Since its foundation 65 years ago, the Faculty of Medicine in Plzeň has been located in historically valuable buildings that are protected by heritage conservation regulations. The buildings were originally designed for a different use, and their structure and layout no longer meets the needs of modern teaching and research. To address this problem, for more than 40 years Charles University has been planning a new University centre for medical studies – a campus on a site adjacent to the Plzeň Faculty Hospital in Lochotín, where land has already been purchased for the development. Over the years the Faculty Hospital has managed to acquire funding for this purpose from the state budget, though it has not yet been possible to launch the construction of the new campus. In the interim period, the Faculty has had to cope with a constant and dynamic growth in student numbers, combined with the need to modernize its teaching facilities. These issues have been dealt with by carrying out some interior reconstructions and implementing costly maintenance programmes at the Faculty’s current premises.

The Faculty has a comprehensive plan for its new campus, covering the overall layout and all technical and structural details. The plan has been approved by the relevant building authority. In 2008, the Faculty decided to apply for EU funding from the Operational Programme (OP) Research and Development for Innovations, and preparatory work began on two smaller-scale investment projects.

One of these two smaller-scale projects involves (in its first phase) the construction of a University Centre for Medical Studies, which will use funding from the OP R&D for Innovations under the priority axis ‘Infrastructure for Teaching Connected with Research at Higher Education Institutions’. The funding application was submitted in June 2010 and the project was approved for co-financing in September 2010.

On 29 April 2011 the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports Josef Dobeš signed the document confirming the official decision to provide a subsidy to Charles University to implement its project for the Centre for Medical Studies at the University’s Faculty of Medicine in Plzeň (Phase I) as part of the OP Programme R&D for Innovations, priority axis 4 (Infrastructure for Teaching Connected with Research at Higher Education Institutions). The governing body of the OP R&D for Innovations is the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (http://www.msmt.cz/strukturalni-fondy/op-vavpi). The Minister and the University issued a joint press release on the occasion of the signing of the decision.

The aim of the project is to build a 7-storey structure with a usable area of over 5,000 m² to house five theoretical institutes – the Institute of Pharmacology and Toxicology, the Institute of Pathological Physiology, the Institute of Physiology, the Institute of Biology, and the Institute of Biophysics. These institutes will move from their current premises, thus freeing up more teaching and research space which will benefit the remaining parts of the Faculty. The new building will have practical modern rooms, laboratories, staff offices and other amenities.

The total eligible project expenditure is approx. CZK 171.4 million; this is all classified as investment expenditure except for the sum of CZK 65,000. Of the total amount, 85 per cent will be financed by the EU through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), while the remaining 15 per cent will be funded from the Czech Republic’s state budget (with the same sum deducted from the applicant’s operating budget).

The project will generate a range of benefits for stakeholders. Besides the new building itself, which will provide state-of-the-art teaching and research facilities, the project represents a unique opportunity to stimulate the quality of both practical and theoretical teaching – providing for more practically focused training which will boost graduates’ employment prospects, as well as enabling the Faculty to nurture talented young researchers and ultimately to improve
research performance. The project will also create close links between theoretical teaching at the Faculty and practical training in the Faculty Hospital, which employs many of the Faculty’s most respected teaching staff.

The implementation of the project began on 1 May 2011; operations in the new building are scheduled for launch in September 2014.

The second of the Faculty’s smaller-scale investments project is the construction of a Biomedical Centre in Plzeň, subsidized under priority axis 2 of the OP R&D for Innovations, which promotes the establishment of regional research centres. This project builds on many years of work during which the Faculty and the Faculty Hospital have collaborated to achieve excellent results in the field of biomedical research.

The project application was submitted in November 2009. The application was approved, allowing the negotiation process to start. On 29 March 2012, the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports Josef Dobeš signed the document confirming the official decision to provide the subsidy, and a joint press release was issued by the Minister and the University to announce the decision. The implementation phase of the project began in April 2012 and will continue until June 2015.

The main objective of the Biomedical Centre project is the development of a high-quality regional biomedical research centre with a unique focus on organ replacement and regeneration. The key research programmes and activities to be pursued at the new Centre were identified on the basis of internationally competitive research results already achieved, the potential for clinical application of these results, and the compatibility of the programmes with the Czech Republic’s long-term research priorities.
The construction part of the project will include two buildings containing laboratories and offices with a total area of more than 4,000 m$^2$. However, the focal point of the project is not the investment itself (though capital expenditure on construction and equipment accounts for approx. 75 per cent of the total subsidy funding). Investment in research infrastructure is merely a tool to support and harness the research potential and creativity of the Centre's research teams, which will gradually be expanded to employ up to 120 staff (mostly on a part-time basis).

Research at the newly established Centre will be focused on cooperation with a range of outstanding applied research institutions; a key aspect will be the commercialization of the Centre’s research results. New research findings, and the new technologies arising from the research, will be directly implemented in therapeutic and preventive care. Besides research work, the Centre will also participate in teaching students of Master's and PhD programmes.

The total expenditure on the project is around CZK 440 mil. Of this sum, approx. CZK 406 mil. will be covered by subsidies, with 85 per cent coming from the EU through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and 15 per cent from the Czech Republic’s state budget.

The preparatory work for the construction part of both projects – carried out by a single contractor selected through a public tender – began in September 2012. The archaeological survey took place in October and was followed by the launch of construction work in November.

Charles University in Prague and its Faculty of Medicine in Plzeň are keen to ensure that both Plzeň projects are completed as soon as possible, as they will help the University optimize the quality of its Master’s and PhD degree programmes as well as boosting the presence of teaching and research in medicine and natural sciences in a region that is still primarily focused on technical fields and humanities. The projects will also improve regional employment levels in cutting-edge fields, and will represent a major contribution to developing and improving medical care.