

IOCB Strategy for Development in Basic Research 2017-2021

Preamble: Inspired by the “Strategy Report” and resulting recommendations of the International Advisory Board from 2016, the chair and vice-chair of the Board of the Institute discussed with four representatives of senior group leaders strategic issues concerning basic research at IOCB. The discussion, which was held on May 5, 2017 and the subsequent e-mail exchange led to the following document to be presented to the IOCB Director and the IOCB Board.

An *ad hoc* group of representatives of the Board of the Institute (Ulli Jahn and Pavel Jungwirth) and senior group leaders covering the principal research directions at IOCB (Jan Konvalinka, Michal Hocek, Ivo Starý, and Jiří Jiráček) agrees with the International Advisory Board that (i) thanks to previous efforts at the Institute healthy foundations have been laid, which allow to start moving IOCB to a new level of scientific quality, but (ii) in order to achieve this goal, specific actions need to be taken.

1. *Hiring policy.* An active scouting strategy needs to be pursued for attracting excellent scientists to IOCB in areas relevant for the development of the Institute. It is stressed that this is the only phase where active science policy should be pursued; once hired, the group leaders must have full scientific freedom. Focus should be on attracting the best candidates worldwide for positions of junior group leaders. Roughly speaking (having in mind that grants are only means and not goals in science) these should be researchers realistically reaching for starting or consolidator ERC grants. Scouting for such candidates should be a systematic activity coordinated by dedicated senior research personnel at IOCB. While conditions for junior group leaders at IOCB are essentially good already, to sweeten the deal the best candidates should be offered more competitive salaries and other benefits (such as contributions toward relocation costs). On top of junior positions, the Institute would profit immensely from 1-2 top senior hires. By this we mean “pre-Nobel prize” rather than “post-Nobel prize” stars in one of the central research areas of the Institute who could serve as role models. These hot candidates are of course hard to attract to IOCB, since we are competing here with the best and richest institutions worldwide. Such a hire should not be done at all costs, but scouting should aim for suitable candidates, where the “costs” may be lower. This process should be actively supported by IOCB during salary and lab space negotiations and, e.g., by financially and logistically supporting moving to Prague.

Implementation

A small “scouting team” will be established under the auspices of the IOCB board, which will pursue an active scouting policy (systematic search for suitable candidates for group leader positions, addressing potential candidates at conferences, creating a lecture and meeting platform at IOCB, etc.) with the active support of the director and the management. Conditions and potential benefits for those who are eventually hired will be negotiated by the management.

2. *Support of risky projects.* IOCB is currently implementing Proof of Concept grants. Such and similar strategies to internally support high risk - (possibly) high gain projects should be a strong priority of the Institute, since similar instruments are badly missing within the Czech science arena.

Implementation

The system is currently being introduced in the IOCB structure. In addition, the interdisciplinary grant system will be modified based on the past experience in collaboration between the IOCB board and the management.

3. Tenure and closing less effective groups. Since the Institute is reaching maximum capacity and space is becoming a crucial issue, closing less effective groups is imperative for enabling new hires. A well thought decision process concerning promotion of junior group leaders to senior status is already in place as defined in the approved “Goals and Organization of IOCB 2016-2020” and should be fully enforced. Only such candidates should be considered for promotion, who (i) successfully established themselves as internationally visible experts in their fields, (ii) published important papers as corresponding authors in high quality journals, which are beyond their PhD or postdoctoral work, (iii) successfully trained MSc. and/or PhD students, and (iv) secured funding as Principal Investigators from national and/or international granting agencies. The groups that will not meet these requirements will be terminated.

At the senior level, terminations may take place during periodic evaluations, if a group is evaluated unsatisfactory or at a satisfactory rating for more than one evaluation period. Otherwise, the most effective and socially acceptable procedure is to terminate (and possibly move to emeritus status) most of the group leaders reaching retirement age. Only in exceptional cases of consistently high scientific productivity should the senior group leaders continue beyond retirement age and even in these cases negotiations toward reducing the group size should be initiated.

Implementation

The director agrees with all the above points and will implement it with the help of the IAB board.

4. Outreach to universities. IOCB should continue and strengthen its outreach to universities. Researchers should be encouraged to teach and habilitate at local universities. Ties should be formalized in form of new joint laboratories and study programs, as well as endowed chairs and stipends, sponsored by IOCB, at Charles University and the University of Chemistry and Technology.

Implementation

The director will start negotiations about creating IOCB sponsored Endowed Chairs at local universities. He will also initiate activities toward creation of a joint PhD program with collaborating local and/or foreign universities, inspired by the biomedical PhD program between the Charles University and the Czech Academy of Sciences. In addition, the director will enter negotiations with the university authorities about mutually beneficial solutions concerning student grants and fellowships.

In Prague, July 4th, 2017

Michal Hocek, Zdeněk Hostomský, Ulli Jahn, Jiří Jiráček, Pavel Jungwirth, Jan Konvalinka, and Ivo Starý