

Meeting of the Scientific Board of the Central European Institute of Technology, Masaryk University

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| Date, venue | 5 th November 2020, online meeting |
| Participants | J. Nantl (chair), V. Bryja, T. Kašparovský, M. Mráz, P. Plevka, K. Říha, R. Štefl, J. Cacek, Š. Vaňáčková, Š. Pospíšilová, M. Repko, J. Doležel, O. Fojt, J. Friml, L. Kunz, S. Pastoreková, P. Tomančák, E. Zažímalová |
| Guests | E. Handlířová, N. Kostlánová, M. Pokorná, Z. Novotná, M. Hamanová, K. Ornerová, M. Marcolla, A. Valterová, E. Jarour |
| Excused | M. O'Connell, M. Králíčková, M. Kiess |
| Minutes prepared by | E. Handlířová |
| Approved by | J. Nantl |
| Comments by | - |

Agenda

- 1) Summary Report 2020
- 2) Outline for Strategic Plan 2021-2028

Minutes

Introduction

The Scientific Board reached the quorum: 18 members were present out of 21 members of the board.

J. Nantl welcomed Scientific Board members in the new term of operation for the period starting from 1. 7. 2020 until 30. 6. 2023. Most of the members are continuing from the previous period. J. Nantl welcomed new members by name: E. Zažímalová (President of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic), Š. Vaňáčková (Research Group Leader and member of the prestigious European Molecular Biology Organisation, EMBO), Š. Pospíšilová (Vice-Rector for Science and Research at Masaryk University), J. Cacek (Dean of the Faculty of Sports Studies at Masaryk University), and M. Repko (Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Masaryk University).

1) Summary Report 2020

J. Nantl summarised the performance and financial situation of the Institute (see the presentation in the annex). In the long term, CEITEC MU constitutes an important part of MUNI's performance. The Institute is composed of 5 % of the employees of the University and produces 20 % of the performance outcome in the Nature Index. However, there is an uneven distribution of research performances between research groups.

J. Nantl: CEITEC MU has a long-term strategy to produce "in-house" publications. That means we do not want to buy research outcomes from productive researchers that are not present at the Institute. In general, about 50 % of our publications are published in Q1 journals and about 50% of our publications have a corresponding author from CEITEC MU.

J. Nantl: CEITEC PhD School has become the flagship of the University. We received positive feedback on the establishment of the Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC), both from members of the University Scientific Board and the consortial International Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB). We also extended the school with a new specialisation in the field of molecular medicine - "Biomedical Sciences Programme." Through that, we are

continuing with the long-term goal of maximising the share of CEITEC PhD students that are enrolled in the CEITEC PhD School programmes (in comparison to PhD students with a supervisor from CEITEC MU that are enrolled in other faculty PhD programmes outside of the CEITEC PhD School umbrella).

J. Nantl: The Institute organises a wide range of training for researchers, mainly for junior researchers. For Group Leaders, we focus on the development and cultivation of managerial skills. When comparing the management of a medium-size research group to running a small-sized company (in terms of budget and number of employees), it is evident that it is essential to support the managerial and leadership skills of Group Leaders.

J. Nantl: In terms of the grant strategy, we defined three pillars: 1. Significant individual research grants – it doesn't matter if they come from a national or international grant provider (e.g., ERC, ERC-CZ, GAČR EXPRO, etc.); 2. Above-average success rate in the national grant schemes; and 3. Institutional grants that support further development initiatives at a larger scale (e.g., Horizon Europe, OP JAK, etc.). Our goal is to increase the number of research groups that receive grants with a budget of approx. 10 mil. CZK per year for five years (pillar 1). This will support the financial stability of the Institute and lower our dependency on standard grant sources. Moreover, the significant individual research grants (such as ERC and GAČR EXPRO) could be perceived as an additional evaluation of our research groups as well.

R. Štefl, Š. Vaňáčková raised a concern about the structure of Group Leaders and their ability to attract ERC grants, particularly in the advanced category. Therefore, we cannot rely too much on pillar 1.

J. Nantl agreed that pillar 1 could not finance the entire Institute. On the other hand, we recently submitted 4 ERC applications per year, and two applicants were invited for interviews. Additionally, we are already one of the main beneficiaries of the ERC CZ grant. At CEITEC MU, one-third of research groups already have an individual research grant as defined in pillar 1, and that is very good in the context of the Czech Republic.

