

*Dear members of the Academic Senate,
Dear academic community of the Faculty of Science,*

let me introduce you my perspective on the challenges that our Faculty of Science of Masaryk University (Faculty) is facing, and the objectives and activities that I would like to promote - in cooperation with you – in case that I will get the support from the Academic Senate (Senate).

An important motif in the proposals offered below is an open communication and sharing, which, in my experience, is the key to success. Thus, I will develop a good faculty tradition and, as Dean, I will consult with the members of the Senate all documents being prepared, even in cases not required by the Faculty Status it. Thanks to this practice, the Faculty has long benefited from the expertise of the Economic and Legislative Committee and the entire Senate. Correspondingly, I will support the good practice where the student chamber of the Senate has a permanent representative at the meetings of the Faculty management, and where the Dean consults with the student chamber all matters relevant for students.

Broader priorities for the period ahead

- Consistently high-quality teaching reflecting changes in society, the use of technology and AI
- Cooperation with external partners in teaching, applied research and knowledge transfer
- Support for excellent scientists in obtaining international grants, especially ERC
- Effective management, use and development of strategic research infrastructures
- Completion of the doctoral reform and re-accreditation of our programs
- Strengthening communication, sharing and cooperation within Faculty
- Creative environment for supporting and development of employees following the HR Award

Teaching and education

The Faculty must constantly strive to be a true "brain gym". Especially in times of dramatic changes in society, accelerated availability of information and the use of new technologies and AI. I will strive to ensure that the Faculty is an attractive place preparing successful, satisfied and creative graduates.

Quality of education in undergraduate programs

It is important that we emphasize more **practical experience** for students and show **the importance of studies for future employment and career**. Naturally, we can connect teaching with science (e.g. offering advanced techniques in exercises and seminars, semestral projects for motivated students, strengthening the importance of bachelor's and diploma theses). The cooperation with external partners from practice is highly important, and I will support "practical" subjects and activities such as excursions, short-term internships, student shadowing at our partners, including innovative companies. I will assure closer cooperation with the JIC and the Regional Chamber of Commerce of JMK offering various opportunities in Life Sciences and STEM fields in general that supports **creativity, entrepreneurship and gaining interdisciplinary experience**.

I will also promote targeted **support for motivated and talented students**, whose enthusiasm and energy should better be used at the Faculty. For example, greater involvement of motivate students in

research grants, involvement in peer-to-peer tutoring, scholarships supporting conferences, authorship of publications, and final theses in English.

A big challenge is **artificial intelligence**, where I would support teaching activities to master responsible use of AI in many forms, e.g. including AI in courses and exercises, solving complex case studies, etc. Also, lifelong education in this very new field is necessary, and I will support diverse activities developing practical experience with AI across the Faculty, for students as well as staff.

I will support all steps towards **international visibility and internationalization** both at the level of institutes and programs (e.g. courses in English, INNOLEC, ERASMUS+ mobility, ERASMUS Mundus), as well as recognition and visibility for the teachers involved, as examples of good practice.

Motivated applicants

Searching for and enrolling motivated students is a key priority for the Faculty and it needs to be supported, for example, by improved activities on social networks and the website. We also need to better articulate **examples and practicality** (*What specific and interesting experiences will I enjoy as a student, what specifically will I do in my future job?*). Here, we should better use the enthusiasm **of satisfied students and successful graduates** as ambassadors of the Faculty. They should become authentic faces of the Faculty in the virtual environment and in popularization and educational events such as science festivals, fairs, lectures, excursions, seminars for secondary school teachers, activities of BIOSKOP, N-Trophy, Physics Cafés, ViBuCh, events at our Botanical Garden, etc.

Individualized motivation and support to the most talented applicants is essential. We can address them personally at conferences such as CzechHopes and/or offer exemption from the entrance exams for finalists of regional and national rounds of Olympiads. I will particularly appreciate cooperation between institutes, sharing experiences and good practices, and I will work to raise awareness of the need for these activities, including acknowledgement to the active colleagues.

Organization and collaboration in teaching

Although our Faculty has invested into accreditation of new programs, the number of students is not growing, and the investments are not reflected in the growth of the budget. Especially on the Bohunice Campus, small and overlapping courses are offered, which creates a great pressure on lecture rooms. Also, a large offer of CORE courses contribute here with rather limited attendance of the students. To rationalize this atomization, we need to discuss and prepare a long-term concept to ensure **the effective use of rooms and teacher capacities and support cooperation between departments** (e.g. the use of "cooperative" credits). I will also advocate for mutually beneficial cooperation with other faculties.

It will also be necessary to respond to the trend of decreasing attendance of students in frontal lectures, where we should strengthen motivation, e.g. **through interactive activities, student collaboration, or the use of hybrid** electronic communication and streaming.

