Selection guidelines
PRIDE Selection Guidelines

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**Glossary:**

**PRIDE:** Programme for Research-intensive Doctoral Education

**DTU:** Doctoral Training Unit

**PPP:** Public-Private Partnership

**NQFD T:** National Quality Framework for Doctoral Training

**Host institution:** Luxembourg-based institution eligible to benefit from PRIDE funding and hosting (employing) the DTU candidate(s). Host institutions are considered as contracting partners.

**Coordinating institution:** host institution employing the DTU coordinator and legally responsible for the PRIDE project towards the FNR.

**Partner institution:** organisation/institution in Luxembourg or abroad not eligible for funding under PRIDE (e.g. company, research institution abroad, PhD awarding institution abroad). Partner institutions are considered as non-contracting partners.

**PhD awarding institution or degree awarding institution:** higher education institution in Luxembourg or abroad, awarding the PhD degree and officially responsible for the verification of academic standards of doctoral training. It is possible to have more than one degree awarding institution associated to a DTU.
1. Objectives of the PRIDE programme

Through the PRIDE programme, the FNR supports doctoral training in Luxembourg research institutions by awarding a block of PhD grants to so-called Doctoral Training Units (DTUs). DTUs are constituted by a consortium of min. 7 supervisors teemed up around a coherent and competitive research programme and offering excellent structures for PhD training. DTUs are implemented for a medium-term duration (6.5 yrs) and contribute to the structuring of research and doctoral training in Luxembourg.

The PRIDE programme objectives are:

- to provide more specific support for the research teams that demonstrate good quality work over time, in order to achieve a critical mass in a limited number of fields of excellence,
- to support Luxembourg-based research institutions in their efforts to attract and recruit outstanding PhD candidates that pursue internationally competitive research,
- to support institutions to offer attractive working conditions to PhD candidates and to train them to become highly skilled professionals, able to respond to the needs of research, society and economy.

PRIDE is a competitive funding scheme, where only proposals attaining international levels of excellence are to be retained.

The PRIDE programme has a bottom-up approach, i.e. proposals in all domains of research and technological development are eligible for funding. Due to its requirement for critical mass (min. 7 supervisors/PRIDE application), the scheme targets research teams that wish to consolidate around strategically relevant research themes. PRIDE also encourages settings for interdisciplinary research within a given DTU.

In the first PRIDE Call, launched in 2015, 135 PhD positions were awarded in blocks to 11 successful Doctoral Training Units (DTUs). In the second PRIDE Call (Call 2017), 75 PhD positions were awarded in blocks to 6 successful Doctoral Training Units. In the third PRIDE Call (Call 2019), the FNR awards up to 130 PhD grants. The FNR requires co-funding for each DTU funded under PRIDE.

It is possible for new PRIDE proposals to build on earlier funded PRIDE projects, however PRIDE is not to be considered as a continued base-funding for doctoral training in ongoing research activities of a thematic group or in a thematic area. Every proposal needs to bring elements of novelty. In the evaluation of follow-up proposals, outcomes of the earlier funded project (contribution to the state-of-the-art, PhDs trained, output, other forms of impact, etc.) should be considered.

For further details on the PRIDE programme, the funding under PRIDE and the implementation of the DTUs, please refer to the PRIDE programme description and the PRIDE application guidelines.
2. PRIDE Selection criteria

The merit of each proposal is assessed according to 5 selection criteria. For each selection criterion a number of points/questions have been outlined, to provide guidance to the reviewers and panel members on what to look at in their assessment.

I. Scientific/technological quality of the multiannual research programme

• Scientific/technological excellence and novelty of the research programme, e.g.
  • Contribution to the state-of-the-art
  • Competitive advantage in relation to leading groups
  • Potential for high quality and innovative PhD theses

• Coherence of the research programme, e.g.
  • Integration and added value of the individual research axes and planned research activities with regard to the intended research programme
  • Added value of the involved institutions with regard to the intended research programme
  • Expertise covered by the DTU supervisor consortium with regard to the intended research programme; complementarity of the involved supervisors (see also selection criteria III)

• Evidence of previous third-party funded research activities relevant to the research programme.

