

► is modelled on European Research Council grants, but with a twist: only those who have published a paper in the past five years that counted among the top 10% most-cited papers in their discipline are eligible to apply. This approach “creates a lot of tension in the community, but without such serious selection science won’t work well,” says Pálincás. To further encourage scientists to aim for quality over quantity, last year he introduced another reward for high-impact publication: researchers who within two years have a paper among the top 5% most highly cited in their field automatically receive a one-off payment of 20 million forints.

Hungary has a long tradition of research and outperforms other former communist countries in the EU on many measures. It has won more European Research Council grants and was the only country this year to win two Teaming grants: prestigious EU awards to create centres of excellence in 15 mostly eastern European countries in partnership with a western European research organization. It has also made some large investments, most generously in the Hungarian Brain Research Programme, launched in 2014, which has received 18.5 million forints up to 2021 and enabled many



Hungarian commissioner for research and innovation József Pálincás has designed grants that reward research excellence.

principal investigators to start their own labs. A 3-billion-forints programme has just been agreed in quantum technology. Five new programmes in areas including artificial intelligence and water research will be added next year, thanks to a 3% increase in the NRDNI budget, agreed in principle this month.

Hungary’s research performance still lags behind that of science-strong western European countries, however, and at 1.2% of gross domestic product, its research investment is well below the EU average of 2%. To support its scientific ambitions, Hungary has heavily

invested its EU structural funds — subsidies to poorer regions — in expanding research infrastructure. The country’s scientists fear that when the current round of these funds runs out in 2019, these major investments may go to waste.

Pálincás says that to avoid this, he will request a doubling of the national research budget in 2019. And despite the political challenges, Hungarian scientists seem optimistic: “The situation for science is better than it has been before,” says Reményi. Immunologist Adam Dénes returned from the United Kingdom in 2012 to start his own lab at the HAS Institute of Experimental Medicine in Budapest, a move he describes as a “political, philosophical and career challenge”. But for now, he says, “the pluses are more than the minuses.” ■

CORRECTION

The second caption in the News story ‘Archaeologists allege study used stolen bone’ (*Nature* **551**, 279–280; 2017) mislabelled the returned deer bone fragment. The fragment is top left in the picture, not top right.