

Chapter 5.22

The Profession of Research Management and Administration in Czechia

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Abstract

The chapter describes the emergence of the profession in Czechia. The major driver for universities and research and technology organisations (RTOs) was the country's accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004. The country has a rich system of national research, development, and innovation (R&D&I) funding and EU Framework Programmes are witnessing a slowly growing interest and success of Czech researchers.¹ Yet, the major force in changing the research management and administration (RMA) culture and addressing the need of professionalising the environment of research administration, management, intellectual property rights, and technology transfer (TT) was European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). The Czech government repeatedly, through four EU programming periods, stressed the need for investments to reshape the research infrastructure, environment, and conditions on a scale not experienced by the universities or the RTOs ever before. The availability of EU funds and increasing emphasis on international cooperation enabled Czechia to witness slow, yet steady growth of demand to deliver better service in the field of RMA. This is illustrated through several EU-funded projects focussed on RMA skills development and the recent

¹ Science|Business. (2022, August 25). *Czech Republic scores 20% Horizon Europe success rate – but only a third of excellent proposals get funding*. <https://sciencebusiness.net/news-byte/czech-republic-scores-20-horizon-europe-success-rate-only-third-excellent-proposals-get>.

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establishment of the Czech Association of Research Managers and Administrators (CZARMA) in 2022 (Masaryk University, 2022a).

Keywords: Czechia; research management and administration; professionalisation; internationalisation; RMA; CZARMA

The Czech Republic Research Ecosystem

The current ecosystem of Czech research was starting to be rebuilt in the early 1990s after the end of the communist era. The first research funding body to offer grant funding was the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic (Czech Science Foundation²), founded in 1993 to support basic research regardless of the field of science. Public universities were already set up in almost every region in the early 1990s, yet the major systemisation, which included replacing various outdated legislation (some from the 1960s), came with the Higher Education Act in 1998.³ The act confirmed the existence of 27 public and 2 state (Police Academy, and the University of Defence) universities and opened the stage for private universities. The second state agency to support the research was established in 2009, through the modernisation of the second law crucial to the Czech research ecosystem – Act No. 130/2002⁴ on the support of research, experimental development, and innovation. Accordingly, the mission of the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic⁵ established support for applied research and innovation, while the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic remains responsible for basic research.

An increasingly important role in the scene of public research belongs to the Czech Academy of Sciences, which dates back to 1890. The existence of the Academy was reconfirmed in 1992 and today it presides over 50 scientific institutes. Until the 1990s, the role of the academy was mainly to perform research, while the universities were expected to educate. The Czech Academy of Sciences, with more than 6,400 employees, is, without a doubt, the largest research institution in the country. In 2005, the Act on Public Research Institutes⁶ was released, which introduced harmonisation into the field of non-teaching public bodies having research as their primary goal. Thus, the Czech Academy of Sciences, together with a number of other research bodies belonging to the various ministerial agencies, was given the legal status of a Public Research Institute.

Participation of private research within the ecosystem of public funding is harmonised through two main channels: the Act No. 130/2002 on the Support of research, experimental development, and innovation – mentioned above – and the list of research organisations maintained by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MEYS).⁷

² <https://gacr.cz/en/>

³ Higher Education Act, Czech Law, No. 111/1998 Col., <https://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/tertiary-education/the-higher-education-act?lang=2>.

⁴ R&D Support Act, Czech Law, No. 130/2002 Col., <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2002-130>.

⁵ Technology Agency of the Czech Republic. (2023, February 15). <https://www.tacr.cz/en/>.

⁶ Public Research Institutes Act, Czech Law, No. 341/2005 Col., <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-341>.

⁷ Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. (2022a, June 8). *The list of research organisations*. <https://www.msmt.cz/vyzkum-a-vyvoj-2/seznam-vyzkumnych-organizaci>.