• Efficiency of the planned resources, e.g. justification for the requested number of PhD positions; embedding of Postdocs, if any.

II. Contribution of the multiannual programme to training and career development of participating researchers

• Appropriateness of the DTU training and career development strategy

• Potential of the scientific and non-scientific training to develop skills and knowledge of PhD candidates

• Support to career development of PhD candidates, approach to interdisciplinary training, research integrity and open science skills

• Strategic approach to international, inter-sectoral and/or interdisciplinary mobility

1 It is not required to provide feedback to every point or question listed. They should merely be used as support to orient the focus of the reviewer’s assessment.
III. Competence of the host institution(s)/DTU to manage PhD training and quality of supervision

- Competence of the supervisors constituting the DTU consortium (please refer to the CVs of the individual supervisors. Consideration should be given to the stage of career both in terms of scientific and PhD supervision track record)
  - **Scientific track record**, i.e. scientific impact of research activities to date in general, and in fields relevant to the PRIDE project, in particular, such as quality of scientific output, invitations as keynote speakers, other scientific achievements, etc. (track record should be evaluated independently of journal-based metrics)
  - **PhD supervision track record**, e.g. numbers of PhDs supervised, time-to-completion, future career, other meaningful supervision experience, training, etc.
- Leadership competence of the DTU coordinator
- Management of the DTU and the interaction between all actors involved in the DTU; approach taken to the continuous development of supervision skills
- Quality of the research environment (e.g. potential for scientific exchange, infrastructure, etc.)
- Strategy to recruit the best PhD candidates
- Approach taken to gender equality
- Follow-up of PhD candidates (e.g. adequacy of procedures for individual PhD plan, approach taken to the resolution of PhD-supervisor conflict, etc.)

IV. Potential contribution by the multiannual programme to the strategic goals of the host institution

- Alignment to the strategy of participating institutions and institutional commitment

V. Outcomes and possible applications of the multiannual programme

- Employability of the PhDs in the academic and non-academic job market
- Expected scientific/economic/societal/environmental impact
3. Role of persons involved in the Peer Review Process

The PRIDE peer review process guarantees an independent, state-of-the-art evaluation of all applications. The general implementation of the peer review process is managed by the FNR. In the implementation, the FNR is assisted by the PRIDE panel and by reviewers.

3.1. General requirements

All actors in the PRIDE selection process are expected to have acquainted themselves with the essentials of the PRIDE programme and understood its objectives.

In the exercise of the evaluation activity, they are expected to judge the quality and merits of the respective proposal(s) against each selection criteria according to the best of their abilities, professional skills, knowledge and ethics.

As a signatory of the DORA Declaration, the FNR expects panel members and reviewers to evaluate quality and impact independently of journal-based metrics and to give value to all types of research outputs.

All actors are moreover held to respect the clauses for confidentiality and conflict of interest detailed in chapter 5. For this purpose and before being granted access to a proposal, panel members and reviewers are required to sign a confidentiality agreement with the FNR.

3.2. PRIDE panel members

The PRIDE panel coordinates and supervises the merit evaluation of the PRIDE proposals through all selection stages and ensures the quality of the peer review process as well as the quality of the retained proposals.

The PRIDE panel is composed by a group of established scholars from various scientific domains and with experience in the management of PhD training. PRIDE panel members are formally nominated by the FNR. The PRIDE panel is headed by the panel chair.

3.3. Reviewers

The reviewers are international established researchers selected on the basis of their scientific merit/track record in the domain of the proposal, as well as their experience with graduate schools or doctoral programmes. Reviewers are invited to remotely evaluate a PRIDE proposal closely related to their field of expertise according to the PRIDE selection criteria and to submit a written review within the deadlines. They may also be invited to participate as interviewer in the interview phase of the PRIDE selection process (please refer to section 4.3. Interview phase and funding decision for further details).

3.4. FNR Management

The FNR staff supports all involved experts during the evaluation process. In cooperation with the ‘Panel chair’, the ‘FNR Programme Manager’ takes care that the FNR rules and procedures are respected.

