

Recommendations by the International Advisory Board to the leadership of the Slovak Academy of Sciences 11.11.2020

Transformation of SAS into public research institutions

The IAB was extremely pleased to learn about the activities and ambitions of the Slovak Government concerning planned new legislation on the renewal of public research institutions, research funding system, evaluation practices of research and science, and that SAS representatives are included in all three committees working on these issues. According to Prof Šajgalík SAS may get a legal status making SAS an equal partner with universities. This would greatly facilitate the collaboration and synergies between SAS and the research universities, the importance of which the IAB has continuously highlighted.

The IAB was pleased to learn that a memorandum of Understanding between SAS and 2 Bratislava universities and 3 Kosice universities has been signed, in order to create 2 joint university research centres in the CNRS-style, which would enable SAS to enter into research collaboration with universities and create a barrier-less programme for PhD students.

IAB recalls its earlier recommendations on the interaction of SAS with research universities, once the legal barriers are lifted:

- Establishment of collaborative structures between SAS institutes and universities, followed by development of a joint science strategy together with the partner universities that could serve as a nucleus for a national science strategy.
- Inclusion of the rectors of the 5 research universities as external members of the SAS scientific board.
- SAS to agree with University rectors that it will be a partner in the organization of the upcoming inter-university doctoral school program.
- SAS to engage with universities in redesign of research-based curricula, and SAS faculty to engage in educational activities in research Universities.

The IAB recommends the leadership of SAS to continue fruitful collaboration with the Ministry, and the current SAS Presidium to efficiently hand over these activities to the new SAS Presidium to be elected in Spring 2021. The fact that the SAS strategy is in-line with the strategies and policies laid down by the Ministry for the Slovakian education and research system provides a firm basis for collaboration.

Development of the Sections during the past year

The IAB notes with satisfaction that all three Sections are striving to develop themselves, oriented by the recommendations of the last Regular Evaluation and the IAB's recommendations.

SASPRO 2 and IMPULZ programmes

The MSC co-fund SASPRO 2 of 9 million EUR is coordinated by SAS and operated together with Comenius University and Slovak University of Technology.

The IAB recommends the selection of the awardees of both programmes to follow a rigorous selection procedure, and to look for a chairperson for the selection committee of IMPULZ

amongst eventual Slovak-born researchers who have served in ERC panels or other high profile selection panels, or Slovak-born ERC advanced grant awardees.

Internationalization of PhD student and post-doc communities

The SAS institutes are responsible for the admission exams, the first quality check of foreign young researchers, and for the monitoring of their progress.

The IAB recommends the quality of applying international PhD students to be paid attention to.

The next SAS Regular Evaluation

The SAS Assembly has approved the principles of the next Regular Evaluation (2016-2021) of the research institutes. The next SAS Presidium starting in June 2021 will be responsible for the process.

Like in the previous evaluation, each of the three sections will have its own panel, the leader of which will choose the members. The scope and methodology of the evaluation will remain the same, and the categories are planned to be A, A/B, B, B/C, C, C/D, D like before.

The IAB recommends to bear in mind that an evaluation should serve strategic and developmental goals, rather than being ranking- and marks-oriented. International evaluators can be attracted by an assessment where strategic goals are the aim, and their definition is given by knowledge of the status of the quality and impact of the research. Each institutes' deep self-evaluation and strategic plan are essential documents for the effective work of the evaluation panels.

The IAB recommends SAS and the partner universities to work towards an integrated evaluation of the whole research landscape in Slovakia, in spite of the fact that SAS has a legal obligation to run its own Regular Evaluations.