

Report on the evaluation of the Integrative Research
Unit on Social and Individual Development (INSIDE)
at the University of Luxembourg

Based on a peer review as commissioned by the Ministry of Higher Education
and Research of Luxembourg

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COMPANY INFORMATION

Authors

Andreas Balthasar, Prof. Dr. rer. pol.
Kristin Thorshaug, MSc

INTERFACE

Policy Studies, Research, Consulting
Seidenhofstrasse 12
CH-6003 Lucerne
Tel +41 (0)41 226 04 26
interface@interface-politikstudien.ch
www.interface-politikstudien.ch

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I INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Higher Education and Research (MESR) of Luxembourg mandated *Interface Policy Studies, Research, Consulting*, Switzerland, to organize and lead a research evaluation of the University of Luxembourg. Simultaneously, the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association carried out an institutional evaluation of the University of Luxembourg. The results of the IEP evaluation are published in a separate report.

The research evaluation was conducted in 2016 and followed two earlier evaluations carried out in 2008 and 2012.

The University of Luxembourg has three Faculties with research units conducting research in different scientific disciplines. In addition, there are three interdisciplinary centres.¹ The evaluation focused on the research performance of the University research units and interdisciplinary centres. This report presents the evaluation of the Integrative Research Unit on Social and Individual Development (INSIDE).

The observations and recommendations presented in this report are based on a peer review by the following three experts working in the research unit's research fields:

- Bea Cantillon, professor of social policy and director of the Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy at the University of Antwerp, Belgium
- Marie Johnston, emeritus professor of health psychology at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland
- Brendan Whelan, former director of the Economic and Social Research Institute Dublin and former research director of the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

The peer review consisted of a self-assessment report written by the INSIDE and a hearing at the research unit that took place in September 2016. The evaluation assessed the period 2012 to 2015. The hearing, which was organized and moderated by Interface, consisted of a self-presentation by the research unit, a group discussion of the self-assessment report, and several individual and group interviews. These included interviews with representatives of the management team, professors, PhD candidates,² and further members of the research staff. Based on the experts' assessments, the report was finalized by Andreas Balthasar and Kristin Thorshaug of Interface. The report has been approved by the experts.

¹ The Interdisciplinary Centre for Contemporary and Digital History was established in 2016. It is not part of the evaluation, as the assessed period is 2012 to 2015.

² The University of Luxembourg calls its PhD students 'PhD candidates'.

The overall results of all unit evaluations are summarized in a synthesis report.³ The synthesis report includes the findings from the interviews with representatives of the management team at the University of Luxembourg.

The report is divided into two parts: The first part discusses the expert team's observations gathered during the evaluation process. The focus is on the input, the output, and the outcome/impact of the research unit:

- *Input* includes the preconditions for the research conducted, such as strategies, financial and human resources, infrastructure, organization, and quality assurance systems.
- *Output* includes the performance of the research unit, exemplified through research results and their dissemination.
- *Outcome and impact* refer to the medium- and long-term effects as well as the relevance of the output on science, society, economy, and politics.

The second part presents the expert team's recommendations for further development of existing strengths and overcoming observed weaknesses.

The evaluation team would like to thank everyone involved for preparing and implementing the hearing at the INSIDE, for making the documentation available, and for participating in interviews.

³ Rieder, Stefan et al. (2017): Evaluation of the University of Luxembourg, Interface Policy Studies, Research, Consulting, Lucerne.

2.1 OVERALL ASSESSMENT

INSIDE demonstrates striking growth in research, publications, and funding in the evaluation period. The research unit has an excellent publication record in leading international journals as well as in journals with policy impact. It has had impressive success in obtaining external funding within very competitive channels at the national and European level. In the experts' opinion, the research unit has important impact on the society of Luxembourg, for one, through its support of governmental bodies and, for another, through its contribution to social work. Potential for further development lies in increasing contact and cooperation both within the unit and with national research bodies and in securing new expertise in future recruitment processes.

2.2 INPUT

Research strategy

The INSIDE was established in 2006 with the aim to bring together existing research capacities to investigate demographic and social change in a multidisciplinary way and from a life course perspective. The INSIDE incorporated existing academic staff members having diverse research profiles. In addition to conducting research, the research unit is responsible for designing and offering an extensive range of undergraduate, master's degree, and PhD programmes.

