Presentation of the Annual Report 2017 of the Luxembourg National Research Fund and its 2018-21 strategy

Luxembourg, 18 May 2018

The Luxembourg National Research Fund reflects positively on 2017. A pivotal year for the FNR, as it marked both the end of the 2014-17 multiannual contract with the Government and paved the way for the new 2018-21 strategy. Over the last four years, it committed a total of 240 million Euros for the financing of 892 projects and grants. Since its creation back in 1999, the FNR has been a leading player in the development of the research ecosystem, driving the national strategy and keeping high the values of excellence in research and socio-economic impact. For the next four years, the FNR has the firm intention to continue in that direction and it will dedicate a total budget of 340.8 million Euros to make progress in the realisation of its vision and mission.

2017 has been pivotal for the FNR, as it both marked the end of the 2014-2017 multiannual contract with the Government, and paved the way for the signature of the next four-year contract.

After more than a year of meticulous preparation, the Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR) had its quality management system certified according to the ISO 9001: 2015 standard. The funding agency is accountable for the usage of public funds that it is entrusted with and strives for efficiency in its operations. The ISO norm is one of the elements that underpin this accountability.

2017 also showed that FNR’s strategy to hire remarkably high-profile researchers was fruitful. Indeed, FNR ATTRACT Fellow Ines Thiele was one of seven Luxembourg-based researchers to be awarded a prestigious European Research Council (ERC) grant in the 2014-17 period. Five of these ERC grantees have benefited from FNR funding. Next to Ines Thiele, these were Lionel Briand (FNR PEARL Chair), Massimiliano Esposito (FNR ATTRACT Fellow), Björn Ottersten (CORE, INTER, CORE-PPP, KITS) and Jan Lagerwall (CORE & INTER).

Endowed with a 2.6 million Euro FNR PEARL Chair, renowned neuropathologist Professor Dr Michel Mittelbronn joined the Laboratoire national de santé (LNS) in a joint appointment with the Luxembourg Institute of Health (LIH) and the Luxembourg Centre for Systems Biomedicine (LCSB) of the University of Luxembourg. He is, for the first time in Luxembourg, setting up a diagnostic neuropathology unit at the LNS and builds a research team together with LIH and LCSB to strengthen the research activities in neuro-oncology and neurodegenerative diseases.

1 https://www.fnr.lu/what-we-do/
2017 also saw one further strong sign of recognition for the FNR on an international level with FNR’s Secretary General Marc Schiltz election to the Presidency of Science Europe, the association of European Research Funding Organisations (RFO) and Research Performing Organisations (RPO). This election not only was a strong sign of recognition for the FNR but also for Luxembourg research in general, which is fully capable of fulfilling its role on the international stage.

The first edition of the “Pairing Scheme – Politics meets Research” project that was organised by the FNR in close collaboration with the Luxembourgish Parliament ended successfully in March 2017. All participants, both researchers and parliamentarians, were very satisfied and delighted to have participated in this initiative. Due to the upcoming general elections in October 2018, the FNR and the Chambre des Députés decided to organize the second edition of the Pairing Scheme in late 2019, beginning of 2020.

LARI – the Luxembourg Agency for Research Integrity – that was formally created in 2016, has been officially launched in September 2017 when the committee of international experts on the topic was in Luxembourg to meet Marc Hansen, Luxembourg’s Minister Delegate for Higher Education and Research. LARI sees it as its responsibility to raise awareness for research integrity and good scientific practices in Luxembourg. It will provide its member institutions a service facility and offer independent investigations of allegations of research misconduct.

For all proposals where positive funding decisions are taken since 1 January 2017, the FNR requires that Open Access options are selected for scientific publications resulting from those projects. The new FNR policy is in line with the global transition towards Open Access and the National Open Access Policy that is supported by all major research institutions. To help FNR beneficiaries comply with this new policy, the FNR has created guidelines and a dedicated Open Access Fund. This new funding instrument aims to reimburse Open Access fees that may arise through the Open Access publication of peer reviewed results from FNR-(co) funded research.