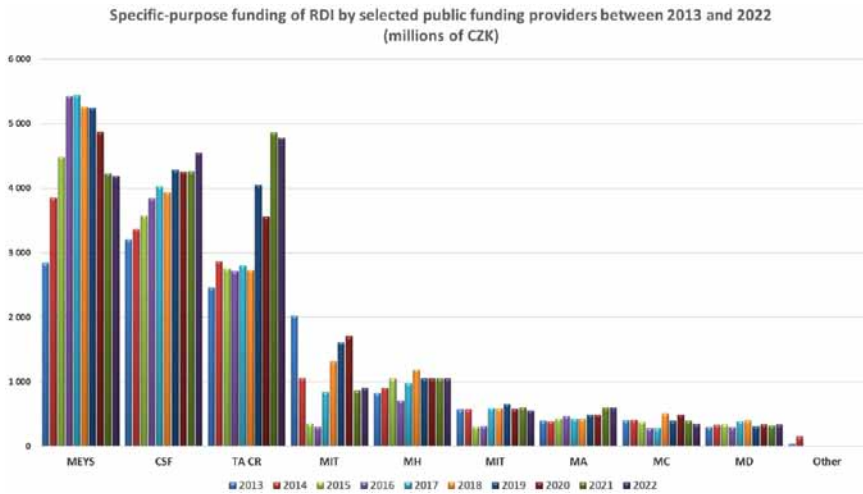


Fig. 5.22.1. Total RDI Spending by Selected Public Funding Providers Between 2013 and 2022 in Czechia.

Source: https://www.comtesfht.cz/media/document/pruvodce_2022-en-a-isbn-kor.pdf

While being on the list means that the organisation qualifies for the acquisition of institutional funding, the Act 130/2002 translates the requirements and conditions introduced on the EU level through EU framework for state aid for R&D&I.

Governance of R&D&I is executed through the Council for Research, Development, and Innovation⁸ – a professional and advisory body of the Government of the Czech Republic, which prepares, in particular, the national R&D&I policy and ensures the control of its implementation. The chairman of the Council is appointed and removed by the government on the proposal of the prime minister. The members of the Research, Development, and Innovation Council, with the exception of its chairman, are appointed by the government on the proposal of the chairman. The Council evaluates science in the Czech Republic according to the currently valid methodology.

According to the EU country profile, Czechia is a moderate innovator, holding tenth place in EU27.

Fig. 5.22.1 shows the history of total funding by 10 public funding providers, which are: MEYS, Academy of Sciences (AS CR), Czech Science Foundation (CSF), Technology Agency (TA CR), Ministry of Health (MH), Ministry of Industry and Trade (MIT), Ministry of Agriculture (MA), Ministry of Interior (MI), Ministry of Culture (MC), and Ministry of Defence (MD). The data for four other providers – Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Transport, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs – are indicated as ‘Other’. MEYS is definitely the largest of the funders, as it is directly responsible for the public universities, with the budget steadily remaining close to 600 mil EUR.

Evolution of the Profession in Czechia

These days the RMA profession is primarily understood as a part of grant writing and processing support within the context of various EU funds. The support they

⁸Council for R&D&I. (2023, February 15). <https://www.vyzkum.cz/FrontClanek.aspx?idsekce=630>.

offer can stretch from the formal checking of applications, reporting, financial management, accounting, dissemination, and public relations. Even these days it is not unusual that all the above mentioned tasks are required to be performed by a single person. While in ESIF applications, having a dedicated budget for an administrative position is a must, national R&D funds, in many cases, consider these tasks as part of the general overhead budget, which rarely can exceed 20% of the project budget. This shows how little the funders consider RMA to be an important component of any research project. If projects are still limited to overhead staying between 7% and 20% of the budget, it becomes obvious how the evolution of the general R&D&I system in Czechia has stagnated since the early 1990s, giving little opportunity for the RMA profession to emerge. Still even these days the applications submitted to the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic are rather simple: individual PIs, leading small teams within their institutions, giving descriptions of foundational research activities, CVs, and targeting a rather low number of papers. Little attention is paid to the project management or broader ecosystems' understanding or impact. Thus, with the exception of budgeting, there is truly very little space left for RMAs to help. The assistance even on the institutional level was therefore limited to the budget, formal control, and processing the delivery of the application to the agency. Such support which can be handled by one person with secondary education is usually located in the office of the vice-rector for R&D.

The major change of requirements appeared in 2004 with Czechia's accession to the EU. This membership opened the door for Czech universities to have access to the ESIF. The first period from 2004 to 2006 was a careful trial time for what was about to come. While in 2004–2006, only 30 million EUR was dedicated to the projects coming from universities on the level of the single measure of the Human Resource Development Operational Programme, the next programming period brought two Operational Programmes almost solely dedicated to the development of education and R&D&I environment with the total budget of nearly 4 billion EUR. For those who paid little attention to the previous operational programme, the impact was sudden and huge. Previous experience with Grant Agency projects was of little to no help, as suddenly the requirements for project management and administration were brought to a new level.

