

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

Final Report of the Languages and Literature Sub-panel

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The Sub-panel for Languages and Literature evaluated 17 applications from Slovak higher education institutions, assessing over 420 research outputs alongside social impact case studies and creative environment statements. The process of assessment clearly shows that humanities, and literatures and languages in particular, are at the heart of society. The contemporary and historical, multi-method, and multi-form engagement with the development of languages, and the unfolding of the literary process articulates and responds to some of the most important national, regional, and global questions. The submissions that we considered reflect the centrality and importance of these fields of study and their capacity to engage with the pressing societal concerns, with some remarkable examples of mobilisation of linguistic study and pedagogy and literature towards societal reflection and renewal.

The submissions exhibited some very strong aspects, demonstrating a commitment to claim space for Slovak scholarship. These included reflections on Central and Eastern European humanism, Slovak modernism and dialogue with postmodernism, study of Slovak in its complexity and its relations with other languages, the investigations of the East-West currents of articulation, contemporary literature and translation, and many others. These research agendas contribute to the international scholarship by outlining and developing unique, and missing, landscapes of research centred on Slovakia, and we strongly encourage further research endeavours towards articulation of the claims to international significance.

The assessment process made clear that the overall shape of the field, articulated differently in every institution, owes some of its character to the history and formation of the discipline of philology. As a disciplinary framework, a pedagogical tradition, and a shared practice, philology has a unique character of a grounded historical and contextual analysis of language including its literary expression, in its slow unfolding. “Staying close” to the object of study is a rigorous mode of research, whose genesis is situated historically, geographically, and politically, as well as philosophically and aesthetically, and it may lead to pulling back from bolder claims, from unrestricted use of literary and cultural theory, and caution towards frontloading research bibliographies with the most recent developments. It should be noted that literary and linguistic scholarship in many countries, including of Sub-panel members, haven’t retained their philological schools of thought or had a different genesis altogether. We recommend that Slovak scholars take this into account when developing international grant proposals and reflect on possible differences of framing research questions and approaches, articulating significance, and engaging with the contemporary scholarly apparatus. Having noted that, any considerations of international “norms” have to be positioned within critical awareness of language hierarchies and publishing bias, reflections on post-socialist institutional inequalities, and academic dependency.

Research Outputs

Research outputs submitted for evaluation demonstrated significant breadth and depth of approaches, with balance between historical and contemporary foci. There are some strong thematic clusters which became visible across multiple outputs, from a variety of institutions. We list some of them below, although this list is in no way exhaustive.

There is substantial work on minority languages and Slovak dialects, as well as on the continuous development of Slovak in relation to those and other languages, which is notable. Research on place, space, and identity, and the relationship between urban environment and literature is well articulated and impactful. Research on Slovak literature and culture, including archival research, that fills the “blank” spaces left after the long period of censorship in the past also stands out. Re-articulation of Slovak literary heritage through a feminist lens, or through other theoretical lenses, is well-represented and compelling. Within a focus on the contemporary, there is research on digital culture in a variety of forms, including online communicative ecologies and their relation to broader cultures and politics, including the recent rise of populism, which is of high quality and impactful. Other notable areas include emerging research in ecological humanities, work on contemporary poetry, and compelling work in areas as diverse as dystopian fiction, Asian novels and ancient literature, and research and interpretation of religious texts.

Translation studies, including literary translation, translation in various forms, and comparative research (within the European context and non-geographically adjacent regions) emerged as one of the consistent areas of strength. It is worth noting that during the period under assessment, academic researchers have completed translations of key works of world literature with evidence of reception that demonstrates a broader impact on Slovak culture.

Strong regional focus and commitment is evident not only in research foci but also in how research builds on regional research collaboration and/or contributes to the understanding of Central European cultures, languages, and literatures, including how different national literatures, cultures, and languages interacted in the past and connect in the present.

