

Code:	SŘ/03/2026	
Reference No.:	UTB/26/044424	
Document classification:	INTERNAL	
Category:	UNI DIRECTOR'S DIRECTIVE	
Title:	Principles of the Return Grants Competition at the University Institute Funded by P JAC	
Liability:	University Institute	
Issue date:	June 12, 2026	Version: 01
Effective from:	June 15, 2026	
Issued by:	Director of the University Institute	
Prepared by:	Implementation team	
In cooperation with:		
Pages:	13	
Appendices:	1	
Distribution list:	UNI employees	
Signature of the authorised person:	prof. Ing. Michal Sedlačík, Ph.D., m. p.	

PART 1 DEFINITION OF THE RETURN GRANTS COMPETITION

Article 1 Basic provisions

- (1) This directive of the Director of the University Institute (hereinafter referred to as "UNI") follows on from the Bursar's Directive "Implementation of a Project Financially Supported by the Programme Johannes Amos Comenius – Support for Enhancing the Career Development of High-Potential Researchers After a Career Break" and lays down the rules of the UNI Return Grants Competition, implemented within Key Activity 3 of the project Support for Enhancing the Career Development of High-Potential Researchers After a Career Break (hereinafter referred to as "Returns"), funded by the P JAC.
- (2) Funds from P JAC Returns project may be used exclusively for activities specified in an approved Return Grant application submitted within the announced competition, in accordance with the rules of P JAC and the internal regulations of Tomas Bata University in Zlín (hereinafter referred to as "TBU").

- (3) This Directive applies to doctoral students and research and academic staff returning after a career break. Such individuals are not required to be employees of TBU at the time of submitting an application. For the purposes of this Directive, all such individuals shall hereinafter be referred to as "researchers".
- (4) A career break shall mean a period of at least 180 days and not more than 1,095 days during which a researcher was unable to fully perform research and development activities (hereinafter referred to as "R&D") due to maternity leave, parental leave, long-term caregiving responsibilities, or long-term illness, provided that the following conditions are met:
- a) During the career break, the researcher may concurrently perform R&D activities under an employment relationship up to a maximum average extent of 0.3 full-time equivalent (hereinafter referred to as "FTE") per month, calculated over the months in which such activities were performed. At the same time, the researcher's R&D workload during the career break must not exceed 0.5 FTE in any individual month. For the purpose of calculating FTE, the duration of the employment relationship shall be counted from the month in which the researcher commenced the employment relationship until the month in which the researcher ceased performing R&D activities, based on the actual dates of commencement and termination.
 - b) A career break may be interrupted for periods during which the personal circumstances giving rise to the interruption temporarily cease to exist. The duration of the career break immediately preceding and following such interruption shall be aggregated, provided that the total duration of the interruption does not exceed 30 calendar days.
 - c) A period of annual leave taken immediately after maternity leave and followed by parental leave shall not be considered an interruption of the career break and shall instead be included in its total duration.
 - d) A career break shall be documented by a certificate issued by the employer or by the relevant public authority.

Article 2
Competition objectives

- (1) Supporting the reintegration of researchers after a career break into a fully-fledged research environment through the development of their scientific independence and their potential to lead a research team.
- (2) Strengthening the quality and internationalisation of research at TBU through mobility undertaken during the implementation of a Return Grant.
- (3) Enhancing the competitiveness of researchers following the completion of a Return Grant through support for the preparation and submission of project proposals to national and international grant competitions during the implementation of the Return Grant and, consequently, through increasing their capacity to independently prepare and submit competitive project proposals.
- (4) Support for the priorities of RIS3 and P JAC, including consideration of the gender dimension in research and the principles of open science, through alignment with the topics of Return Grants.

PART 2
SPECIFICATION OF THE COMPETITION

Article 3
Applicants

- (1) An applicant for a Return Grant may be a researcher who holds a Ph.D. degree or its equivalent, or who is a doctoral student, and who simultaneously meets the following conditions:
 - a) is on a career break as defined in Article 1(4), or has completed it, provided that no more than 12 months have elapsed since its end,
 - b) does not concurrently receive any other institutional support of a similar nature aimed at returning to research activities after a career break.
- (2) One applicant may serve as the principal investigator of only one Return Grant.
- (3) The applicant shall submit an application in either the Senior Return Grant or Junior Return Grant category, according to their classification as a “Senior Researcher” or a “Junior Researcher” pursuant to Article 4.

- (4) Upon approval of the project for implementation, the applicant shall become the principal investigator of the Return Grant.
- (5) As of the planned commencement date of the project, the principal investigator of a Return Grant must have an employment relationship with TBU.

