



Recommendation from the CEO

Enhanced support through a revamped organisation – this is our primary mission, and it is also the key message of our newsletter's inaugural issue. The interview below also discusses the ongoing preparations for our modernised processes, following several organisational developments that took effect on February 15th. It covers the objectives of these changes, the experiences to date from the assessments of the research institutes ongoing since mid-January, the programme for the March event of the Strategic Workshop series and the launch of the AI Action Plan.

Interview with CEO Roland Jakab



Following your appointment as CEO, you announced the transformation of the HUN-REN governing body into a Headquarters (HQ). What progress has been made in this regard?

The Governing Board approved our new organisational and operational regulations and the operational principles of HUN-REN at their meeting on 14 February 2024. These documents, while maintaining the values previously adopted within the research network, reflect the new objectives, including enhancing HUN-REN's scientific and innovation capabilities and its visibility in international competition, increasing the social, economic and intellectual impact by integrating research and innovation results

into the value chain, and reducing manual administration by incorporating new, emerging solutions into science management, including artificial intelligence.

In the renewed organisation, we are paying special attention to creating a framework that enables the most effective support for the scientific and innovative work of researchers. For this reason, we have initiated preparations for new developments based on the most advanced digital technologies and AI, including enterprise resource planning and organisational management systems, as well as complex databases. These will allow us to make significant progress in data-based decision-making and thus streamline administration, as the requirement for frequent, static data inquiries is eliminated. However, these data-based developments will facilitate the operation of research institutions not only from a business management perspective but also in other aspects. Among our most important tasks are the assessment and organisation of the research infrastructures and data assets available at research institutes, which is undoubtedly justified for the efficient operation of the entire research network and, in my expectation, can also serve as a tool for tightening collaborations between research institutes. Although the HUN-REN HQ is factually the governing body of the research network, our focus will be on strengthening its service function. To this end, we have significantly expanded the professional capacity of the HUN-REN HQ, especially in supporting successful grant applications, developing professional programmes that endorse innovation, encouraging corporate collaborations, and supporting activities related to technology transfer.

One of the key organisational changes is that the President and the CEO direct the HQ and the scientific and administrative work of the network, supported by the Executive Cabinet. In performing his duties, the CEO is assisted by the Deputy CEO for Strategy and Innovation, and the Deputy CEO for Operations. Furthermore, to better represent its role and authority, the Department of Network Development will henceforth operate as the Department of Strategy and Monitoring.

The on-site reviews of the research institutes have been ongoing since mid-January. Where does the process stand, and what are the main experiences so far?

The assessment of the research institutes by international experts, initiated by President Balázs Gulyás, commenced almost concurrently with the renewal of the organisation of the HUN-REN HQ. Its aim was to obtain an unbiased and candid assessment of the standing of HUN-REN's 49 research institutes in global competition and to identify potential breakthrough points. Building on the evaluation results and incorporating international best practices and examples, in collaboration with the research institutions we will develop a new research strategy that supports our defined objectives.

On 16 February, the evaluation of the 7 institutions belonging to fields of Life Sciences, which collectively comprise 17 research institutes, concluded. The Assessment Committees, composed of internationally renowned researchers aligned with the institutes' profiles, are led by Professor Alexander J.B. Zehnder, Visiting Professor at

Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore, Professor Emeritus at ETH Zurich, Switzerland, Chairman of the HUN-REN Advisory Board.

During personal meetings with the leaders of the institutes and research groups, the Assessment Committees familiarised themselves with the research activities, the local research infrastructures, and also met with PhD students. The visits at all places concluded with the committee sharing its initial impressions and key recommendations. The continuously prepared written assessment reports are being sent to the leaders of the institutions for review prior to finalisation. Based on experiences so far, both leaders and researchers have expressed a positive view of the process and are open to recommendations that support development. From 19 February and 13 March, on-site reviews of research institutes operating in the fields of STEM, followed by those in the humanities and social sciences (SHAPE), will take place. The assessment is not intended as a one-time occurrence, our plan is to repeat it every 3-4 years.

Since September 2023, HUN-REN Strategic Workshops have been organised quarterly. What is their purpose, and when and on what topic will the next event be held?

The objective of the workshop series launched last Autumn is to engage in collective thinking about the future of HUN-REN, explore opportunities for integrating scientific and innovation results into value chains, and strengthen collaboration within the network. In addition to discussing development directions and priorities, these events feature internationally renowned foreign researchers and advisors committed to enhancing the international competitiveness of the Hungarian research system, showcasing best international practices and trends. These presentations address, among other topics, the role of science in modern society and the ongoing transformation in the evaluation of scientific performance. Alongside our research institutions, participants include the Governing Board, the Advisory Board, the President's Circle, members of the Scientific Council, colleagues from the HUN-REN HQ, as well as representatives from numerous partner organisations in the Hungarian RDI ecosystem.