The FNR staff does not provide any information regarding the status of the applications to the applicants while the evaluation procedure is in progress and until the funding decision has been taken by the Board of the FNR. The FNR staff does not provide any information regarding the identity of the reviewers and panel members involved. For panel members and reviewers participating in the interview phase (c.f. section 4.3. Interview phase and funding decision), their identity will be revealed during the interview session.
4. PRIDE Selection process

The PRIDE selection process is divided into the following stages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Eligibility check</th>
<th>Oct 2019</th>
<th>Eligible proposals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>Remote evaluation Pre-selection panel</td>
<td>Jan 2020</td>
<td>Short-list ≤ 15 DTUs for interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>Interview phase Funding decision</td>
<td>March 2020</td>
<td>Award ≤ 130 PhD grants to highest ranked DTUs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1. Stage 1: Eligibility check

Prior to entering the peer review process, applications undergo an administrative check by the FNR secretariat in order to verify that all formal requirements are respected (please refer to the Application Guidelines for further details on the eligibility criteria).

Moreover, all submitted proposals are subject to an electronic plagiarism check. The FNR sends feedback to the applicants concerning the proposal’s eligibility.

Following the eligibility check, each proposal is attributed to a member of the PRIDE panel with the appropriate scientific background and remains under the responsibility of this panel member until the conclusion of the selection process.

4.2. Stage 2: Remote evaluation and pre-selection

For each PRIDE proposal, the FNR appoints at least 4 reviewers in the proposal's domain to provide a written evaluation according to the selection criteria. For proposals covering more than one field or discipline, care is taken to select an appropriate mix of reviewers with relevant backgrounds, including where applicable, reviewers with interdisciplinary backgrounds.

4.2.1. Completing the review form

Reviewers are expected to complete the PRIDE 2019 Review Form as explained below.

Reviewers are expected to make an in-depth analysis of the proposal and formulate clear arguments, which underline their objective judgement of the quality of the proposal against each of the selection criteria. The first criterion, i.e. ‘scientific excellence of the research programme’ is considered the most important of the five criteria. All selection criteria should
be explicitly addressed and strengths and weaknesses presented in a structured way. A scoring system is applied for each selection criterion with 4 possible scores:

**excellent** > **very good** > **good** > **fair/poor**.

The score “excellent” should only be reserved for proposals fully and unambiguously convincing of their excellent quality and merit towards a specific selection criterion.

As conclusion, an **overall assessment of the proposal with a funding recommendation** must be provided. In this overall assessment, the most important strengths and weaknesses of the proposal and any other comments justifying the funding recommendation should be highlighted. Possible recommendations for modification and/or improvement of the proposal may also be outlined, supported by examples. The scoring system applied for the overall assessment is detailed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Score</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>Proposal of excellent quality and outstanding international standards that should be funded as proposed. The proposal scores excellent on all or most criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Proposal of very good quality and high international calibre that should be funded. The proposal scores very good (and even excellent) on all or most criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Proposal of very good quality, but with shortcomings on one of the selection criteria. The proposal could be improved to become an excellent proposal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Proposal of insufficient quality and with major shortcomings on one or more selection criteria.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When completing the review form, it is essential that the comments and arguments provided are formulated in a clear and unambiguous manner in order to help the PRIDE panel in reaching a fact-based funding recommendation. Also, care should be taken that the scores match with the arguments and observations provided in the respective comments sections.

For proposals giving rise to ethical or data protection issues, comments should be provided, whether the issues have been adequately addressed by the applicants.

For transparency reasons, applicants receive the anonymised remote reviews as feedback. Reviewers should therefore avoid wording that could be perceived as insulting and aim to formulate criticism in a constructive way. **The identity of the reviewers is kept confidential**. Reviewers should therefore refrain from identifying themselves in the review form. On the other hand, reviewers are requested to briefly specify in the review form their domain of expertise. This is relevant for the PRIDE panel, in particular when it comes to judge proposals with an inter- or multidisciplinary approach. The reviewers’ domain of expertise will only be made visible to the panel members, but will not be included in the feedback to the applicants.