Article 4 Types of Return Grants

- (1) Return Grants are divided into two categories:
 - a) Senior Return Grants, intended for Senior Researchers,
 - b) Junior Return Grants, intended for Junior Researchers.
- (2) Applicants shall apply for the category of Return Grant corresponding to their classification under paragraph (1) of this Article.
 - a) A Senior Researcher is a researcher for whom more than seven years have elapsed since the award of their Ph.D. degree (calculated from the date of the doctoral thesis defence) or its equivalent (ISCED level 8 qualification).
 - b) A Junior Researcher is a researcher for whom no more than seven years have elapsed since the award of their Ph.D. degree (calculated from the date of the doctoral thesis defence) or its equivalent (ISCED level 8 qualification). A doctoral student shall also be considered a Junior Researcher.

The above-mentioned seven-year period shall be extended by periods of maternity leave, parental leave, long-term illness (exceeding 90 days), care for a family member (exceeding 90 days), specialist medical training, or military service.

Article 5 Research team

- (1) The research team shall always consist of the principal investigator of the Return Grant. In addition, a mentor and a supporting expert team may be involved in the implementation of the Return Grant. The mentor is an optional component of the Return Grant. The supporting expert team may consist of a maximum of four additional members.
- (2) The workloads (FTE) of individual team members shall be set as follows:
 - a) Principal investigator: 0.5–1 FTE,
 - b) Mentor: max. 0.2 FTE,

- c) Other team members: up to a total of 2 FTE.

Article 6
Key dates and deadlines

- (1) The call for submission of project proposals under the competition shall be continuous, with the opening date for submissions on 15 June 2026 and the closing date on 31 March 2028.
- (2) The implementation of Return Grants may commence no earlier than 1 September 2026.
- (3) Physical implementation of the project may only commence after the Return Grant has been awarded by the Evaluation Committee. The commencement must take place no later than one calendar month after the date of delivery of the notification of approval of the Return Grant for implementation, and at the same time not earlier than 1 September 2026.
- (4) The latest possible date for completion of the implementation of a Return Grant is 30 June 2029, i.e. the date of completion of the physical implementation of the P JAC Returns project.
- (5) The duration of a Return Grant shall be a minimum of 12 months and a maximum of 34 months. The exact duration must be specified in the project proposal and must correspond to the planned outputs.

Article 7
Eligible expenses

- (1) Eligible project expenditures must comply with the financial rules of the P JAC Returns project, while respecting the principles of efficiency, economy, and effectiveness, and shall include the following categories:
 - a) personal costs of the Return Grant research team,
 - b) costs related to the implementation of research activities,
 - c) mobility of the principal investigator,
 - d) participation of the principal investigator in training activities.

PART 3

PROJECT APPLICATION SPECIFICATIONS

Article 8

Requirements of the project application

- (1) The research topic of a Return Grant must be in line with the R&D activities of UNI and its organisational unit, the Centre of Polymer Systems (hereinafter also “CPS”), and must be consulted in advance with the guarantor of the relevant research direction.
- (2) Where the applicant is a doctoral student, the topic of the Return Grant must not be identical to the topic of the doctoral thesis.
- (3) The Return Grant application, including all annexes, shall be submitted in English. The only exception is the proof of career break, which may be submitted in Czech or English.

Article 9

Structure of the project application

- (1) The description of the Return Grant shall include:
 - a) title of the Return Grant,
 - b) identification of the principal investigator and his/her FTE involvement,
 - c) identification of the mentor, duration of his/her involvement in the Return Grant and FTE allocation,
 - d) identification of other members of the supporting expert team, specification of their individual activities including FTE,
 - e) description of the research plan and its originality,
 - f) description of the alignment of the research plan with the research focus of UNI/CPS,
 - g) objectives and planned outputs in line with P JAC Returns,
 - h) mobility plan (time schedule and content) and description of its benefit for the principal investigator,
 - i) time schedule of the project duration including a Gantt chart,
 - j) detailed budget breakdown and justification,
 - k) description of alignment with RIS3 and P JAC,
 - l) consideration of the gender dimension in research,
 - m) description of the implementation of open science principles.

(2) Mandatory parts of the application:

- a) project description in PDF format with a maximum length of 10 pages,
- b) structured CV of the principal investigator (Europass format),
- c) motivation letter,
- d) career development plan of the principal investigator,
- e) project budget according to Calculator Activity 3_Return Grant Application_4_1,
- f) statement of the guarantor of the research direction,
- g) proof of career break,
- h) applicant's declaration that the topic is not identical to the doctoral thesis topic, where relevant (for doctoral students),
- i) applicant's declaration of non-overlap with other institutional support and non-participation in another Return Grant,
- j) declaration of the principal investigator,
- k) data management plan,
- l) appendix on compliance with the National RIS3 Strategy.

