

# Minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Czech Science Foundation

Wednesday, June 5, 2019  
Czech Science Foundation, Room no. 39-41

Meeting called to order at 1:00 p.m. by SAB chair prof. J. Doležel

**Members present:** prof. J. Doležel, prof. P. Exner, prof. M. Hartl, prof. Š. Jurajda, prof. A. Shaked, prof. P. Sommer, prof. F. Štěpánek

**Members connected via Skype:** prof. J. Roithová

**Members not present (pre-arranged):** prof. B.J.F. Nordén, prof. H. Schwarz, prof. A. Šedo, prof. J. Zeman

**Guests:** dr. A. Valkárová, prof. J. Koča, assoc. prof. P. Baldrian, Mgr. P. Chorošenin, Mgr. V. Hrkalová

## Agenda of the meeting

1. Opening and approval of the agenda
2. Evaluation Panels' composition and grant selection process
  - a. Information on the current system and future plans
  - b. Discussion and suggestions for improvement of the system
3. Budget of GACR
  - a. Information on medium term outlook
  - b. Discussion and suggestions by SAB
4. Discussion of the material "A proposal for the approval schedule of targeted support programs and groups of research and grant projects" by the Research, Development and Innovation Council
  - a. Information on the proposal
  - b. Discussion and suggestions by SAB
5. Agenda of the 3rd SAB meeting (Friday, October 4, 2019)
6. Any other business

## 1) Opening and approval of the agenda

The meeting was opened by the SAB Chair, prof. J. Doležel, who welcomed the SAB members and guests and presented the agenda.

**Motion:** SAB members unanimously approved the meeting agenda. In addition, they asked the members of GACR Presidium if the modifications of the proposals for the new types of research projects (Postdoctoral projects and Junior Star projects), which SAB requested at its meeting on March 22, 2019 were included in the proposals.

Assoc. prof. P. Baldrian responded to this request on behalf of GACR Presidium as follows:

a) GACR Presidium did not consider it feasible to rename "Postdoctoral projects" to "Junior projects", or give it other name, and decided to keep the original name.

b) In the near future, it will not be possible to evaluate proposals submitted by Junior-Star applicants based on interviews with the applicants. This would require a two-step selection procedure, which is not compatible with the current Czech law on grant competitions (announcement of the results of the first step of evaluation before the end of the call). Moreover, there are no funds left in the current budget of GACR to cover additional costs associated with the evaluation of proposals by a dedicated panel of experts.

**Motion:** SAB members unanimously agreed on the following recommendations:

a) GACR Presidium should rename the Postdoctoral program to more accurately reflect the nature of these types of projects.

b) GACR Presidium should undertake all necessary steps to propose a change in the current legislation so that the Junior Star projects and possibly also Postdoctoral projects are evaluated based on interviews. This would require the possibility of announcing the results of each of the two phases of projects evaluation (i.e., the first stage to select a sub-set of applications into stage two that would rely on interviews).

c) GACR Presidium should take the necessary actions so that The Junior Star projects and the Postdoctoral projects are evaluated by Discipline Committees and, in the nearest possible term, by a dedicated panel with special guidelines.

d) The criteria used to evaluate proposals for Postdoctoral projects and Junior Star projects should be based on the quality of the proposed research and of the principal investigator, and not on the quantity of planned outputs. The SAB asks that (internationally recognized) quality is the guiding principle of selection for these two of programs.

## 2) Evaluation Panels' composition and grant selection process

Assoc. Prof. P. Baldrian presented the GACR Evaluation Process, including the information on the panels' composition and selection of the project proposals in Standard Panels and EXPRO evaluation system.

During the discussion that followed, prof. Š. Jurajda argued that 8 out of 12 members of the economics panel 402 had few or no international publications as well as almost no international citation performance in the panel subject area. It appears that when choosing the panel members, a preference was given to economists without an international impact, while nominated economists who have international publications and citations were not selected. Prof. Š. Jurajda gave a few examples of unsuccessful nominations of such scientists.

After a thorough discussion, SAB concluded that the selection procedure itself is well designed and that the main weakness of the whole process is the quality of panel members, and possibly also the number of panellists in each panel as well as the number of panels. In particular, the nomination and selection of panellists is failing to attract the best scientists.