The experts note that the strategy of the research unit, namely, to conduct high quality research, disseminate to the scientific community, and provide expertise and advice at national, European, and international levels, has been successful. The experts acknowledge that the research unit has been effective in the evaluation period in addressing their objectives, especially in providing expertise at a national level. Further, through its strategy of building up excellent laboratory facilities, the INSIDE has laid the foundation to become a leading research institute within the health domain.

The four institutes of the research unit focus on health; family and generations; social and economic inequality; and social welfare and social cohesion. As such, the INSIDE demonstrates a wide range of research areas within its four institutes. The research unit has been successful in focusing on a number of research domains using a variety of methodologies and approaches. The research unit thus constitutes a successful confederation of research groups. In the near future, the INSIDE needs to secure several new professorial appointments due to retirement and further recruitment. The experts note that this presents an opportunity for the research unit to reassess its strategy, including the possibility of restructuring its research areas.

Human and financial resources, infrastructure, and equipment

In the experts' opinion, the working conditions at the INSIDE are very good. Across institutes and positions, the researchers interviewed stated that they appreciate the positive working environment. The resources available within the research unit are

assessed as excellent regarding financial resources, available personnel, and infrastructure. Further, the multilingualism present at the INSIDE (as well as at the University of Luxembourg in general) is viewed as a strong asset for research. The experts encourage the INSIDE to take advantage of this asset in its research activities.

The experts welcome the newly started Centre for research methods and data analysis at the Faculty of Language and Literature, Humanities, Arts and Education (FLSHASE) as an important support to the INSIDE and to the other research units in the Faculty.

The experts identify three issues linked to human and financial resources as well as to infrastructure that should be given priority:

1. First, there is uncertainty among the researchers at the INSIDE concerning internal career paths and promotion possibilities. The extensive use of temporary contracts at the University of Luxembourg reinforces this insecurity. There also seem to be varying policies on the appointment of permanent positions at the four institutes. The experts see the need for transparent and coherent recruitment and a clear career path policy across the research unit's institutes. The experts recognize, of course, that only a minority of the more junior researchers can be retained or promoted.
2. Second, the experts identify issues concerning the access to infrastructure at the new Campus Belval. The researchers interviewed provided examples of strict guidelines and restrictions that hamper the use of meeting rooms, the library, and kitchen facilities. Access was particularly limited outside the normal working day, when academic researchers would expect to be able to continue to work. By limiting contact and interaction among researchers, these restrictions may have negative effects on the research activities as well as on the social environment at Campus Belval. Novel research ideas frequently arise from such informal interaction. The experts encourage the University to look into these issues and to facilitate optimal access to the infrastructure.
3. A third and final issue concerns the internal funding possibilities at the University of Luxembourg. The experts note a perceived lack of transparency in the funding decisions at the University level. Connected with this is the non-competitive funding available in some research units at the University. The experts welcome equal access to non-competitive funding at the University, as this represents an attractive funding possibility that should be open to all research areas.

Organization

The experts find that the organization of the INSIDE functions well and has good supportive leadership. Particularly noteworthy is the development of an attractive and positive working environment. The research unit is able to attract junior researchers of high quality and supports them in developing their careers with ambition and enjoyment.

In the experts' opinion, the research unit could profit from increased opportunities for informal contact among the internal institutes and research groups. Through social

activities and shared presentations of research, the research unit could lay the foundation for increased collaboration across research groups and institutes.

External research collaborations and service provision

The INSIDE demonstrates very good national and international scientific networks and collaborations. The experts further view the existence of a Luxembourg “EU path finder” in Brussels as very positive, as it enables researchers to be more effective in bidding for EU funds.

The short distances between research and government actors in Luxembourg are seen as beneficial to the effective transfer and application of INSIDE research; this enables research to provide social benefit to the country. The experts identify further opportunities for collaboration: Especially the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER), the LIS Cross-National Data Center in Luxembourg, and the Luxembourg Institute of Health (LIH) are seen as important partners.