(3) The project application shall be submitted electronically via the e-mail address specified together with all requirements and attachments in the Call Documentation, which forms an Appendix to this Directive.

Article 10
Project outputs and results

(1) The applicant for a Return Grant is required to deliver the following outputs and results. These outputs and results are reported within the P JAC Returns project, where they are defined as mandatory indicators:

- a) peer-reviewed Jimp publication, category article, chapter or book,
- b) peer-reviewed Jimp publication, category letter, review, conference paper or article in a special issue,
- c) contribution to professional events, e.g. in the book of abstracts,
- d) patent application,
- e) applied result, such as functional sample (Gfunk) or utility model (Fuzit),
- f) submitted project proposal in a national call,
- g) submitted project proposal in an international call,
- h) establishment of new cooperation,

- i) carrying out one mobility period of 1–6 months.

PART 4 PROJECT APPLICATION EVALUATION

Article 11 Evaluation Committee

- (1) The Evaluation Committee shall be appointed by the Director of UNI.
- (2) The Committee shall consist of at least four internal members and a Chair, who shall be the Director of UNI.
- (3) The Committee shall:
 - a) review the results of external evaluations,
 - b) rank the project proposals,
 - c) propose the allocation of financial resources.
- (4) In the event of a tie, the score achieved in the evaluation criteria defined in Article 13(1)(a) and (b) shall be decisive.

Article 12 Evaluation process

- (1) Each project proposal shall be evaluated by at least four external reviewers, of whom at least two shall be affiliated with institutions outside the Czech Republic.
- (2) Each project proposal shall receive at least four independent expert reviews.
- (3) Reviewers shall provide both quantitative (0–100 points) and qualitative assessments (excellent, very good, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory) and the following overall recommendations:
 - a) recommended for funding,
 - b) recommended for funding subject to availability of financial resources,
 - c) insufficient,
 - d) not recommended for funding.
- (4) Prior to submission to external reviewers, each project proposal shall undergo a formal check carried out by the P JAC project administrator.
- (5) The formal check shall verify:
 - a) eligibility of the applicant,
 - b) submission of mandatory attachments.

- (6) The outcome of the evaluation shall be communicated to the applicant no later than six months after submission of the Return Grant application.

Article 13
Evaluation Categories and Scoring

- (1) Applications for Return Grants shall be assessed in the following categories:
- a) Applicant – max. 25 points,
 - b) Return Grant – max. 25 points,
 - c) Alignment with the research direction – max. 10 points,
 - d) Alignment with the P JAC Returns call and RIS3 priorities – max. 10 points,
 - e) Involvement of other team members – max. 10 points,
 - f) Institutional readiness – max. 5 points,
 - g) Career development potential of the applicant – max. 5 points,
 - h) Budget – max. 5 points,
 - i) Gender aspects in research and open science – max. 5 points.
- (2) The scoring scale for Return Grant applications (arithmetic mean of four external reviews) shall be as follows:
- a) Less than 50 points: the project proposal is excluded from final evaluation,
 - b) 51–70 points: the project proposal must be revised according to the recommendations of the Evaluation Committee and may be resubmitted in the competition,
 - c) 71–85 points: the project proposal is forwarded to the final evaluation together with other applications; in case of sufficient financial resources, the Evaluation Committee may decide on its implementation,
 - d) 86–100 points: the project proposal is forwarded to the final evaluation together with proposals achieving the same threshold; proposals shall be ranked according to their score.

PART 5
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RETURN GRANT

Article 14
Changes during implementation

- (1) During the implementation of Return Grants, situations may arise requiring adjustments to the originally approved conditions.
- (2) Changes are divided into two categories:
 - a) non-changeable parameters,
 - b) substantial changes.
- (3) Non-changeable parameters are those that may not be modified during the implementation of a Return Grant. Non-changeable parameters include:
 - a) replacement of the principal investigator of the Return Grant,
 - b) change of the objective or main research focus of the grant,
 - c) increase in the total amount of funding,
 - d) setting personnel costs below the values specified in the relevant calculator (“Calculator Activity 3_Application” or “Calculator Activity 3_Implementation”),
 - e) change of the version of the “Calculator Activity 3_Implementation” (the version approved at the time the grant is awarded shall apply throughout the entire implementation period).
- (4) Substantial changes may be made during the implementation of the project. Changes affecting the requested costs must be explained in the interim activity report and the final activity report. Such changes are always subject to an approval process. Substantial changes include:
 - a) reduction in the number of planned outputs or modification of planned outputs,
 - b) change in the destination or duration of mobility,
 - c) changes to the supporting expert team (minimum of two members; the total workload must not decrease by more than 10%),
 - d) modification of the grant timetable,
 - e) suspension of the grant implementation,
 - f) early termination of the grant.