A considerable number of outputs we assessed were rooted in such international-regional collaborative research projects, which are important and valuable, as they create a framework in which different scholarly traditions and practices can enter into dialogue. Here,

research illuminates similarities and differences within different fields by revealing how current theoretical concepts and approaches “travel” across contexts and regions; how they are applied and interpreted in regional scholarship; and to what extent regional cultural, historical, literary traditions are organised around their own specific research questions, agendas, and methodological frameworks. Although the empirical focus of such work is regionally defined, this does not limit its scholarly relevance and significance. In many cases these projects and studies contribute to wider academic discussions by applying, testing or refining broader theoretical approaches within the specific context of Central European research traditions.

There is a wealth of linguistic research, including applied (e.g., discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, etc.), descriptive (e.g., lexicographic work, etc.), and related to translation (as noted above). There are a wide range of approaches, including some notable work based on strong links with contemporary theory and methods, including Corpus-based and Corpus-driven approaches, using internationally renowned software/platforms such as SketchEngine. There is less representation of fields such as psycho- or neurolinguistic methods or computational linguistics. In this way, more diversification in linguistics (including theoretical, experimental and computational work) would be welcome, although this is strongly correlated with investment into labs and funding, on which we comment in the section on creative environment below.

Social Impact

The Sub-panel was impressed by the range and seriousness of the social impact case studies submitted. A significant proportion of work submitted convincingly demonstrated how underpinning research exercised a strong influence on society, whether large scale or small scale, while collaborations with academic and non-academic institutions increased

the range and depth of its influence. Work submitted in this rubric has deep roots in Slovak cultural and civic life, and the case studies often reflected a real embeddedness in the communities they served as well as with institutions designed to support various aspects of social life.

Some notable approaches included projects connecting literary and linguistic research to space, place, and location, including reflection on majoritarian and minoritarian status, or building on research on medical translation and mental health discourse to develop mental health support, and multiple others. Several of the best impact cases were developed out of deep and clear regional commitments. Several institutions demonstrated sustained work with the cultural life of minority groups; others had contributed meaningfully to public understanding of political language and discourse, with evident relevance to the political landscape in Slovakia, Europe and beyond.

A cluster of case studies was grounded in translation research, which was effectively mobilised to support refugees in Slovakia. This work drew on training and knowledge developed over years of language and translation study. This is a testament to the strength of this discipline, and demonstrates how maintaining teaching a wide range of languages and supporting research in languages and translation created an institutional readiness for social intervention, which played an important role in people's lives and Slovak society in general.

In terms of future guidance on preparing social impact case studies, we would like to note the importance of articulating the underpinning research, including the detailed description of its connection to impact. There is room for improvement in terms of how impact is evidenced. Moreover, we would like to emphasise that media appearances, conference presentations, and the publication of research findings are activities that may precede or accompany impact, but they do not, in themselves, demonstrate it. Impact requires evidence of change: in behaviour, policy, practice, understanding, or cultural life. The Sub-

panel recommends that institutions develop clearer theories of change when preparing impact case studies, articulating how research reached its intended beneficiaries and what difference it made to them.

Creative Environment

Many institutions demonstrated excellent strategic research direction, cohesion, and vision. In a highly diverse and complex landscape of higher education research in Slovakia, creative environments ranged from units that are research-only and teaching-and-research focused to institutions that are primarily teaching-focused, and from institutions that are tightly integrated in their research focus to units that are positioned in trans-disciplinary contexts. There were also differences between long-established institutions and more recently founded institutes or departments, and their differing positions constituted an important factor that influenced the spectre of possibilities for the staff. While a range of size and purpose is a healthy sign of a diverse sector, primarily teaching-focused units need more institutional support and strategic investment to develop shared strategic research goals at the college level, which would also support collaboration on interdisciplinary grants and initiatives and increase social impact.

Overall, most units do a lot with small budgets. This excellent work is commendable, but constrained circumstances raise concerns regarding sustainability. We take this report as a site where we can call for more funding given the excellent results achieved in often difficult situations.

Many institutions demonstrate high volume and quality of collaboration, both research-based and civic-focused, across Slovakia, the European Union, and beyond, and within their cities and regions. Many units have large international networks and engage European projects with significant international reach and recognition. There is a strong sense of

embeddedness and social, cultural purpose that institutions serve in their milieu, provisioning services to civil society, governmental programmes, responding to political emergencies, etc. Most institutions disseminate research to the general public through media (radio, television, film, popular magazines, etc.), with some organising research and cultural events, conferences, festivals, and scholarly journals.