Universities and the MEYS,⁹ which were responsible for the implementation of the programmes, were learning along the way, which brought several provisions:

- *Growth of the projects*: a large number of small projects (most of the money was dedicated to salaries and small equipment), which were implemented on the departmental level, resulting in high administrative pressure for the Ministry. Therefore, the second part of the implementation period led to the calls for larger, faculty level projects, which resulted in the transfer of the administrative burden to the universities as more project management skills were required and addressing that by utilising some of the time of researchers was no longer possible.
- *Support to the developing professions*: with the growing complexity of projects, both the Ministry and the universities realised the need for administrative support. Thus, in 2008, the first call within the Operational Programme Education

⁹Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic. (2023, February 15). <https://www.msmt.cz/>.

for Competitiveness, enabling the investments in supporting the development of specific professions was released with the following supported activities:

- Further training of research and development staff.
- Further training of R&D personnel in R&D management, in areas of popularisation and communication, dissemination of the results of science and research into practice, in TT issues, and in the acquisition of knowledge about protection, evaluation, and intellectual property management of R&D personnel.
- Support for the creation of quality research and development teams and their further development.
- Preparing for the involvement of individuals and teams in international research networks and projects.
- Promoting intersectoral mobility, in particular, mobility between research institutions and private and public sectors.

Similarly, the year 2011 brought a strong push to establish the TT profession. A call was announced where the complementary activity was further training of R&D personnel, with the aim to establish technology transfer offices at the universities.

Among the early attempts to bring the RMA community together, another project fuelled by the structural funds was the Grant Office Network of the Czech Republic,¹⁰ realised between 2011 and 2014. The aim of the Grant Office Network of the Czech Republic project was to create partnerships between existing and emerging project centres and their gradual transformation into the newly created Grant Office, which provided qualified support for preparation and management of national and especially international scientific research projects. The target group of the project were academic and other employees of the Czech universities and employees dealing with education, research, and development.

Since these beginnings in the 2010s, a number of other projects were realised, yet compared to resources and efforts invested into university TT departments, the effort was much less systemic, especially when we take into account the fact that the volume of public funding universities gets through grants is much larger compared to the volume of income gained through TT, which shall focus especially on generating revenue.

While it was reported¹¹ that the total spending of the Czech universities in 2017 was 1,490 mil EUR, the expenses in the TT chapter were 42 mil EUR while the spending in national project funding was 158 mil EUR and non-CZ project funding was 42 mil EUR. The support of the two professions (TT and RMA) was and still is unbalanced, given the fact that TT cared about the volume of 42 mil EUR, while RMA oversaw over 250 mil EUR. Despite the larger volume of funding on the side of RMA, their professional organisation (CZARMA) was founded a decade later than the organisation of TT (TRANSFERA¹²)

¹⁰ Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. (2011, December 27). *Operational programme education for competitiveness*. <https://www.op-vk.cz/cs/siroka-verejnost/projekty/individualni-projekty-ostatni-ipo/grant-office-network-czech-republic.html>.

¹¹ Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. (2022b, November 5). *Annual reports of the Czech universities processed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports*. <https://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/vysoke-skolstvi/vyrocní-zpravy-o-hospodareni>.

¹² TRANSFERA. (2022, September 30). <https://www.transfera.cz/>.

The Czech RMA Community

In 2005, the Association of University Administration Staff (APUA, 2022¹³) was founded by an initiative of several university provosts, where membership was mainly institutional based. The mission of the organisation, according to its statutes is: *The purpose of the association and its main activities is to create an effective platform for cooperation and mutual assistance of APUA members, to exchange theoretical and practical experience, gain new knowledge and increase their professional level, and to contribute to public welfare employees and the services they provide.* Although the APUA and its benefits to the education of university administration staff are widely accepted by the universities, the portfolio is very basic and far from what would be needed for RMAs to attain substantial professional development.

TRANSFERA, an NGO founded in 2008 gained its momentum in 2017 and since then is very active towards both the TT community and the governmental bodies as *a unified functional platform protecting the interests of the Czech transfer community; its objective is to advance and strengthen TT.* Having gained the attention of the community and the public administration, TRANSFERA may be the closest inspiration for the RMA community to show the direction of further steps.