Quality assurance system

The expert team notices that publication achievements vary between staff and between the institutes. This may be due to historic causes in the initial staffing of the research unit or to the additional tasks that must be performed by the unit, such as undergraduate teaching or the training of social workers. Further, some institutes are of much more recent origin than others are and may not have had time to accumulate a large volume of research. This variation might not be an issue, as it may provide an effective structure for ensuring that all research, teaching, and training are of high quality. Nevertheless, the experts encourage the INSIDE to implement procedures for monitoring and providing feedback to staff and institutes on their research funding and publication achievements. The experts note that systematic collection and dissemination of information on publications in leading journals would provide a guarantee of the quality of the research at the University of Luxembourg to prospective funders and raise the profile of the University and its research units.

2.3 OUTPUT

In the documentation made available, there is clear evidence of output of high quality. The INSIDE has an excellent publication record, with publications in international leading journals as well as in journals that have impact at a policy level. In the experts’ opinion, the INSIDE should attach further priority to publishing more of their work in international leading journals in order to maintain international competitiveness.

The INSIDE demonstrates a strong ability to attract external competitive funding. It has had impressive success in obtaining funding within very competitive channels at the national and European level. The research unit has shown an especially impressive initiative in attracting funding for development in research on inequalities. A notable example at the national level is the appointment of two joint PEARL chairs funded by

the Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR).⁴ At the European level, the recent successes within EU funding programmes, such as the project Health Behaviour of School-aged Children, represent a great achievement. In addition, the INSIDE has successfully obtained funding to establish laboratory facilities, allowing investigation of a broad range of psychological and biopsychosocial processes.

The research unit demonstrates research of practical value, such as advancements within the area of early dementia, the impact of social and economic changes on the middle class, and the improvement of the skill base within the social work professions. The experts note that a majority of the staff at the INSIDE take their obligations towards supporting Luxembourg society very seriously; there are several examples of the INSIDE providing reports of clear value to policy makers and governmental bodies in Luxembourg and beyond.

In the context of innovation, the experts wish to highlight the work of the research group on Ageing and Life Span Development. Through its understanding of developmental processes, the research group has managed to design environments that are compatible for individuals with mild cognitive impairments, enabling them to remain in their own homes using assisted living services.

For the purpose of a more detailed description of the research output, the experts assessed the output of the four institutes at the INSIDE:

HEBE

The Institute for Health and Behaviour (HEBE) has four research groups. The HEBE has expertise in an impressive range of methodologies, including use of biomarkers, cardiovascular and respiratory psychophysiology, laboratory experimentation, assessment and treatment of psychological disorders, self-regulation treatment interventions for pain and health behaviours, questionnaire assessment, and epidemiological studies. It is therefore well placed to tackle the key research questions that it addresses. The HEBE has a large output of scientific papers, including papers in the most highly esteemed peer-reviewed journals. It also has a very good record of obtaining external research funding, including excellent EU funding. As a result, it has increased in size and has many researchers employed through external funding. In addition, the HEBE was awarded a substantial prize that enabled them to develop outstanding laboratory facilities, which they have brought into functioning very efficiently and are now poised to use in state-of-the-art research. In addition to its scientific programme, the HEBE contributes to the understanding and treatment of pain and several psychological disorders. It has the potential to address key health problems such as diabetes, cancers, and cardiovascular disease by extending its self-regulation portfolio to management of health-related behaviours including smoking, physical activity/sedentary behaviour, healthy eating, and drug/alcohol use. To maximize this potential, recruitment of expertise in health behaviour change, combined with additional expertise in digital/mobile

⁴ The PEARL programme is directed at public research institutions in Luxembourg and leading research professionals abroad. The goals of the programme are to recruit internationally leading researchers with outstanding track records and thereby to strengthen the research areas that are of strategic importance to Luxembourg. PEARL projects have a lifespan of five years with a financial contribution of between three to four million euros by the FNR (see <www.fnr.lu>).

technology and analyses, is required to enable the HEBE to be among the leading international groups in this rapidly advancing research area. In addition, this research would have applications in disease prevention and enhancement of health in Luxembourg.