**Motion:** The SAB unanimously agreed on the following recommendations:

a) In the nearest possible term, the working group assisting the selection of panelists in social sciences should consider appointing additional panelists to serve on the panel 402 who have international publications and citations in the panel subject area. GACR may ask the International Advisory Board of the Research, Development and Innovation Council to establish an external expert committee to assist these appointments.

b) In addition to the standard nomination process, GACR should allow for nominations initiated (invited) by GACR Presidium based on recommendations of the SAB and by professional societies.

The SAB acknowledges, that universities and research organizations have a right to nominate panel members. However, the issue is with cases when a dean or a head of research organization does not agree to nominate a good panellist who is willing to be nominated.

c) The informal working groups, which assist members of the GACR Presidium in selecting panel members, should consist of the relevant member of the GACR Presidium, a member of the Research, Development and Innovation Council, and two members of SAB selected to maximize the coverage of subject areas covered by these groups.

d) GACR should consider a possibility of reducing the length of the period for which a researcher serves on a panel.

e) GACR should evaluate the performance of panel members. The evaluations could be assisted by bibliometric comparisons of panellists' own performance versus that of rejected applicants. Such analyses are to be discussed at the next meeting of the SAB.

In relation to this topic, SAB members discussed possible actions to stimulate the interest of excellent scientists in participating in the grant evaluation process.

**Motion:** *The SAB unanimously agreed on the following:*

a) GACR should consider actions to reduce the workload of panel members by eliminating routine steps in the process of grant selection and by simplifying the evaluation forms.

b) The Research, Development and Innovation Council should consider participation of researchers in grant evaluation panels and committees as one of the important criteria when evaluating the performance of universities and research organizations (Module 3-5 of the Methodology of Evaluation 2017+).

### **3) Budget of GACR**

GACR President Dr. A. Valkárová provided SAB members with an overview of the GACR budget for 2019 and the near future. Due to the introduction of new grant schemes and related evaluation procedures, the current budget will not be sufficient and will have to be increased.

As the information on GACR budget was new to SAB members, they were not prepared for a detailed discussion of this issue.

**Motion:** *The SAB unanimously agreed on the following:*

a) A more detailed discussion of GACR budget is needed and SAB will return to this topic during its meeting in October.

b) GACR Presidium should provide SAB members with a detailed information on its current budget and future outlook at least two weeks before the October meeting.

c) Prof. J. Doležel should inform prof. J. Michl (International Advisory Panel of the Research, Development and Innovation Council) about the need to increase GACR budget so that there is enough funding for the new grant schemes such as EXPRO and more elaborate grant selection processes, which include interviews.

**4) Discussion of the material “A proposal for the approval schedule of targeted support programs and groups of research and grant projects” by the Research, Development and Innovation Council**

GACR President Dr. A. Valkárová informed SAB members about a change in the process of approving new proposals of funding programs, new classes of projects and renewal of programs by funding organizations. The Research, Development and Innovation Council introduced a new step at which the proposals are evaluated also by the Committee for the Evaluation of R&D&I Outputs. There is fear at GACR that this step prolongs the whole approving process.

*Motion: The SAB acknowledged the information.*

**5) Agenda of the 3<sup>rd</sup> SAB meeting (Friday, October 4, 2019)**

*Motion: The SAB unanimously agreed on the following:*

a) The main topics of the October meeting will be the empirical analysis of GACR and measurement of the impact of GACR (based on the results of bibliometric analysis by GACR and The Research, Development and Innovation Council). In relation to this, possible changes in the evaluation panels (their number and the number of panellists) will be discussed during the October meeting.

b) SAB requests GACR Presidium to provide a detailed information on the results of its bibliometric to the SAB at least two weeks before the October meeting.

c) Prof. J. Doležel and prof. F. Štěpánek will collect the available information and prepare materials on GACR panels and Discipline Committees at least two weeks before the October meeting and distribute it to SAB members.

**6) Any other business**

*Motion: The SAB unanimously agreed on the following:*

a) GACR may provide documents only in Czech language to the SAB if English versions are not available and if it is not practical and/or feasible to translate the versions in the Czech language to English.

b) GACR should not use formal details of grant applications for eliminating applications as far as possible. The guiding principle of application evaluations should always be the quality of the proposed research.

c) SAB will discuss the priorities, future plans and visions of GACR during its meeting on December 10, 2019.

d) SAB will discuss gender issues in research funding during one of its meetings in 2020.

**7) The meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m. by SAB chair prof. J. Doležel**

Recorded by Mgr. Valentýna Hrkalová

Approved by Prof. Ing. Jaroslav Doležel, DrSc.