In spring, the FNR signed a Statement of Intent with the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMW), to support bilateral research projects between researchers based in Luxembourg and the Netherlands – bringing the number of countries the FNR has bilateral agreements with to twelve².

A few weeks later, the FNR signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). The signature was witnessed by the Prime Ministers of both countries, Mr António Costa and Mr Xavier Bettel. The agreement fosters the collaboration in science and research between the two nations, which both recognise that the very best research may be delivered by working with the best researchers internationally. Through this MoU, teams from Luxembourg and Portugal will conduct joint research projects in the areas as defined in the CORE programme.

² Find further details on the international relations of the FNR on page 58 of the 2017 Annual Report
In 2017, the FNR evaluated 666 proposals submitted within the framework of its various funding instruments. 97 research projects, 66 science communication projects – for communication between scientists as well as for the exchange with society – as well as 62 AFR PhD and Postdoc grants, were selected for funding.\(^3\)

1067 expert reviews were conducted in the process of evaluation and selection. Of 666 proposals submitted, 240 were retained for funding, representing a success rate of 36%. To finance all the projects selected in 2017, the FNR committed 66.2 MEUR.

### The FNR’s strategic objectives 2018-2021

The development of the FNR strategy 2018-2021 has taken more than a year and involved most of the agency’s collaborators, the chairs of FNR evaluation panels, the members of its scientific council and board of directors, as well as important stakeholders, such as the University of Luxembourg and the Public Research Centers. It has also drawn input from a large number of important fundamental policy documents and recommendations.

As already mentioned, the FNR will dedicate a total budget of 340.8 million Euros over the next four years to make progress in the realisation of its vision and mission.

In order to make that progress, three strategic objectives have been set, articulated around six key value drivers.\(^4\) Furthermore, the FNR wants to push forward a competitive and comprehensive culture of excellence and has therefore defined six dimensions that constitute the agency’s understanding of “excellence in research”. Though scientific excellence will obviously remain the key criterion throughout the FNR schemes, it will be coupled to strategic considerations as well as to a greater emphasis on the generation of economic and societal impact through research.

FNR’s strategy for 2018-21 has been designed by duly taking into consideration the current state of play of public research and at the same time making maximal use of Luxembourg's key assets.

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\(^3\) For details, see page 15 of the 2017 FNR Annual Report

\(^4\) Please consult the FNR strategy brochure for all details regarding the strategic objectives, the action plan and value drivers [https://www.fnr.lu/news/fnr-publications/](https://www.fnr.lu/news/fnr-publications/)
**Strategic objective 1**

**Strengthening the foundations**

- We will reinforce the development of a sustainable research system and human resource base, founded on a comprehensive culture of excellence;
- We will build up critical mass with the ambition to attain scientific leadership in key areas.

**Strategic objective 2**

**Shaping a shift in Luxembourg**

- By developing research priorities that are in line with the long-term strategic plans for the country, we ambition to fuel innovation in the business, health and public sectors and support the digital and societal transformation.
- We intend to anchor science in society by reinforcing an active exchange between research and society including the mobilisation and involvement of citizens.

**Strategic objective 3**

**Promoting innovation in strategic research management**

- We will develop the know-how and infrastructures to implement an evidence-based approach in the design, monitoring and assessment of research strategies and programmes;
- We will position the FNR at the forefront of national and international debates on research policy and strategy;
- We will explore new ways of assessing and evaluating projects and programmes, enabled through digital technology and based on the latest evidence available from research.
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The Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR) is the main funder of research activities in Luxembourg. Our vision is to establish Luxembourg as a leading knowledge-based society through science, research and innovation, thereby contributing to the country’s economic diversification and future prosperity. Our mission is to set up a sustainable world-class research system in Luxembourg that will generate societal and economic impact in key strategic areas. It is to nourish this vision that the FNR invests public funds in research projects in a range of scientific domains, prioritising the research domains identified as priorities for the country. Furthermore, we support and coordinate activities to strengthen the link between science and society and to raise awareness for research. We also advise the Luxembourg government on research policy and strategy.