Luxembourg, 26 May 2017

The Luxembourg National Research Fund reflects positively on 2016. A year marked by the changes in its governing body, external evaluations, and by the successful launch of multiple big projects. All in all, 195 projects were retained for funding, representing around 33% of submitted proposals. Throughout its activities, the FNR pursued its mission of establishing a system of sustainable and internationally renowned research which will generate societal and economic impact in key strategic areas.

Excellence and impact in research are two values to which the Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR) attributes particular importance. These are values which the FNR applies not only in its evaluation and selection procedures but equally in its management methods. Facts confirmed by the external evaluations conducted in 2016 by the Evaluation Center of the University of Western Michigan and INTERFACE.

In order to identify the most promising and most excellent projects and researchers, the FNR systematically submits funding requests to an assessment by independent international experts. Thus, the FNR implements the ‘Principles for Scientific Merit Review’, which embody the highest international standards of expert assessment, transparency, impartiality, confidentiality and integrity. In its final report, the Evaluation Center certifies that the FNR applies the highest international standards in its procedure of selecting projects.

The FNR will also be awarded the ISO 9001 certification, attesting to the quality of its management methods.

On the governing level of the FNR, the year 2016 was marked by the appointment of Véronique Hoffeld (previously Vice Chair of the Board of the FNR) as Chair of the Board of the FNR, succeeding Yves Elsen. Following his appointment as Chair of the Governing Board of the University of Luxembourg and subsequent legal incompatibilities, Yves Elsen in July announced his resignation from the Board, of which he was a member since 2005 and Chair since 2010.

Under his leadership, the FNR developed into a dynamic organisation, which is now unanimously known and recognised for its central role in the national research and innovation apparatus. He always defended the demand for excellence and quality in research and he was aware that the FNR had a central role to play in this plan. Under his governance, the FNR developed the socioeconomic valorisation of research findings and partnerships between public

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1 www.fnr.lu/what-we-do/
2 The reports and evaluations are available under: https://www.fnr.lu/news/fnr-publications/
3 An animation explaining the evaluation and selection process can be found under: https://youtu.be/s7x-L49AWJE
research and industry. Additionally, he resolutely supported the international orientation of Luxembourgish research and encouraged the FNR to push its collaborations beyond the borders of Europe, most notably to Asia.

The new Chair Véronique Hoffeld counts on continuing in the same direction as her predecessor and maintaining the FNR as a pillar of excellence and innovation. “We will continue to implement fair and transparent procedures in our decision-making,” she explains “and nourish an open dialogue with the scientific community. We will continue to invest public funds in research projects and quality human capital. Equally, we will continue to promote scientific culture to the general public, to guarantee the continuity of the ecosystem that we have contributed to putting in place.”

**Big projects 2016**

During the year 2016, the FNR worked towards implementing an inter-institutional agreement on doctoral training and the supervisory rights of doctoral students. It is under the direction of the FNR that an agreement was negotiated between the University of Luxembourg and the research institutions LIH, LISR, LIST and MPI. Under this agreement, qualified researchers from the research institutions may supervise PhD candidates enrolled at the University. This was a long-standing demand of the FNR and one of the first commitments made during the first edition of the ‘Assises de la Recherche’ at the end of 2014.

On an international level, the FNR signed an important collaboration agreement with the National Research Foundation of Singapore. This agreement was signed in November 2016 in the framework of a visit of Prime Minister Xavier Bettel to Singapore. Thematic calls for joint research projects will be launched in the second semester of 2017 in the domains materials, FinTech and autonomous systems.

The “Pairing Scheme – Politics Meets Research” is a new project which launched in 2016 and concluded in 2017, carried out in close cooperation with the Chamber of Deputies. Following a call, 17 “pairs”, each made up of a researcher and an MP, were established. The researchers and MPs respectively met at least two times in their respective work environments. The goal is to build more sustainable links between the world of research and politics.

At the beginning of December 2016, the FNR with its partners, organised the 5th edition of the Researchers’ Days at the Rockhal. During two days, the Rockhal was transformed into a huge laboratory with more than 20 interactive workshops and four Science Cafés. Organised for the very first time in Belval, the Researchers’ Days 2016 attracted more than 3400 visitors of all ages.

The FNR also coordinated the Luxembourg participation in the Teaming action of the programme H2020-Widespread, initiated by the European Commission. A project of the LIH and LCSB in partnership with The University of Southern Denmark, which targets digital innovation in the medical sector, was submitted and accepted.
The FNR has put in place a block grant funding programme consisting of PhD and Postdoc grants with the aim of building important industrial collaborations (IPBG – Industrial Partnership Block Grant). A joint project between LIST and Goodyear Innovation Centre was retained for funding.

In collaboration with the University of Luxembourg, SCRIPT and IFEN, the FNR created the SciTeach Center, which has the purpose of developing educational courses for primary school teachers to expand their knowledge in the field of natural sciences, completed by educational resources.

80.4 MEUR for research projects selected based on excellence criteria

In 2016, the FNR evaluated 581 proposals submitted within the framework of its various funding instruments. 78 research projects, 54 science communication projects – for communication between scientists as well as for the exchange with society – as well as 63 AFR PhD and Postdoc grants, were selected for funding.

More than 1200 expert reviews were conducted in the process of evaluation and selection. Of 581 proposals submitted, 195 were retained for funding, representing a success rate of 33%. To finance all the projects selected in 2016, the FNR committed 80.4 MEUR.

The three strategic objectives of the FNR – 2016 figures

Objective 1: To promote quality and scientific excellence in research

Instruments: CORE, INTER, INTER Mobility, OPEN, RESCOM

335 proposals submitted
529 expert reviews conducted
73 projects retained for funding
24.92 MEUR committed

Highlights pp. 37, 41 and 42 in the annual report 2016

Objective 2: To strengthen research engendering an economic and societal impact

Instruments: POC, PSP, IPBG, AFR-PHD-PPP, AFR-PPP, CORE-PPP

108 proposals submitted

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4 For details, see page 18 of the 2016 FNR Annual Report
5 The multi-annual contract in which the strategic objectives of the FNR are set, as well as the first amendment to the agreement are available on the FNR website under www.fnr.lu/organisation
6 http://fnr.lu/news/fnr-publications/
290 expert reviews conducted
70 projects retained for funding
11.31 MEUR committed
Highlights pp. 43 and 44 in the annual report 2016

Objective 3: To strengthen the efficiency and durability of the Luxembourg public research system. To invest in human capital

Instruments: PEARL, ATTRACT, AFR-PHD, AFR-PD, PRIDE
138 proposals submitted
378 expert reviews conducted
52 projects retained for funding
44.15 MEUR committed
Highlights pp. 38, 40 and 46 in the annual report 2016

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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.