

Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Czech Science Foundation

Friday, October, 9, 2020
Czech Science Foundation, Room no. 19
Beginning at 13:00

Members present: prof. J. Doležel; prof. P. Exner; prof. A. Šedo; prof. J. Zeman

Members connected online *via* MS Teams: prof. M. Hartl; prof. B. J. F. Nordén; prof. J. Roithová;
prof. A. Shaked; prof. F. Štěpánek

Members not present (pre-arranged): prof. Š. Jurajda

Guests: Dr. A. Valkárová; doc. P. Baldrian; Ing. Eva Molíková

Agenda of the meeting:

1. Opening and approval of the agenda (J. Doležel)
2. Old business and approval of the last meeting's minutes (J. Doležel)
3. Brief information and updates from GACR (A. Valkárová)
 - a. Evaluation of project proposals in 2020
 - b. Extraordinary measures approved during the coronavirus pandemics
 - c. GACR President's awards in 2019
 - d. Meeting of GACR President with early career woman scientists
4. Overview of the types of research projects supported by GACR (A. Valkárová)
5. Project proposal evaluation process (A. Valkárová)
 - a. Grant proposal forms
 - b. Grant evaluation forms
6. Information on the Report on SAB Activities in 2020 submitted to RVVI (J. Doležel)
7. Preparation of a Work Plan of SAB in 2021 to be submitted to RVVI (J. Doležel)
8. Agenda of the 7th SAB meeting (Wednesday, December 2, 2020)
9. Any other business
10. Adjournment

1. Opening and approval of the agenda

Prof. Doležel opened the meeting, welcomed four SAB members in person as well as the members connected online and presented the meeting's agenda.

Motion: *SAB approved the meeting agenda.*

2. Old business and approval of the last meeting's minutes

Prof. Doležel asked SAB members to approve the last meeting's minutes and presented points raised during the last meeting, which needed to be discussed again:

a. Discussions on POSTODOCTORAL projects and JUNIOR STAR projects

During the first and second meeting in 2019, SAB suggested that all grants funded by GACR are portable. During its previous meeting, SAB also suggested that the JUNIOR STAR and POSTODOCTORAL projects selection is based on interviews. Responding to this, President Valkárová informed that all grants are portable. Doc. Baldrian informed SAB that GACR is in favour to introduce the interviews for JUNIOR STAR projects. The only obstacle is the lack of funds to pay for organizing the interviews and also some logistical issues that would have to be solved. Dr. Valkárová also noted that JUNIOR STAR projects are in the first year of operation and GACR should wait for another year to gain more experience before suggesting any modifications.

Motion: *SAB acknowledged the information and noted that the COVID-19 pandemics demonstrated the usefulness of online meetings and conferences and this approach could be introduced in the interviews for JUNIOR STAR.*

b. The composition of evaluation panels and grant selection process

During its previous meeting, SAB discussed the composition of the evaluation panels and agreed to discuss the evaluation process and the proposal evaluation forms during the following meeting. SAB also asked GACR to be informed about the replacement of evaluation panel. Moreover, SAB suggested that the results of the first phase of the evaluation process are published as soon as possible. However, President Valkárová informed that GACR is governed by the Act No. 130/2002 Coll. which does not allow GACR to announce the results of the first phase of the evaluation process and that GACR will not take any action to change the legislation.

Motion: *SAB acknowledged the information and agreed to discuss the grant proposal evaluation forms under point 5 of the present agenda.*

c. DIOSCURI programme of the Max-Planck Gesellschaft

SAB expressed its willingness to contact Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to endorse GACR as the Czech partner in the DIOSCURI programme of the Max-Planck Gesellschaft. Responding to this, President Valkárová informed SAB that GACR has decided not be the Czech partner in this program and that GACR is not going to contact the Ministry in this matter.

Motion: *SAB acknowledged the information.*

d. What can GACR do better?

SAB expressed its concern whether GACR supports high-risk high-gain projects and if the current project portfolio supports Czech scientists at every stage of their career. Based on this discussion, SAB requested GACR to present an overview of all currently supported types of projects.

