Terms of Reference for the PEARL Scientific Advisory Board

For all PEARL funded research programmes, the FNR will commission a Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), to provide independent, external and science-orientated advice to the PEARL fellow and yearly reporting to the FNR. PEARL programmes run for a total duration of 5 years and it is vital that the goals and objectives of the programme remain ambitious and cutting-edge. The SAB assists in revising, formulating, and achieving the programme’s goals by acting as a critical sounding board in the development of new ideas and initiatives, and monitoring and evaluating the programme’s effectiveness.

The functions of the SAB are to:

a) Advise on the overall strategy and direction of the programme, particularly in terms of the scientific orientation. The panel should:
   - Review objectively the progress of the programme, its outcomes and the achievement of the milestones set
   - Review new project ideas and research directions
   - Highlight critical issues and emerging global trends in the field where programme could fill a gap or meet a need
   - Assess the research outcomes and/or identify new areas of research where the PI can reap the benefits of his/her scientific findings and build intellectual property
   - Act as an ambassador for the programme and help establish and develop networks internationally

b) Assist and advise on the management of the programme including:
   - The allocation of funding and human resources as well the development strategy for the group
   - Challenging the assumptions and operating routines of the programme
   - Advise on seeking new funding sources

c) Report on the progress of the PEARL funded programme to the FNR:
   - Critical appraisal of progress relative to objectives set
   - Benchmarking against international competition

The SAB is not a steering committee, and the advice given to the PEARL fellow is not binding. However, the SAB can make the FNR aware of severe issues in the project, and can recommend to the FNR to enforce modifications or stop the project if necessary.

Membership

At the start of the project, members of the SAB are selected by the FNR in consultation with the PEARL fellow. Members will normally serve for the whole duration of the PEARL project. However, if a panel member needs to be replaced
(e.g. due to an arising conflict of interest, change of institution, or other reasons), the FNR should be informed of the intended changes of the SAB compositions in a timely manner, so that a replacement can be found.

The Board should consist of a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 6 members.

SAB Members are individuals external to the programme who have relevant knowledge, experience and expertise in both the scientific domain as well as in research group leadership. It is not recommended that SAB members actively collaborate in other scientific projects with the PI.

Confidentiality

In order to support their ability to provide well-informed advice, SAB members may receive and discuss at meetings information from the PEARL programme that is confidential in nature. Thus, every member of the SAB signs a confidentiality agreement with the FNR before participating on the advisory board. The agreement prohibits the disclosure of any confidential information received through participation in the Board, including information received orally or in writing.

Timeline for annual SAB meetings and reporting

SAB meetings should be held yearly, roughly around the same month as when the project started. The agenda will be circulated in advance of meetings and will be prepared by the FNR in discussion with the SAB and the PEARL fellow. Meeting agendas will normally include a concise annual progress report by the PI which will form the basis of the discussion in the panel meeting, and should be made available by the PEARL fellow at least 1 month prior to the meeting.

The participants at SAB meetings are: the PEARL fellow, the SAB, representatives of the FNR, representatives of the host institution. The PEARL fellow can choose to involve others if deemed necessary (e.g. group members for scientific content discussion, etc.).

All SAB meetings are organized by the FNR with respect to logistics (accommodations, honorariums, travel reimbursement), but in coordination with the PEARL fellow to allow for desired specificities (e.g. lab tours, PhD candidate poster sessions, etc…). In the event that the SAB meeting will not be held on the FNR’s premises, the PEARL fellow is responsible for booking the meeting room, lunch, and transport after the SAB meeting.

Dinners are organized by the FNR the night before each SAB meeting, in order to have an informal exchange between the FNR and the SAB on the annual report.

Content of SAB meetings

During the panel session presentation should be kept to a minimum (the SAB should have sufficient knowledge of the achievements from the progress report and the presentations should just be a summary) and sufficient time should be provided for discussion and objective setting.
A maximum of one hour should be dedicated for a private discussion between the FNR and the SAB around the progress of the PEARL fellow and to address any topics that may have arisen.

Content of Annual SAB reports:
The conclusions of the meeting will result in a written SAB report which should contain an appraisal of the progress (in terms of outputs and milestones status), and recommendations for the PEARL fellow and the FNR. The SAB report should be approved by all SAB members by a maximum of 1 month after the SAB meeting and sent to the FNR. The FNR will then approve the report and send it to both the PEARL fellow and the management of the host institution.

If required, the SAB can recommend that the FNR request a clarification or revision to the scientific programme from the PEARL fellow. In this case, the PEARL fellow will finalize such a document for review by the SAB within an agreed upon timeframe.

Final report and SAB meeting
At the end of the PEARL funding period, the PEARL fellow writes a final report covering the scientific accomplishments, development of the group, and overall impact of the funded PEARL programme (‘PEARL Final Report template’).

This report goes to the SAB members, and a final SAB meeting is then held as a final evaluation of the funded programme and its overall quality. This meeting is completely organized by the FNR, and is held at the FNR’s offices. In addition to the SAB members, representatives of the host institution, the Secretary General of the FNR, as well as the PEARL standing panel are invited in order to provide a holistic evaluation of the PEARL programme.

A final SAB report is then prepared by the FNR, and sent to the PEARL fellow and host institution. The final SAB report is comprised of four parts:

- A summary of the final report/overall outcome of the project by the PEARL fellow
- The evaluation of the SAB on the outcomes of the PEARL programme
- The host institution’s opinion of the impact of the PEARL, including future perspectives within the institution
- The overall conclusion by the FNR of the success of the PEARL programme

Optional – PEARL final scientific conference
The PEARL fellow can choose to organize (with support of the FNR and the host institution) an international scientific conference at the same time as the final SAB meeting, in order to showcase the accomplishments of the PEARL project and build further connections between Luxembourg and international researchers in the field. In case of interest, the PEARL fellow should contact the FNR at least one year before the final SAB.