Microcertificates

The importance **of lifelong learning is growing** along with rapid changes in the society and the Faculty should make the most of this opportunity. I will support coordination between institutes, e.g. in creating relevant courses, searching for "customers" among companies, public administration, high school teachers and sharing good practice and capacities.

Education of future teachers

Teacher education has a long tradition at the Faculty, and it is a priority due to the shortage of science teachers in the society and financial incentives from the Ministry of Education. I will ensure that teacher education remains a priority, and we continuously improve the quality of graduate training, **because the key ambassadors of the Faculty are satisfied graduate teachers**. It will also be necessary to focus on threats. With legislative changes, we have lost "exclusivity" and graduates of pedagogical faculties can also teach at secondary schools. We must also address the disappointment of students, who comment on too high demands in expertise, and on the contrary, low usefulness of subjects in the pedagogical-psychological training.

Research and doctoral studies

Science and internationally competitive research in all natural sciences fields are the basis of our Faculty's life, and we must keep and promote the passion for knowledge. We build on a stable structure (autonomous institutes with critical mass and quality in their fields) and transparent, predictable budgeting reflecting both quality and performance indicators.

Concept

I will strive to **strengthen the roles of Scientific Board and ISAB** in the life of the Faculty, e.g. by involving these bodies in discussions about the Faculty's Long-Term Strategy and its updates. We could better use the expertise of external members of the Boards in doctoral boards, invited lectures, etc.

When assessing the quality of science, I will support gradual steps towards further **reflection of the quality of the content of R&D outputs and their significance and impact**, rather than simply counting scientometry. The of CoARA are emphasized in the scientific community, grant agencies and national Methodology 17+, and our Faculty should have the ambition to be an active player.

International grant funding

We have a good tradition in obtaining competitive grants at the national level (GAČR, TAČR, AZV, NAZV, etc.) and continues support is needed for competitive projects. I will advocate for support of strong existing teams as well as for systematic **head hunting of excellent scientists, especially international**. The high priority are the **international grants, especially ERC**. I will ensure maximum support at all levels, including GAMU – MASH / MASH Junior. I will support sharing of excellent capacities that we have e.g. in RECETOX, to support other institutes in applying for Horizon Europe calls and others. I will also discuss updates of the budgeting rules to better appreciate quality and proactivity.

The Faculty must provide the necessary support to make us "visible" (especially updated content on web and social networks) and be long-term attractive place for new scientists. Within the HR Award I will assure formation of **stable environment supporting the orientation in the complexity of the university**. I will support buddies in onboarding as well as involvement of existing experienced scientists in mentoring of new colleagues. I will acknowledge "bottom -up" initiatives, such as the platform of junior leaders, which assure both peer-to-peer mentoring and valuable feedback for the Faculty management.

Research infrastructures

Important challenges will be the decline in resources from the EU structural funds and the uncertainty in the financing of large research infrastructures. The role of the Dean must be assuring **long-term sustainable and effective functioning and to search for strategic opportunities**. In addition to

Centres coordinated at the Faculty such as CEPLANT, RECETOX RI or the pan-European EIRENE, our scientists are in many others (CzechNano-Lab, ACTRIS-CZ, ELIXIR-CZ, etc.), we cooperate with CEITEC MU and operate the Polar Station. The priority will be **the MUNI Preclinical Centre**, a part of BioPharmaHub and I will ensure that the initial time-limited investment will be transformed to sustainable functioning of this joint Centre of the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Medicine.

Applied research and knowledge transfer

The Faculty must also improve **cooperation with external partners** and make better use of the CTT MUNI. I will strengthen partnerships e.g. with ThermoFisher, Contipro, TESCANA, spin-offs such as Enantis, and others established at our institutes. I will collaborate with JIC and RHK JMK to network with innovative partners in the region. I will open a discussion about corresponding adjustments of our budgetary rules to **promote applied research and knowledge transfer** to the private and public sectors. I will strive to ensure that active scientists are better visible and receive the necessary acknowledgement.

Doctoral studies

I am proud that as Vice-Dean, I succeeded to implement major changes that strengthen quality, transparency and international principles in PhD. Standards that have at Faculty since 2018 have currently been implemented for all university. The MUNI Mendel Doctorandus coordinated by the Faculty is highly acknowledged. In the next period, we need to finish the reforms and assure **reaccreditation of doctoral programs**. It will be necessary to **emphasize transferable skills** (leadership, career, project and team management), which are essential for success of graduates also outside of academia. I will promote standards of internationalization such as **dissertation in English, defences with international committees**, timely and successful completion of studies.