The entries on workplace conditions contained varied narratives, with some submitting units failing to articulate support for staff, gender ratios overall and in relation to rank, support at various career stages, research leave if any, adjustments for disability or other characteristics putting staff at risk, etc. Some units reported precarious work contracts, which could limit researchers' ability to build collaborations and produce high-quality research, while others indicated very high instructor-to-student ratios, which would impact the research capacity of faculty.

To sustain excellent research and dynamically develop world-leading work in languages and literature in the future, it is essential that funding is not only maintained but also increased. The Sub-panel recognises the structural constraints institutions and funding bodies face, but we encourage funding bodies and institutions to consider strategic support that would be required to boost development and move towards growth. Improving working conditions for staff, boosting the capacity of institutions to support faculty's research, as well as investing into cutting-edge infrastructure, such as experimental linguistic labs, would support strategic growth towards excellence and institutional dynamism for resilience.

Assessment and Quality Level Characteristics

The Sub-panel would like to note that our assessment is based on the detailed reading of the outputs or abstracts provided when the output is in Slovak or another language which the Sub-panellists might not be able to speak or read. Extremely succinct and unclear abstracts

may have a major impact on the Sub-panel's judgement. We recommend that authors prepare new abstracts specifically for VER exercise, articulating submitted research in relation to VER's criteria of originality, rigour, and significance. Monographs and essay collections would benefit from more extended and detailed abstracts, which could be included (and, in some cases of best practice, were included) with the submitted output file. Contextualising and articulating work such as literary translation and other work which does not take the form of a research article or a monograph, in terms of research and in relation to the three quality level characteristics, would significantly aid its assessment.

Below we provide a brief summary of each of the quality level characteristics detailing what was typical for the outputs we placed in each of the categories given the assessment criteria.

1. World-leading quality. World-leading outputs are exceptional in their originality, significance and rigour. We observed that a significant number of outputs in this category were produced from national and international projects, indicating a potential to have a major impact on the field of enquiry. Depending on the subject area, such outputs were based on clearly articulated extremely rigorous methodology, aligned with international standards in the collection, use and publication of data and other aspects of quantitative analysis. Long form work (such as research monographs that require long periods of research and preparation and extended edited collections, edited by, with an introduction and an article by the submitting author), was more likely to be scored in this category. Outputs focused on research topics that could be considered narrowly regional or specialised could be scored in this category if their originality, significance and rigour were likely to make them a key reference point for scholars working on that topic.

2. Internationally excellent quality. Internationally leading outputs were innovative, rigorous and significant, possibly a result of a national or international project, and with potential to have substantial impact on the field of study. Depending on the constitution of the subject

area, they were based on a well-defined methodology, and when collaborative, could include scholars from different countries, languages and cultures. These outputs aimed to become a reference point for their research subject to scholarly communities and had potential to have international impact. Methodologically robust studies that innovatively interpreted and applied internationally established debates within the specific scholarly context of the region, its research tradition, and its scholarly trends could be scored in this category. Compared to “world-leading”, outputs in this category could exhibit a slight lack of clarity in some aspects of methodology, conceptual framing, or contextualisation, but be, nevertheless, very significant and extremely well-exercised pieces of research.

3. Internationally recognised quality. Outputs in this category present research that is novel, significant and rigorous, which leads to the exploration of new aspects of existing research or phenomena, contributing to the scholarly debate. They are based on a well-defined methodology and have potential to have a good impact on the field(s) of enquiry. Outputs in this category could be comparable to the “internationally excellent” category, but were evaluated as providing limited evidence in one or more of the three criteria. The Sub-panel would like to note that internationally recognised quality is a good, robust grade, with a large proportion of research outputs scoring 3.

4. Nationally recognised quality. An interesting piece of research, based on an adequate and well-defined methodology, making incremental advances in its field. Some outputs scored in this category could be short, or be published in a form, such as conference proceedings, that prevented an extended articulation of research aims, process and outcomes. Outputs in this category could be based on adequate and well-defined methodology, but lack rigour.

5. Below the standard of nationally recognised work. An output with unconvincing aims and methods, that makes no discernible contribution to its field.

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