P. Tomančák: The ERC CZ grant scheme is a great thing. However, it is crucial that groups that receive the ERC CZ grant (i.e., they received the grade A in the ERC evaluation) apply for the ERC grant again next year. Having grade A means a higher chance of receiving ERC funding the following year, not even mentioning the greater prestige of having an ERC grant than the ERC CZ grant – it is not only about the money.

J. Nantl: In the future, we need to address the delicate topic of the publication strategy and expectations for publication performances. Data from 2019 are not as good as in previous years. We need to see data from 2020 to assess whether the 2019 performance is just a deviation.

M. Mráz: Rather than defining a publication strategy, we should focus on the selection of Group Leaders and their promotions to senior positions. When a Group Leader is hired, we should trust that s/he has the quality and inner motivation to do quality science. We should not “play” with the system or curve our publication strategy according to the evaluation/finance system, but rather pursue quality science.

Š. Vaňáčková: The publication strategy is connected to the grant strategy. If we want more ERC grants, we need a top-quality publication that requires more time. Therefore, we should seek quality in the first place.

Š. Pospíšilová: Of course, we want to produce as many quality publications as possible. However, we must reflect the system of institutional funding as well. It is not feasible to cut the link between research performance and the way the institution is financed.

J. Nantl: At the end of 2020, the NPU project is ending (the quasi-institutional part of the budget). We have been preparing for the end of the sustainability period for the past five years. The Institute was able to generate a reserve fund. As part of the change of the Institute's strategical research areas, we are also cancelling six research groups this year. The goal of the preparation for the end of sustainability period was to keep the institutional budget for research groups at the same, or even slightly higher level (i.e., 2-3 mil CZK per year).

Conclusion(s):

The Scientific Board is taking the report summary 2020 into account.

2) Outline for Strategic Plan 2021-2028

J. Nantl presented a plan for the preparation of the Strategic Plan of the Institute for 2021-2028. The period is provided by law and follows the same period of the University Long-Term Plan that is currently being finalised.

So far, the Strategic Plan's key points were introduced at the Group Leaders' Meeting in October 2020 and at today's Scientific Board meeting. Further planned steps are:

- Per partes debates with research centres (December 2020 – January 2021)
- Work by the CEITEC MU Strategy Committee (January 2021)
- Discussion with the Scientific Board (January 2021)
- Discussion with the MUNI management (February 2021)
- Approval procedure consisting of a Group Leaders' Meeting, Director's Board meeting, and Scientific Board meeting (March 2021)

The main points of the Strategic Plan are summarised in the presentation (see annex to the meeting minutes).

P. Tomančák: At Max Planck, the strategy is reformulated every time a new Director is selected. The strategy is the outcome of a profound debate, which brings a message and vision, rather than a technically perfect table with precise indicators.

J. Nantl: Here, the planning period is prescribed by the Ministry and is not dependent on the tenure of a Director. As far as the format is concerned, we expect that a debate will include a design of the strategy as well. The previous strategy for 2016-2020 responded to the needs of the sustainability period.

M. Mráz asked about the prediction of the institutional support income (IP).

J. Nantl: For 2021, we expect approx. a 5 % increase in IP. Currently, we are the second most significant beneficiary of the IP at the University (after the Faculty of Sciences). However, we are expecting an economic crisis to come as well. In the future, space will become an issue (as it is already now). CEITEC MU has the lowest m² per FTE and the highest earnings per FTE at the University. For the long-term viability of the Institute, we need to continue to bring in new Group Leaders – but that means that we need to cancel another group. We need to start a discussion on generational change as well. At the faculties, researchers have to leave their managerial roles when they are of retirement age. At CEITEC MU, we do not have such a rule yet.

P. Tomančák appreciated the establishment of the TAC. Of course, it brings a commitment and extra work for the participants, but also increases the quality of PhD students. At Max Planck, they've had a very positive experience with TAC as a tool for PhD student development.

S. Pastoreková very much appreciated CEITEC MU, its concept, and ideas. Remarkably, the method of internal communication with Group Leaders and the system of training serve as inspiration for the Biomedical Research Center of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

P. Tomančák recommended not to focus only on summary performance data (such as % of Q1 publications), but to present the best individual research outputs, and to provide stories, topics, and real examples of the quality science done at CEITEC MU.

J. Nantl: The University should have different expectations related to individual parts – based on size and research/educational orientation.

Conclusion(s):

The Scientific Board will reconvene in January 2021 to discuss a draft of the Strategic Plan 2021-2028. The draft will be distributed in advance.

Annexes

https://is.muni.cz/auth/do/ceitec/vedecka_rada/2020/2020-11-05/