IRSEI

The PEARL Institute for Research on Socio-Economic Inequality (IRSEI) addresses important societal and analytical problems related to social and economic inequalities in Europe and beyond in an interdisciplinary, comparative, and longitudinal perspective. The research brings together sociological research on intergenerational and other social inequalities and economic analysis of well-being in a dynamic perspective. This research is highly relevant to both the academic advancement of knowledge and the Luxembourgish society and beyond. The work is innovative and at the forefront of scientific debates on increasing inequalities. This is largely due to the very active role of the two leaders of the group. The group has definitely become an international player: The number of publications in peer-reviewed journals is very high, the members of the research group have presented their work at many conferences and seminars, and they have organized some important international events themselves. The group is also very successful in attracting research funds (e.g. H2020, NORFACE). Thanks to the appointment of new researchers, many new research topics have been addressed. The institute organizes events that raise the local visibility of IRSEI and its work, exciting a high level of interest and engagement. The evaluation team is of the view that IRSEI will continue to make important contributions within and beyond the University by developing their core focus on socio-economic inequalities and social policies. The experts fully endorse the PEARL programme's scientific advisory board recommendation on the further development of the IRSEI research as a priority within the University by providing further personal and financial resources. Although the team has been building links with the prestigious LIS, LISER, Eurostat, and other Luxembourg-based entities, forging an even greater number of significant links is of major strategic importance.

IGEFA

The Institute for Research on Generations and Family (IGEFA) is the largest of the institutes in INSIDE, with 32 FTE staff. It focuses on three very important domains of study: education and care in early childhood; research on youth; and ageing and lifespan development. The institute works to address these issues using an explicitly interdisciplinary approach. These are vital topics from both a scientific and a policy point of view. The staff members at the IGEFA have published substantially in good international journals; some researchers have achieved H-index scores in excess of 20 based on the extent to which their publications are cited in the literature. The researchers utilize a wide range of analytic techniques and data sources. The level of staff participation in international conferences and meetings is impressive. An important innovation is the recently established Documentation Centre for Youth Research. This brings together digitalized information gleaned from the youth research conducted in the IGEFA and grey literature on youth research in Luxembourg. This centre will be of benefit to both researchers and practitioners. As well as adding to scientific knowledge, the institute's work has helped to improve policy in a number of areas. A good example of research that has immediate policy application is the project 'MinD – Designing

for People with Dementia: mindful self-empowerment and social engagement’, which is developing technological tools to help improve psychosocial well-being. The IGFEA is involved in a number of high profile European collaborations, such as the COST Action on Intergenerational Family Solidarity across Europe and the cross-national survey of school students ‘Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children’ (HBSC). The HBSC is a very prestigious project, and participation in it will enhance the standing of both the research unit and the University. At the national level, the Ministry of National Education and Youth is financing an ongoing study that is putting national youth research in a comparative European context and delivering a five-yearly national youth report. The institute has built up continuing interaction with the Ministry on these topics.

IRISS

The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Work, Social Pedagogy, Social Welfare (IRISS) focuses in particular on processes of social change such as transitions during the life course; life worlds, social supports and social networks; and the development of social work as a discipline and a profession. A substantial proportion of the institute’s effort is directed towards supporting innovation and improvement in Luxembourg’s social work sector. This may explain why the publication performance of this institute is not as strong as that of the other institutes examined, as evidenced by fewer publications and lower H-index scores. This may well be an acceptable trade-off, as the experts were impressed by the professionalism of the staff devoted to the social work component of the institute’s work. The IRISS does of course participate in a number of substantial research projects. For instance, the Horizon 2020 project MOVE (‘Mapping mobility – pathways, institutions and structural effects of youth mobility in Europe’) is noteworthy. It investigates cross-border geographic mobility of young people aged 18-29 in the EU, which is a very relevant topic. Another important project is BiSoNetMig (‘Biographies and (trans)national social support networks of older migrants in Luxembourg’). Using qualitative methods, BiSoNetMig found that, contrary to widely held beliefs, it is not a general expectation in these groups that elders will receive hands-on social support from their children.

2.4 OUTCOME AND IMPACT

The INSIDE demonstrates clear impact through its publications in international leading journals as well as through its success in international and national competitive funding channels. In the experts’ opinion, there is research within INSIDE that represents leading trends in the domain. Notable examples are found in psychophysiological work as well in as studies focusing on longitudinal data and interdisciplinary approaches to inequality.

