

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

Final Report of the Political Science Sub-panel

General

The Political Science sub-panel read outputs that spanned subfields covering political theory, public administration, public policy, comparative politics, Slovak politics, international relations, foreign policy and political methodology, as well as interdisciplinary work that intersected with other social science and humanities fields. It also read institutional reports on social impact and creative environment.

The outputs submitted by institutions varied in quality. Of all submitted outputs, 3.6% stood out as world-leading quality, 15.3% were considered internationally excellent, 38.9% of internationally recognized quality, 38.5% of nationally recognized quality, while 3.6% were evaluated as being below the standard of nationally recognised work. The sub-panel noted that in terms of outputs, there was a marked increase from VER 2022 in the work falling in the international categories (1/2/3), which this time was 58% - a stark improvement from 34% last time. This suggests that quality improvements are being made at individual level and/or strategically at institutional submission level.

In terms of social impact, 12.7% of the institutional submissions across all 4 categories of evaluation were considered excellent, 27.3% very good, 20% of good, 16.4% of satisfactory, and 3.6% unsatisfactory. Finally, in terms of creative environment, 1.8% of institutional submissions across all categories were evaluated as excellent, 34.5% as very good, 27.3% as good, and 16.4% as satisfactory, without any submission in the lowest category.

Outputs

In evaluating outputs, the sub-panel based its consideration on the following parameters:

1. It evaluated world-leading work as research that could serve as a reference point for scholarship in political science or the specific subfield addressed.
 - a. On the criterion of originality in this category, the sub-panel looked for evidence of new conceptual ground being broken or typology being developed.
 - b. On the criterion of significance, evidence was sought for research that uncovered mechanisms of action, or other analytic explications with wider broad implications.
 - c. On the criterion of rigour, the sub-panel looked for evidence that were not only robust but generated analysis that went beyond the existing literature and therefore went beyond incremental development of existing knowledge.
2. Internationally excellent work was evaluated as work that pushed the agenda in political science or a sub-field, but without changing or disrupting it.
 - a. Here, originality was often evidenced through new datasets or a novel case
 - b. Significance was evidenced through work that makes a substantial contribution to international knowledge
 - c. Rigour was evidenced by methodologically professional and high quality design but not generating disruptive or path-breaking analysis
3. Internationally recognised work was evaluated as work that was useful to political science or a sub-field.
 - a. Originality was assessed through the evidencing of new empirics, for example a new case study or example, but which lacks theoretical depth.

- b. Significance was assessed through evidence of an incremental mode work, which for example syntheses existing debates and uses secondary data analysis
 - c. Rigour was assessed through evidence of competent research but often in a descriptive mode.
- 4. Nationally recognised work was evaluated as work that was useful to specific-interest audiences in political science or a subfield.
 - a. Originality was assessed as such if evidence of contribution to international debates was lacking.
 - b. Significance assessed in this category was often limited to historical overviews or textbook style accounts.
 - c. Rigour in this category was assessed as adequate but often lacked a clear research question.
- 5. Work below the standard of national recognition was limited and assessed in this category largely on the basis of scope, i.e. where it fell outside the purview of political science or a subfield and therefore its contribution to this field was not evidenced. In a few cases this category also included very short editorial or reflective pieces where a conceptual approach or method was not evident.

Overall, the articles, books, chapters and other publications the sub-panel read revealed a great diversity of fields of expertise and approaches to politics in Slovakia. The topics, theories, approaches and methodology cover all areas of political science. This indicates a healthy and diverse academic overall environment. The outputs that stood out as making a strong contribution to the field internationally accounted for a fifth of all submissions, suggesting that Slovak political science is contributing to international debates, via excellent contributions to international theory, presenting original empirical material, and rigorous

and transparent analytic approaches. The further two fifths of outputs in the third category of international recognition speak to the ability of political scientists in Slovakia to engage with and contribute to international debates. The outputs of national recognition that accounted for a further two fifths provided valuable sources of information that was, however, of limited applicability. This is in some cases appropriate and important in the generation of evidence and explanation that enriches local and national knowledge. However, there was scope in this category for a number of works to explicate more clearly the ways in which such seemingly limited relevance may have consequences for broader debates. The focus on description to the exclusion of analysis in this category was often a key characteristic that suggests scope for improvement. Finally, the small number of works in the last category that fell outside the scope of political science or outside the purview of academic research per se suggests an overall prudent approach to institutional selection of submissions, which nevertheless can still be improved.

On this point, the sub-panel saw indications that the 25-output limit functioned well as a focusing mechanism, for some institutions but not so well for others. While output venue was not part of the evaluation, the results indicated some correlation between work that took the form of non-peer-reviewed publications and assessment in the lower categories. This is something that institutions with higher levels of representation of outputs in these categories might approach more strategically in the future.

On the level of individual outputs, five aspects might be further considered by authors in preparing future submissions:

- (i) Conceptual framing: weaker outputs presented empirical findings without anchoring them in a theoretical framework or explaining what they add to existing debates. Researchers could make the conceptual stakes explicit from the outset.
- (ii) Contextualisation: this was a consistent limitation at the lower bands, where there was little use of international literature as context for the contribution. Even

- where the empirical focus is domestic, there seemed to be scope for arguments to engage with international scholarship.
- (iii) Methodology: this was handled unevenly, with stronger outputs being transparent about research design and justifying their choices, while other outputs could have benefited from a clearer account of how evidence was gathered.
 - (iv) Abstracts: this area was also uneven, with several abstracts being too short to enable confident assessment of originality or rigour. On the contrary, some abstracts were impressive in the clarity with which questions were stated, the approach was described, and the contribution to the wider field explicated.
 - (v) Interdisciplinarity: outputs in this category varied widely and the comparative evaluation was similarly varied. Some outputs were impressive in evidencing their excellent contributions across disciplines, others presented weaknesses in provide evidence of relevance to multiple sub-panels. A practical recommendation on this aspect is for authors and submitting institutions to explicitly foreground their relevance to the field, in the case of authors within the outputs and in the cases of institutions in curating the abstracts.

Social Impact

Evaluating social impact proved challenging. Submissions varied significantly in how strategically they approached this dimension.

The strongest cases were those where research had been demonstrably taken up and used by actors outside academia (eg. policymakers, civil society organisations, or public institutions) with clear evidence of engagement or collaboration. These suggested long processes of planning and execution, that were very well thought through strategies to generate impact, where research expertise is consciously leveraged to reach well-specified target audiences using strategies that often rely on multiple actions or channels.

Weaker cases relied primarily on publication activity, media appearances, or general public engagement, which reflects dissemination rather than impact in the evaluative sense. These examples suggested more short-term strategies, where the focus lies more on output - often in the form of public outreach activities - without a clear strategy or definition of the target audience, nor evidenced tracing of the actual impact on audiences.

Institutions would benefit from developing impact strategies earlier in the research cycle rather than retrospectively, and from keeping systematic records of non-academic engagement as work progresses.

Creative Environment

The evaluation of this aspect proved challenging across the sub-panel because of the lack of contextual background in which the creative environment submissions were produced. Strategic focus and explication of the distinctiveness and identity of the institution within the Slovak political science environment were helpful in this direction and highly-evaluated submission evidenced these. The best reflections of creative environments also included explicit reflection on the mechanisms and infrastructure in place to support both individual and collective research environments, with a specific focus on PhD training, schools, sustainable funding sources and researchers' mental health.

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