Article 15
Progress reports

- (1) An interim progress report (hereinafter referred to as the "Progress Report") shall be submitted by the principal investigator of the Return Grant after each monitoring period, which shall always be six months in duration. The first monitoring period shall commence on the date of the physical start of project implementation.
- (2) The Progress Report shall be submitted within 15 days of the end of the monitoring period via the designated e-mail address specified in the Call Documentation.
- (3) The Progress Report shall be submitted using the prescribed Progress Report template, which forms an attachment to the Call Documentation.
- (4) The Evaluation Committee shall inform the principal investigator and the mentor of the results of the interim evaluation within 30 days of submission of the Progress Report for the relevant monitoring period.

Article 16
Final report

- (1) The final report on activities (hereinafter referred to as the "Final Report") shall be submitted by the principal investigator of the Return Grant following completion of the project, within 30 days of the project completion date via the designated e-mail address.
- (2) The Final Report shall be submitted using the prescribed Final Report template, which forms an attachment to the Call Documentation.
- (3) The Evaluation Committee shall inform the principal investigator and the mentor of the results of the final evaluation within 30 days of completion of the project.

Article 17
Suspension and early termination of implementation

- (1) Suspension of the implementation of a Return Grant shall be permitted only if the principal investigator is unable to continue implementing the project, provided that the project implementation is completed by 30 June 2029. The implementation may be suspended only once during the project period and for a maximum duration of 12 months.
- (2) Early termination of the implementation of a Return Grant by the principal investigator shall be permitted only after the minimum project duration of 12 months has elapsed.

Upon termination of the implementation, the principal investigator shall submit a Final Report within 30 days of the project completion date via the designated e-mail address.

- (3) In the event of a serious breach of the conditions governing the implementation of a Return Grant, the project may be terminated following the relevant monitoring period by decision of the Director of UNI based on the recommendation of the Evaluation Committee.

Article 18 Sanctions

- (1) The principal investigator shall comply with the established rules and conditions for project implementation. In the event of failure to fulfil these obligations, procedures under the internal regulations of TBU shall apply, in particular the Rector's Directive governing compensation for damage.
- (2) Failure to provide documentation demonstrating the achievement of results and outputs, a Progress Report, or a Final Report may result in the suspension of funding.

Article 19 Principles of open science and data management

- (1) The applied principles of open science must be in compliance with P JAC and TBU Rector's Directive SR/42/2023 "Secure Research Data Management at Tomas Bata University in Zlín".
- (2) Open science is a mandatory component of Return Grants and includes the dissemination of results, the preparation of a data management plan, appropriate handling of data, and consideration of the gender dimension of research. Principal investigators shall ensure open access to publications and research data in accordance with the FAIR principles, including the deposit of publications and data in trusted repositories (e.g. Zenodo), their immediate availability, and the retention of the necessary copyright and usage rights. Their obligations also include ensuring machine-readable metadata, providing all information necessary for the verification of results, and making available other relevant outputs, such as software, algorithms, or protocols.
- (3) Research data must be made available in open access in accordance with the data management plan and under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 licence (or an equivalent licence), except where legitimate restrictions apply. Such restrictions must be duly

justified and regularly reviewed. The data management plan must be updated on a regular basis, namely as part of each Progress Report.

- (4) Results that cannot be made publicly available because they are subject to intellectual property protection shall be duly protected in cooperation with the Technology Transfer Centre. Any non-disclosure of such results and the related data must be properly described in the data management plan.

Article 20 Publicity

- (1) Principal investigators of Return Grant projects shall ensure that all project outputs and results comply with the publicity requirements laid down by P JAC. Consequently, all project-related documents must include the “Co-funded by the EU and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports” logo and funding acknowledgement. The mandatory publicity requirements are available at: <https://opjak.cz/publicita/>
- (2) When publishing in peer-reviewed journals, the principal investigator of a Return Grant is always required to state the affiliation of the beneficiary, i.e. UNI/CPS, and include an acknowledgement of the P JAC Returns project entitled Support for Enhancing the Career Development of High-Potential Researchers after a Career Break and project number CZ.02.01.01/00/24_037/0013848, in all articles or conference papers in a manner customary in the relevant field.

Article 21 Final provisions

- (1) A detailed description of all requirements for the Return Grant application is provided in the Call Documentation, which forms Appendix 1 to this Directive. Terms used in this Directive shall always be interpreted in accordance with the Call Documentation and the conditions of P JAC.
- (2) This Directive shall enter into force on the date of its issuance.
- (3) List of appendices to the Directive:
- a) Appendix 1 – Call Documentation.

Document version			
Date	Version	Modified by	Description of change
01. 06. 2026	01	Director of UNI	Document created