Motion: *SAB agreed to discuss the types of research projects under point 4 of the present agenda.*

3. Brief information and updates from GACR

a. Evaluation of project proposals in 2020

President Valkárová presented a summary of evaluation of all types of project proposals. She shared basic statistics, including the number of project proposals, the success rate, etc. It was a challenge to obtain at least two foreign reviews for each project because the deadline for submitting the project proposals was postponed and consequently, the evaluation period was shortened. Almost 23,000 foreign reviewers were contacted to obtain the required number of reviews.

Motion: *SAB acknowledged the information and appreciated the challenging work of GACR Office in managing the evaluation of project proposals during the difficult times.*

b. Extraordinary measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemics

President Valkárová reminded SAB about the measures that were adopted by GACR during the coronavirus pandemics. She also informed about two calls for the Lead Agency projects to support a research related to COVID-19; one in cooperation with the Swiss National Agency (SNSF) and the other with the Austrian Agency Fonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung (FWF).

Motion: *SAB acknowledged the information.*

c. GACR President's awards in 2019

President Valkárová informed about the GACR President's awards ceremony during which five scientists, two women and three men received the awards for excellent execution of GACR projects that were completed in 2019.

Motion: *SAB acknowledged the information.*

d. Meeting of GACR President with early career woman scientists

President Valkárová informed SAB about her meeting with early career woman scientists and also about the invitation from Ms. Tenglerová (Center for Gender & Science, Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences) to join the online conference “Science and Research 2021+” on the opportunities and challenges in professional employment of women in science.

Motion: *SAB acknowledged the information and agreed to discuss the invitation to the conference under point 8 of the present agenda.*

4. Overview of the types of research projects supported by GACR

The discussion of SAB was structured into three parts.

a. Projects to support researchers throughout the length of their professional career.

Doc. Baldrian introduced the POSTDOC INDIVIDUAL FELLOWSHIP project type, which will be announced in the next call for proposals in 2021. This project type will help young Czech scientists at the beginning of their career to obtain professional experience in a foreign research institution. Excellent young researchers who are planning to establish their own group can apply for JUNIOR STAR project. All other researchers, no matter if they are at the beginning of their career or have a senior position can apply for a STANDARD research grant. Doc. Baldrian noted that young scientists are not discriminated in the call for STANDARD projects. Only the quality of a project proposal and not the length of professional experience in case of early career applicants are considered during the proposal evaluation by panel members. President Valkárová reminded SAB that GACR substitutes the institutional funding by the STANDARD projects and this fact was confirmed by the majority of SAB members.

b. Low success rate in the recent call for JUNIOR STAR projects.

Doc. Baldrian informed SAB about the low success rate in call for JUNIOR STAR projects in 2020. This was a consequence of a high number of applications and relatively low quality of many of them. However, the actual number of funded projects has not yet been decided as it will depend on available funding. Prof. Shaked noted that the applicants were most probably not aware of the requirements due to insufficient information provided by GACR.

c. A need for another project type, or more flexible conditions for the execution of the current project types.

Prof. Roithová shared her positive experience with the high-risk high-gain projects in the Netherlands. SAB members welcomed this proposal, but identified potential obstacles, which could hamper the establishment of this project type. These include the current legislation, such as the requirement for registration of the results of each project (namely publications) in the Information Register of R&D results. A risky project, which is completed without any result, is classified as unsuccessful with some negative consequences for the principal investigator. Another obstacle to introduce a new project type is the limited budget of GACR.

Motion:

- *SAB acknowledged that STANDARD projects substitute in part the low institutional funding of research organizations in the country.*
- *SAB agreed that the current legislation and legal framework limit the flexibility of individual types of research projects.*
- *SAB agreed that the introduction of another type of research project is not necessary.*
- *SAB recommended that Executive Summary explaining the conditions for each project type is published during the next calls for project proposals.*
- *SAB reiterated their recommendation to GACR to offer webinars immediately after announcing the calls for project proposals to help the applicants with the preparation of their project proposals.*

5. Project proposal evaluation process

a. Grant proposal forms

GACR provided SAB members with grant proposal forms one week prior to the meeting for discussion. Prof. Roithová suggested that a description of social/scientific relevance is included in the proposal forms.

