve the very best scientists in the country in the Scientific Council of GAČR, to make sure that policies set by this council were actually put in practice by the leadership of the agency, and to actively select outstanding and internationally recognized scientists as panel members instead of relying on volunteers. Some of the specific suggestions were to allocate funds for the whole project in the beginning, avoiding difficulties with year-to-year transfers of funds, to foster significant long-term projects, making sure that renewal proposals are not discouraged, to reward risk-taking, to support independence of young scientists, to reduce micromanagement, and to pay attention to the funding of equipment, perhaps by setting up a separate competition for instrumentation grants, with proper recognition of the different needs of different scientific subdisciplines. A conclusion was reached that the chairman of the IAP should send the list of recommendations made by the IAP over the years to the new leadership of GAČR with a request to provide a response in English.

(ii) AZV ČR. This was the first time that the IAP examined the activities of this agency and it is not yet ready to make specific recommendations. The general principles are without doubt the same: name the best scientists into the policy-setting scientific board and into the leadership of the agency that converts the policy into practice, and emphasize quality over quantity of outputs. Issues specific to medical research, such as the interaction of basic and clinical activities were discussed at length. From the information at our disposal, the AZV ČR does not reach the quality of GA ČR and more frequent personnel rotation will most likely be advisable. The conclusion was that the working group needs to continue its work to generate a set of specific recommendations.

The meeting concluded by an agreement to meet again in 2-3 months.

Josef Michl, chairman of the IAP

Appendix: recommendations to GAČR and the response.