Among the initiatives to bring the RMA into the light was the attempt to bring the EARMA Annual Conference to Prague, the Czech capital. When the author of this chapter was approached in 2018 to take part in the preparation of the conference application, EARMA had only one Czech university as an institutional member. Now, in 2022, there are four Czech universities and the Czech Academy of Sciences. More Czech universities are expected to join as Prague will host the EARMA Annual Conference in 2023. Having achieved that, local organisers are hoping to also attract researchers and show how the investment into further RMA professionalisation can materialise in delivering better research.

The very recent result of previous efforts is the foundation of a formal association for the RMA profession CZARMA, an NGO registered in late 2021. The decision was made following the organisation of regular meetings, over several years by the Masaryk University in Brno, within the Regon project.¹⁴ The audience the meetings were able to attract reached far beyond one university, and the topics discussed surpassed the regional and even national matters. Speakers were from all over Europe; including some members of EARMA, discussing the content of European projects and touching on the issues of the RMA profession. In June 2022, the Regon project has celebrated 115 monthly meetings since its beginning in 2011, recent list of events can be seen at the project's website.¹⁵ Eventually, the step towards formalising the project, which grew far beyond one university, into a national platform seems logical and it is hoped that it will succeed. The inspiration and justification of such activity can be seen all around the world.

The Future of RMA in Czechia

Counting the number of employees reported in annual reports of the Czech universities, we find that for the 10 largest universities it exceeds 15,000 people working in

¹³ APUA. (2022, September 30). <https://apua.cz/>.

¹⁴ Masaryk University. (2022b, September 30). *Regional grant office network*. <https://improve.muni.cz/regon>.

¹⁵ Regon project. (2022, September 30). <https://improve.muni.cz/regon>.

services. Together with the other universities, the Academy of Sciences, and private RTOs, we may get to a community of 20,000–25,000 people. Of course, not all of them are working with grants, it might be around 5% of them, thus we may estimate around 1,000–1,250 crore RMAs. Since its start, CZARMA gathered over 300 members. In the RAAAP-3 survey (Kerridge, Dutta, et al., 2022), 62 participants from Czechia responded, 80% of them are women; 23 respondents are having experience in the field longer than 10 years, while new to the profession (less than five years) are 19 respondents; 30 identify themselves as project managers, 10 as research managers/administrators, and none of them as research developers. Compared to Sweden, a country with the same size population, we see a difference in the ratio of academic qualification: while Sweden has the percentage ratio of bachelors, masters, and PhDs 19–47–29, Czechia has 11–77–10, and the UK has 29–25–38. The level of education might be interpreted as related to the prestige of the job as well as the maturity of the profession within the society. Looking at the number of respondents in the UK, where the RMA profession is very probably the most mature in Europe, we count 476 respondents. When comparing the size of the population in Czechia (10 million) and the UK (67 million), UK is nearly 7 times bigger, we can see a similar ratio of respondents in the RAAAP-3 survey. Therefore, we may assume that the topic of RMA has gained high attention in Czechia in recent years.

When we look at the volume of funding coming from both public and private sources, the evidence of the need for RMA professional development is clear. Especially when the main stakeholders (government, universities, and the general public) want to increase the volume of research expenditures, focussing on assets coming from the international funding landscape, or make the universities more attractive and relevant to the contractual research, the need for the RMA profession becomes obvious. The self-awareness and the inner need to improve, become better professionals, and gain recognition is demonstrated through the recent set-up of the CZARMA. Reading interviews¹⁶ with young scientists returning to Czechia, who are trying to continue the successful careers they have had in research ecosystems in the foremost universities and research institutes abroad, they all have one thing in common. They call for higher standards of university services, releasing them from administrative tasks, and allowing them to focus on the research in the quality and intensity they would wish.

Therefore, we believe that there is ample room for improvement in the field of RMA, which gives a wide scene for all enthusiasts to engage. Recognition of the profession may bring government support, and with the backup of university leadership, the investment into the profession will multiply on several levels: existing profession and offering a career path will likely attract better quality RMAs. Thus, universities would be able to offer better services, which is one of the main components of raising, attracting, and retaining better researchers.

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¹⁶Vedavyzkum.cz. (2022, September 30). *Interviews*. <https://vedavyzkum.cz/rozhovory/rozhovory>.

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