MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND YOUTH OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

VER 2026

Periodic Assessment of Research, Development, Artistic and Other Creative Activities VER 2026

Final Report of the Clinical Medicine Sub-panel

The Clinical Medicine sub-panel conducted a qualitative peer-review evaluation of submissions from three participating institutions. The assessment covered 113 outputs produced between 2020 and 2024, comprising:

1. **100 Research Outputs**
2. **9 Social Impact Case Studies**
3. **4 Creative Research Environment Statements**

Methodologies of the Assessment Process

The review was conducted in accordance with the established methodological framework and quality standards for the evaluation exercise. All submissions were assessed by panel members with appropriate disciplinary expertise.

Research outputs were evaluated primarily on originality, significance, and rigour:

- **Originality** encompassed new empirical findings, innovative methods or analytical techniques, engagement with novel problems, or the development of new arguments, interpretations, or insights.
- **Significance** reflected the extent to which the work influenced, or had the potential to influence, knowledge, scholarly debate, or the development of clinical policies and practice.

- **Rigour** assessed the intellectual coherence, methodological integrity, and appropriateness of the concepts, analyses, and theoretical frameworks employed.

Social impact case studies and creative environment statements were evaluated separately using defined criteria, with particular attention to demonstrable impact and the sustainability of research structures. In addition to assessing the scientific merit of individual outputs, the panel considered the broader research context in which they were produced, including each institution's capacity to generate sustained, high-quality research and to translate findings into societal and clinical benefit.

Calibration of the Assessment Process

To ensure consistency across the evaluation exercise, the panel implemented a structured calibration process to align judgments with the defined quality categories. Panel members first conducted independent assessments, followed by comparative discussions of representative cases and consensus-building sessions. This approach ensured consistent scoring across institutions, disciplines, and submission types.

Quality level descriptors

Submitted outputs were classified into five quality levels reflecting their scholarly contribution and research impact.

A) World-leading

Outputs in this category demonstrated exceptional originality, significance, and methodological rigor. Typical characteristics included:

- A substantial and clearly identifiable contribution to international knowledge.
- Innovative conceptual or methodological approaches.
- Significant theoretical advancement or clinical innovation.
- Robust and transparent research design.
- Strong international relevance and visibility.

Such outputs typically represent research capable of influencing international research agendas or clinical practice.

B) Internationally excellent

Outputs in this category represent high-quality research making a clear contribution to knowledge at the international level. Typical characteristics included:

- Methodologically sound and well-structured research.
- Clearly articulated research questions and analytical approaches.
- Findings relevant beyond national boundaries.
- Solid contributions within established research fields.

These outputs contribute significantly to ongoing international research discussions.

C) Internationally recognised

Outputs placed in this category met accepted international standards of scholarship and demonstrated sound methodology. Typical characteristics included:

- Appropriate research design and data analysis.
- Moderate advancement of existing knowledge.
- Relevance to the wider research community, though with limited broader influence. These works typically extend existing research lines rather than introducing major innovations.

D) Nationally recognised

Outputs in this category were of acceptable scholarly quality but were primarily relevant within a national context. Typical characteristics included:

- Studies addressing locally relevant clinical or healthcare issues.
- Descriptive or confirmatory research.
- Limited methodological innovation.
- Restricted international visibility.

While academically valid, these works contributed mainly to national or local research discussions.

E) Below the standard of nationally recognised work

Outputs assigned to this category did not meet the minimum scholarly standards expected within the evaluation framework. In the present evaluation cycle, such classifications were typically associated with:

- Submission of conference abstracts rather than full peer-reviewed publications.
- Insufficient methodological transparency.
- Incomplete reporting of research methods or results.
- Very limited scholarly contribution.
- Submission of publications not written in English, limiting accessibility to the international research community.

These limitations significantly constrained the panel's ability to evaluate the work against standard research criteria.

Overall Quality of the Research and Evaluation Process

The Sub-panel observed a highly heterogeneous distribution of research quality across the submitted materials. While several outputs demonstrated strong methodological rigour and clear international relevance, others showed deficiencies in reporting standards, documentation completeness, and publication format.

Research outputs varied substantially across institutions. Some institutions submitted an appropriate number of high-quality, peer-reviewed outputs—occasionally reaching world-leading or internationally excellent levels. In contrast, others submitted non-peer-reviewed work, duplicate outputs, or an insufficient number of submissions, indicating either limited research activity or poor-quality contributions.

In one institution, submissions originated from only a small number of individuals within specific departments, highlighting a lack of interdisciplinary engagement and limited collaboration in preparing materials for the evaluation exercise.

Assessments of social-impact case studies were somewhat more consistent, with two cases achieving good scores and the remainder judged satisfactory. However, rather often, the effective “achieved social impact” of the research was lacking.

Creative-research-environment statements were more concerning: half of the submissions received only satisfactory or unsatisfactory ratings.

A lack of interdisciplinary research environments was noted early in the assessment process and remained a recurring concern throughout the evaluation.

Sub-panel's Conclusive Statement: General Observations and Recommendations

Continued investment in strong research environments and transparent methodological practices will be essential to enhancing the global visibility and impact of clinical-medicine research in future evaluation cycles. Based on the overall assessment, the panel identified several areas where institutions could further strengthen their submissions.

The sub-panel encourages institutions to reinforce their research strategies, promote international collaboration, and prioritise the submission of high-quality, peer-reviewed publications. Institutions should ensure adherence to recognised international reporting standards to enhance methodological transparency, reproducibility, and overall research rigour.

Furthermore, institutions should ensure that interdisciplinary outputs demonstrate explicit and balanced contributions from each relevant discipline, including the integration of methods, theories, or analytical frameworks. Outputs in which disciplinary contributions remain parallel rather than integrated should not be classified as interdisciplinary.

Institutions should also place greater emphasis on demonstrating the social impact of their research and on fostering well-structured and strategically oriented research environments.

Regarding social impact, future submissions should move beyond predominantly descriptive narratives and provide clear, evidence-based accounts of impact. Where appropriate, this may include quantitative or verifiable indicators such as policy adoption or evidence of commercial or societal application. At the same time, the nature of evidence should remain appropriate to the type and maturity of the research.

Regarding the creative research environment, institutions are encouraged to move beyond primarily structure-based descriptions and adopt a more strategy-oriented approach.

Submissions should demonstrate how infrastructure, resources, and organisational practices actively support the development of high-quality research and help address nationally and globally relevant health challenges.

The assessors also recommended that institutions engage proactively with their Ministry of Education from the outset of the VER process. Early coordination would help ensure that the entire university collaborates strategically to support stronger outcomes in the next cycle.

Furthermore, institutions should allocate sufficient time and resources to preparing submissions from the beginning of the evaluation period. For example, universities may benefit from establishing interdisciplinary teams that (i) engage with the Ministry of Education early in the process, and (ii) align internal evaluation practices with the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). DORA encourages fair, responsible, and contextualised assessment of research performance, discouraging misuse of metrics and promoting holistic evaluation based on quality and contribution rather than journal indicators.

Additional areas for improvement include:

1. Prioritising submission of full peer-reviewed publications rather than abstracts.
2. Strengthening methodological transparency and reporting standards.
3. Expanding participation in international research collaborations.
4. Developing coherent institutional research strategies aligned with the VER cycle, adequately reflected in the submitted publication output.

Greater and more timely attention to these aspects will help enhance the overall quality, visibility, and impact of institutional research outputs in future assessment exercises.

Sub-panel members

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