Motion: *SAB unanimously agreed that all current grant proposal forms are adequate and recommended that the scientific/social relevance is included the proposal forms.*

b. Grant evaluation forms

GACR provided SAB members with grant evaluation forms (for rapporteurs as well as for reviewers) one week prior to the meeting for discussion. Doc. Baldrian informed SAB that GACR simplified the evaluation forms a year ago.

Motion: *SAB agreed that the grant evaluation forms are adequate and that there is no need to change them, also considering the fact they were modified only a year ago.*

6. Information on the Report on SAB Activities in 2020 submitted to R&D&I Council

Prof. Doležel informed SAB members that GACR was asked by R&D&I Council to submit a report about the activities of SAB in 2020. The document was prepared by the GACR Office and by prof. Doležel at extremely short notice and there was no time left for consulting it with the SAB.

Motion: *SAB acknowledged the information and asked prof. Doležel to share the document (written in Czech) with SAB members.*

7. Preparation of a Work Plan of SAB in 2021 to be submitted to R&D&I Council

Prof. Doležel informed SAB members that he was asked by R&D&I Council to submit a Work plan of SAB for 2021. After a discussion, SAB agreed on the following main topics to be included in the Work plan for 2021:

- Analysis of the impact of GACR on the level of Czech science.

- Support of young scientists; gender and parenting issues.
- Quality of the proposal evaluation process and the selection of projects for funding.
- Selection of members of evaluation panels and their quality.

The discussion also touched the issue on how to evaluate the performance of GACR. Responding to this, doc. Baldrian asked SAB to provide GACR with some guidelines. He also asked SAB to articulate the criteria of success and noted that funding schemes are easily comparable with other agencies.

Motion:

- *SAB instructed prof. Doležel to prepare a Work Plan of SAB for 2021 as suggested and submit it via GACR to R&D&I Council.*
- *SAB agreed that GACR should ideally be evaluated by an independent body outside GACR.*
- *SAB agreed to prepare the evaluation guidelines and discuss them in one of its future meetings.*

8. Agenda of the 7th SAB meeting (Wednesday, December 2, 2020)

Prof. Doležel proposed three main topics for the discussion during the 7th SAB meeting:

- Gender and parenting
- Methodology of the evaluating of GACR performance
- Final results of GACR project calls with a particular focus on the JUNIOR STAR grant projects.

Motion: *SAB approved the three topics and agreed to invite Ms. Tenglerová (see point 3d above) to the 7th SAB meeting to discuss the gender and parenting issues.*

9. Any other business

- a. A proposal by GACR Presidium to merge the evaluation panels P201 and P202

President Valkárová informed SAB members about a proposal of GACR Presidium to merge panels P201 and P202 (both belong to the Discipline Committee No. 2 - Physical Sciences). The main reason being the low number of project proposals submitted to either of the two panels during the past years. This proposal is also in line with the efforts to make GACR operation more effective. SAB discussed the issue in detail and, among other, prof. Nordén shared his experience with merging panels in ERC and DFG.

Motion: *After a thorough discussion, SAB agreed to merge both panels following the proposal by GACR Presidium. SAB also recommend to pay special attention to the selection of members of the new panel to cover appropriately both research areas.*

- b. The attendance of SAB members during the SAB meetings

Prof. Doležel reminded that SAB agreed that all members of SAB should attend at least two meetings a calendar year in person, with a possibility to attend the maximum of two meetings online. Considering the limitations imposed by the current pandemics of COVID-19 he

suggested to change this rule temporarily so that the members of SAB can attend all meetings online.

Motion: *SAB agreed to change its internal rule until decided otherwise so that that all members of SAB can attend all four meetings in a year online.*

c. GACR budget

SAB discussed again the need to increase the budget for GACR. Doc. Baldrian noted that the budget in the coming years should at least reflect the inflation, which is currently not the case.

Motion: *SAB agreed to endorse the budget and agreed to send another letter to R&D&I Council with this proposal.*

No other business has been discussed. At the end of the meeting, prof. Doležel thanked SAB members and the members of GACR Presidium participating in the meeting for their valuable contributions and hard work and closed the meeting.

10. The meeting closed at 3:45 pm

Recorded by: Ing. Eva Molíková

Approved by: prof. Ing. Jaroslav Doležel, DrSc.