

# Five Recommendations for Strengthening Austria as a Research Country



# Call for the Incoming Austrian Federal Government to Take Action

Scientists drive progress and innovation. However, world-class research is more complex and competitive today than ever before. Researchers, universities and research institutions need a forward-looking framework to ensure that the great potential of scientific talent does not go to waste and to enable outstanding research achievements in Austria. Important incentives have already been created in recent years. The OECD report on the current situation in Austria's RTI system (OECD Reviews of Innovation Policy: Austria 2018), the recommendations of the Council of the European Union on Austria's National Reform Programme 2019 and the report from the Council for Research and Technology Development on Austria's scientific and technological performance in 2019 have set important and correct benchmarks, in addition to proposing promising measures that must be incorporated in the planned RTI Strategy 2030.

The Austrian Alliance of Science Organisations has therefore drawn up five recommendations addressed to the political parties currently campaigning for the upcoming general election, and to the future Austrian federal government. The recommendations include urgently needed research policy measures that will enable Austria to take the lead on an international level, thereby securing Austria's innovative strength and prosperity in the long term.

The members of the Alliance hereby call on the incoming federal government to strengthen Austria as a research country and to implement the recommendations as quickly as possible in the interests of Austria's researchers.

***Thomas Henzinger (IST Institute of Science and Technology Austria)***

***Antonio Loprieno (Austrian Science Board, ÖWR)***

***Helga Nowotny (ad personam)***

***Klement Tockner (Austrian Science Fund, FWF)***

***Oliver Vitouch (Universities Austria, uniko)***

***Anton Zeilinger (Austrian Academy of Sciences, ÖAW)***

# 1. Enhancing the Role of Competition in Promoting Research

**Fair and transparent competition boosts quality, promotes cooperation and attracts the most creative people.**

The OECD report published in December 2018 states very clearly that if Austria is interested in strengthening the country as a research and innovation location in the long term, it must increase its share of competitive funding to a much larger degree. The largest gap to be closed is in basic research. The higher the share of competitive funding, the better positioned researchers are to succeed at European and global levels.

# 2. Improving the Legal Framework

**A Research Funding Act that provides for autonomy, planning security and a path toward growth will build confidence and secure long-term success in research excellence.**

The independence of publicly funded research must be firmly enshrined in a new Research Funding Act. This includes ensuring broad-based autonomy for universities and research institutions as well as securing their independence in setting their own policy guidelines.

An annual growth rate of at least seven percent in the funding budgets for all institutions covered by the Research Funding Act is a step we would explicitly welcome. Such a measure would provide the necessary predictability, increase investment efficiency and significantly boost confidence in Austria, both domestically and abroad, as a research location. Achieving and maintaining excellence in basic research is only possible within a long term outlook. Consequently, it is essential to secure long-term funding within a multi-annual legal framework.

In addition, the contractual relationship between the Austrian federal government and the individual institutions concerned should be structured in the form of contracts under public law, analogous to universities. The contractual status as set forth in the new Research Funding Act must under no circumstances jeopardise the public law character of contract performance or the independence of publicly-funded research.

## **3 ■ Implementing the Excellence Initiative**

**A future-oriented package of measures conveying the message internationally that Austria is looking to attract and promote excellent researchers.**

The Excellence Initiative, developed in line with international standards, will further boost cutting-edge research and cooperation between disciplines and institutions. It will provide the Austrian science and innovation landscape with the sustainable energy boost necessary to significantly closing the gap between Austria and the nations leading the world in science and innovation today.

The Excellence Initiative will stimulate a culture of competition, promote cooperation and lay the groundwork for a dynamic research environment in all disciplines that attracts outstanding researchers and offers young scholars long-term career prospects. Excellent researchers in turn attract the most creative talent. Now is the time to begin implementing the present strategy as soon as possible.

## **4 ■ Introducing Overheads throughout Austria**

**A holistic solution with comparable standards and additional funding will ensure fairness in the research landscape.**

Uniform and binding overhead funding as a component of research funding, as has long been customary in the European Research Framework Programme, is urgently needed for all funding organisations and research institutions. Such a measure would further bolster quality-enhancing competition. Overheads will would additionally spur universities and research institutions to engage in quality-enhancing competition both domestically and internationally. The introduction of 25% overheads for all FWF programmes would significantly strengthen research institutions, generate an increase in project submissions and as a consequence additionally encourage the competition the OECD Review calls for in Austria's RTI system.

## **5 ■ Sustainably Endowing the National Foundation**

**A long-term National Foundation endowment will secure the most recent models for success in research funding.**

The National Foundation for Research, Technology and Development (NFTE) finances essential components of eligible organisations' funding portfolios. In recent years, new formats have been established across all funding organisations, thereby significantly enhancing research activities. Be it "aws first" by the Austria Wirtschaftsservice (aws), the "Bridge" programme by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG), the "Research Center for Open Innovation in Science" by the Ludwig Boltzmann Society (LBG), the "GO!DIGITAL" initiative by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) or a focus on strengthening doctoral training with the FWF's "doc.funds", all of these activities, financed with funds from NFTE, have been met with overwhelmingly positive feedback from researchers and have generated effective incentives for promoting Austria as a country of research and innovation. Consequently, the National Foundation requires a long-term endowment that goes beyond its current statutory funding, which only guaranteed until 2020.