The next, third workshop will be held on 20-21 March, where we will introduce two new initiatives. In the agenda for the first day, we have incorporated three separate sessions to provide leaders of research institutes in the Life Sciences, STEM, and SHAPE fields with the opportunity to discuss collaborations within the network in their respective fields, interdisciplinary collaborations, and the initiation of joint projects. This will involve science area experts invited by the President. The second day will be dedicated specifically to talented young researchers within the network, aiming to listen to their opinions and suggestions about the future of HUN-REN, support their career development, and foster their collaboration within the scientific community. With this, we are launching the Young Researchers' Day event series. A subsequent strategic workshop will provide an excellent opportunity for a collective review of the findings from the international expert assessments.

You mentioned the indispensable role of artificial intelligence in research and science management. How does this manifest in practice?

We are launching the HUN-REN AI Action Plan in early March to promote and support the use of artificial intelligence in and for research. The programme, involving representatives from all HUN-REN research institutes, plays a crucial role in advancing our research and innovation activities. Our aim is to strengthen the application of AI, collect and share best practices, and develop a comprehensive training programme on the subject for researchers. We count on the active participation and support of research institutions in this important endeavour. The kick-off workshop for the programme will be held in early March 2024. Furthermore, we have initiated the development of the AI strategy of HUN-REN, and are working to ensure its tangible results appear in practice as soon as possible.

HUN-REN News



On 12 February 2024, President Balázs Gulyás, was a guest on the programme "Az este" (The evening) on Kossuth Radio, hosted by János Csák, Minister for Culture and Innovation. The Minister as the host of the show once a month, together with President Gulyás discussed various topics including the international integration of Hungarian research and scientific life, the creativity and talent of Hungarian researchers, the domestic research talent pipeline, and the conditions for attracting and retaining talented researchers. The full interview is available in Hungarian on HUN-REN's [YouTube Channel](#).



On 19 February 2024, Hungary Today featured an interview with CEO Roland Jakab, where he addressed various topics including the position of Hungarian science on the international stage, efforts to facilitate the return of talented Hungarian researchers from abroad, enhancements to the service function of the HUN-REN HQ, and the significance of artificial intelligence in research and research management.

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01/03/2024 – Eleven young researchers from HUN-REN were awarded the Academic Youth Award of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) established over fifty years ago, on 29 February 2024 at the MTA Headquarters. This year, a total of twenty-five young researchers from the fields of humanities and social sciences, life sciences, and mathematics and natural sciences received the accolade.



28/02/2024 – Hungary's first Na-S battery arrived at the HUN-REN EK-CER; it will be able to demonstrate innovative electric energy storage. The experiences gained during the project can assist in achieving Hungary's carbon neutrality.

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26/02/2024 – Gergely Róna a molecular and cell biologist, returns to Hungary from the US as part of the HUN-REN Welcome Home and Foreign Researcher Recruitment Programme to investigate the molecular mechanisms of neural DNA repair to gain a better understanding of neurodegenerative diseases with the research group he is establishing at the Institute of Molecular Life Sciences of the HUN-REN Research Centre for Natural Sciences (HUN-REN RCNS).

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12/02/2024 – Attila Kaszas, a neuroscientist and beneficiary of the HUN-REN Welcome Home and Foreign Researcher Recruitment Programme, brings home his interdisciplinary expertise acquired in France. The aim of his newly established research group at the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience and Psychology of the HUN-REN Research Centre for Natural Sciences is to investigate one of the most aggressive types of brain cancer, glioblastoma, and one of its severe complications, tumor-associated epilepsy, using methods developed abroad.

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09/02/2024 – The Systems Immunology Research Group at HUN-REN Biological Research Centre, Szeged led by Máté Manczinger is participating in a HORIZON-HEALTH-2023-DISEASE-03 project named ID-DarkMatter-NCD. The researchers investigate the role of infectious diseases in the development of immunological diseases.

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06/02/2024 – The Brain Imaging Centre of the HUN-REN Research Centre for Natural Sciences has launched a programme aimed at promoting an active lifestyle for the elderly by joining the FINGERS research network, which includes an increasing number of countries worldwide. Volunteers between the ages of 65 and 75 are invited to participate in the eight-month-long group programme, which simultaneously supports the preservation of physical and mental activity, the establishment and maintenance of social connections, and the adoption of healthy eating habits.

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