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2 Except for reviewers participating in the interview phase (c.f. section 4.3. Interview phase and funding decision), whose identity is revealed during the interview session.
4.2.2. Drafting the synthesis and panel preparation

In order to prepare for the panel, PRIDE panel members are expected to read the proposals assigned to them and the related remote reviews. Based on the remote reviews, they complete the “PRIDE Synthesis Form” and submit this to the FNR prior to the panel meeting. For the drafting of the synthesis, the following guidelines should be considered:

- The arguments in the synthesis should be based on the arguments provided in the written reviews. The individual comments by reviewers do not need to be repeated. Instead, the synthesis should clearly state how the individual comments of the reviewers lead to the overall conclusion;
- Conflicting arguments stated in different reviews should be resolved by proposing a justified opinion;
- Panel members have the possibility to bring in their own observations; these should be clearly highlighted as such and justified with evidence;
- Factual information which has a major influence on the funding decision needs to be checked on validity;
- Criticism should be constructive and supported with examples;
- Possible modifications or recommendations to improve the quality of the proposal may be indicated;
- The synthesis needs to be coherent throughout the text and the proposed funding recommendation comprehensible and duly justified.
- When completing the scoring tables, panel members should refrain from making a simple average of the reviewers’ scores. Instead, they should aim to base the scoring on their overall judgement of the evoked strengths and weaknesses by the reviewers.
- The final score should be coherent with the overall assessment.

4.2.3. Pre-selection panel

The overall objective of the PRIDE pre-selection panel is to analyse all proposals with their respective remote reviews against each other and rank the proposals according to the fulfilment of the selection criteria in view of defining a short-list of proposals to proceed to the next selection stage (interview stage).

During the pre-selection panel, each panel member presents the proposals assigned to him/her focusing on the following elements:

- topic and objectives of the proposal,
- main strengths and weaknesses identified by the remote reviewers, highlighting eventual conflicting statements by reviewers,
- overall assessment of the application against the selection criteria,
- funding recommendation

Each proposal and related reviews/synthesis is co-read by at least one other panel member. Following the short presentation by the panel presenter, co-reader(s) and all panel members are invited by the panel chair to join in the general discussion of the scientific merit of the proposal.

Following the presentation and discussion of all proposals, the panel agrees on a ranking of the proposals according to their merits. In the pre-selection phase, the PRIDE panel short-
lists **up to 15 PRIDE proposals** to proceed to the next selection stage (interview phase). Only proposals that are competitive in relation to the international standard should be considered to be short-listed.

After the pre-selection panel, the draft syntheses are updated to reflect the discussion and conclusion of the panel meeting. The panel syntheses serve as the basis for the formal decision process within the FNR to proceed to the next selection stage. This document should therefore be as comprehensive as possible, clear and unambiguous.

All applicants are informed of the outcome of the pre-selection and receive the full written reviews (anonymised) and syntheses. The short-listed DTUs receive an invitation for the interview phase, jointly with their feedback.

### 4.3. Stage 3: Interview phase and funding decision

#### 4.3.1. Interview session

The objective of the interview phase is to deepen the assessment of the overall merits of the short-listed PRIDE proposals against the selection criteria and to make a recommendation of proposals to be funded.

To this end, all short-listed DTUs will be invited to an interview, to be held at the locations of the FNR. The invitation will contain more details about the organisation and programme of the interview sessions.

The interview panel is composed of members of the PRIDE panel (one of which will act as chair) and of at least one domain experts usually recruited from the group of remote reviewers; the latter will act as main interviewer(s) during the interview sessions.

During the interview sessions, members of the DTU application team present their proposal to the interview panel and address the issues raised in the written reviews. In this evaluation stage, a particular emphasis is given to the supervision, the research and training environment and the management of the DTU.

For each interview session, a short panel report shall be drafted by the interview panel, highlighting the main conclusions from the interview session and underlining the funding recommendation.