People and life at the Faculty

I am convinced that our wealth lies in people, who are not just “human resources” (HR), but importantly living human beings.

Organization, collaboration and sharing

One of the principles that I will promote across the agendas is **open communication, listening and sharing**. However, discussions should have a frame, it should be clear in advance what is the goal, what is the time frame, what are the specific outputs and results. Correspondingly, I assure that Faculty management will communicate and explain the needs for changes or regulations well in advance.

I will pay attention to broader information about the direction of the Faculty and will actively involve the Senate, directors, Scientific Board and the ISAB in planning and updating the Faculty's Long-term Strategy. Also, I will strive to improve the information about the Faculty's achievements, e.g. in the form of comprehensive **Annual Reports on the Faculty's activities**.

The degree of autonomy of our institutes is a unique phenomenon in the university environment, which I consider to be well-functioning. Standards in natural science disciplines are subject-specific and it is important to support diversity and institute autonomy. However, institute directors must be **strong personalities well accepting the deal of responsibility and authority**. As Dean, I will support their decision-making, which will contribute to the development of the institutes and the Faculty as a whole.

However, autonomy does not mean isolation. Here, I will again **support horizontal communication and cooperation**. I will strive for sharing in various forms – existing and new - such as working groups for HR Award, meetings of program guarantors, etc. I will support inspiring platforms such as Junior Faculty and various **activities initiated by students and student association activities**.

Fair and equal opportunities

Issues of (un)equal access resonate throughout society. I will work to create an environment offering fully open and equal opportunities for all. We need to address the current situation of dramatic underrepresentation of women along the Faculty hierarchy. This is a complex issue that requires open communication and respect, where we benefit and get inspiration from great personalities established at our Faculty. Within the HR Award implementation, we should implement Gender Equality Plan. I will also advocate for specific steps supporting parents such as **the opening of children's corners**, first in the Kotlářská in suitable spaces in Pavilion 12, and later also on the Bohunice Campus.

Further important HR Award activities include offers of **development courses, transferable skills, building a functional mentoring system**. I also intend to discuss better use of **sabbatical leave**, which can have various in the academic environment.

Development and community

I will strive for the best possible development of both of our campuses. In addition to the priorities such as Preclinical Centre, EIRENE-RI, children's corners, I will **demand from the university management a solution to the unacceptable situation with student catering** on Campus in Bohunice. We cannot accept simple food delivery as currently proposed, but to ensure decent spaces for dining and social life. On the Kotlářská campus, I will strive for the improvement of the Central Library - pavilion 12 and eventual extensions at other pavilions to improve e.g. capacities for doctoral students. On both campuses, I will assure **strengthening community of employees and students** (Garden Party, Scientists' Ball, Dean's Barbecue, etc.), promote **outdoor workout areas** or building infrastructure for electromobility charging.

Budgeting, efficiency

As outlined above, for planning and using the institutional funds I would discuss with the Senate gradual **adjustments in the motivational parts of the budget rules**, naturally while maintaining the necessary long-term stabilization component. The budget should better reflect cooperation between institutes in teaching (principles of cooperative credits), address the quality and the impact of R&D results, including the applied research and knowledge transfer, or promote pro-activity towards international grants. The budget should also strengthen the importance of more recent current data and indicators.

I will also search for all opportunities to save the central costs, will discuss with the university management the structure of the overheads, will strive for maximum simplification and digitalization of administration and increasing its efficiency. I will also support the use of alternative energy sources, such as photovoltaics and other means to support sustainability.

Conclusion

Education and research in natural sciences are the pillars of our civilization. The ideas and work of creative science-educated individuals, to whose education and development our Faculty of Science at Masaryk University has been contributing for more than 100 years, we improve our understanding, we spread knowledge and help its use for the development and good of society. These are our missions, and the Faculty is an important pillar in addressing major issues such as global change and its impacts on ecosystems, biodiversity, food availability, non-communicable diseases, antimicrobial resistance, availability of energy, materials and water, management and use of big data, AI and many others.

I am grateful for the many opportunities in the past that allowed me to bring a small contribution to our missions in various roles. Whether as a junior and senior scientist at the Faculty and abroad, as a manager of national and international projects, as a lecturer, supervisor of students and mentor of successful graduates. I was also able to contribute to the functioning of our "institution" - in the 90s as a student in the Student Parliament, later in the Academic Senate, as a head of a workplace with more than 40 colleagues, guarantor of a doctoral program with 50 satisfied students and as a Vice-dean.

I humbly offer the Faculty my experience and all my energy and commitment to the work that awaits us in the next term of office of the Dean in 2026-2030.

Sincerely, Luděk Bláha

In Brno, September 12, 2025