#### 4.3.2. Conclusions by the PRIDE panel

Following the end of the interview sessions, the PRIDE panel will convene for the concluding panel. On the basis of the individual panel reports, the PRIDE panel will discuss the conclusions from the interview sessions, revisit the ranking of proposals, if applicable, and make a recommendation on which DTUs should be retained for funding and on the number of PhD grants to be awarded to the respective DTUs, respecting the available budget.

Following the final funding recommendations by the PRIDE panel, the individual panel reports will be finalised. They serve as the basis for the formal decision process within the FNR and will be forwarded to the applicants together with the FNR funding decision.

#### 4.3.3. FNR Funding Decision

The FNR board validates the funding recommendations by the PRIDE panel. The funding decisions are then communicated to the applicants and their host institution(s).
5. Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

5.1. Confidentiality

All research plans and evaluation statements are confidential documents. Application documents should therefore be handled with care and treated as confidential before, during and after the evaluation process.

Reviewers and panel members must not disclose any information concerning application documents or evaluations to outsiders, nor should they use confidential information to their own or any other party’s benefit or disadvantage.

Reviewers and panel members must not communicate with applicants. Reviewers and panel members’ advice to the FNR on any proposal may not be communicated by them to the applicants or to any other person. Panel members are not allowed to disclose the names of other experts participating in the evaluation. Where proposals are posted or made available electronically to reviewers, who then work from their own or other suitable premises, the reviewer will be held personally responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of any documents or electronic files sent and returning, erasing or destroying all confidential documents or files upon completing the evaluation as instructed. Reviewers and Panel members may not show the contents of proposals or information on applicants to third parties (e.g. colleagues, students, etc.).

Reviewers contacted by anyone who has questions about application documents or evaluation statements, should direct these people to the FNR contact person.

5.2. Conflict of Interest

All persons involved in the review process are required to declare any personal interests according to the criteria below. The FNR will check the level of the conflict of interest.

Circumstances in which a conflict of interest may exist:

A disqualifying conflict of interest exists if a person:

- was involved in the preparation of the proposal;
- has had close collaboration with the applicant(s) (e.g. has co-authored and published an article with the applicant during the past three years);
- stands to benefit directly if the proposal is accepted (e.g. is involved in the publication or exploitation of the potential results of the proposal);
- has a close family relationship with any person working for an applicant organisation in the proposal. This includes:
  - a spouse, child, grandchild, sibling, parent, grandparent,
  - a person otherwise especially close (e.g. fiancé/e or a close friend), and/or their spouses,
  - a sibling of a parent or his/her spouse, a child of a sibling, previous spouse,
  - a child, grandchild, sibling, parent or grandparent of a spouse and/or their spouses, a child of a sibling of a spouse,
  - or a half-relative comparable to the above mentioned.
- is a director, trustee or partner of an applicant organisation;
- is employed by one of the applicant organisations in a proposal;
- is in any other situation that compromises his or her ability to evaluate the proposal impartially.
A potential conflict of interest may exist, even in cases not covered by the clear disqualifying conflicts indicated above, if a person:

- was employed by one of the applicant organisations in a proposal within the previous three years;
- is involved in a contract or research collaboration with an applicant organisation, or has been so in the previous three years;
- is in any other situation that could cast doubt on his or her ability to evaluate the proposal impartially, or that could reasonably appear to do so in the eyes of an external third party.

Persons involved in the peer review process must also declare a conflict of interest at any time during the process.

5.3. Inability to Perform Obligations and Termination

If for some reason the reviewers and panel members are not able to fulfil their obligations for a given work, the FNR should be informed immediately. The work cannot be delegated to another person without the prior written agreement of the FNR.
### 6. Call Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 3rd 2019</td>
<td>Launch of PRIDE Call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 8th 2019</td>
<td>Deadline Full Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End January 2020</td>
<td>Pre-selection panel and invitation of max. 15 DTUs to proceed to the next selection stage (PRIDE interviews)</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 5 – 6th 2020</td>
<td>PRIDE interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End March 2020</td>
<td>Funding decision by FNR board</td>
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</tbody>
</table>