The research unit has had clear impact on the health, well-being, and wealth of Luxembourgish society through its research a variety of topics, including: elderly care; formal and informal caregivers; support of health care professionals; psychological help for people with psychological disorders as well as youth development; inequality and social policy. The experts further acknowledge the research unit’s clear service impact on society, not only in the training of future social workers but also in the professionalization of social work (e.g. through quality standards and through research on

in-home care services). As well as providing advice directly to policy makers, INSIDE research also raises the level of general policy discourse in Luxembourg and increases public awareness of the sometimes complex issues underlying current policy issues and dilemmas. Furthermore, the INSIDE has had impact outside of Luxembourg, displaying an influence at the EU level and beyond. Internationally as well as nationally, scientific reporting from the INSIDE supports politicians and decision-makers in the further development of strategy with respect to their areas of responsibility.

Although the impact is impressive, it is not well documented. Therefore, the full range and depth of impact is not easily visible to those outside the research unit, including the University. The experts encourage the INSIDE and its researchers to strive to make their research and influence more visible in society. This entails strengthening the documentation of their impact through accumulating evidence.

2.5 STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE

In the experts' opinion, the INSIDE has a clear potential to become a leading European institute within the field of European social and behavioural science research. The experts recommend that in its future strategy, the research unit should not only focus on consolidating its existing activity. Instead, it could set higher and more focused ambitions concerning its impact at a European level. The experts also recommend that the INSIDE take time to review its strategy for further improvement of the innovative excellence of its research.

Sustainable development and health were identified to the experts as the key research areas in the future strategy of the INSIDE. Although clearly pertinent, these are very broad, generic issues. The experts encourage the research unit to identify further and more focused areas where it has a potential to become an international leader.

Further, the identified areas should influence future recruitment processes, both in the succession planning and in the planned new recruitments. The outstanding laboratory facilities available should play an important role in the future strategy, but to maximize their output and impact, expertise in methodologies using digital and mobile technologies for physiological and behavioural data should be appointed. The experts also noted a gap in the area of health behaviour, which could benefit from the recruitment of expertise in health-related behaviour change to complement existing expertise. A third gap in expertise was found within comparative European social policy designed to reduce mounting inequalities.

Luxembourg is uniquely placed to develop research in the general area of socio-economic inequality and policy because of the co-location of the PEARL Institute for Research on Socio-Economic Inequality in the INSIDE, the LIS Cross-National Data Center, and the LISER. The experts feel that at present, the potential synergies between these bodies are not being fully exploited and that more should be done to encourage collaboration between them. A funding stream, incorporating clear conditions about enhanced and in-depth collaboration, should be put in place to facilitate this development.

3.1 SUMMARY

The INSIDE demonstrates impressive growth in funding, research, and publications in the evaluation period. The research unit has been successful in establishing a number of research strands with strengths in a variety of research areas, using a range of methodologies and approaches. The working conditions at the INSIDE are very good, and the resources available are assessed as excellent. The research unit has an excellent publication record, with publications in leading international academic journals as well as in journals that have impact at a policy level. The research unit also demonstrates output of practical value, such as advancements within the area of early dementia and improvement of the skill base within the social work professions. The INSIDE provides valuable reports to several ministries that actively seek their input. In the experts' opinion, the INSIDE has fundamental and important impact on the society of Luxembourg.

There is potential for increased contact and cooperation among researchers at the different institutes within the research unit as well as for increased collaboration with national research bodies. The experts further identify areas of scientific expertise that the INSIDE should prioritize in future recruitment processes. In the experts' opinion, in future, the research unit should set higher and more focused ambitions concerning its impact at a European level. The necessary future recruitments present an opportunity for the research unit to reassess its strategy, including the possibility of restructuring its research areas.

3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the observations stated above, the expert team formulates the following recommendations for the research unit, the University, and the MESR. The following recommendations are relevant to the research unit as a whole and to the individual institutes:

Recommendation 1: Secure coherence of research strategy and recruitments

The experts noted that several new professorial appointments will be made due to retirement and further recruitment. Prior to making these appointments, the experts recommend that the INSIDE take the opportunity to reassess its strategy, including the possibility of restructuring its research areas.

Recommendation 2: Increase synergies within the research unit

The INSIDE is a successful confederation of research institutes. There is further potential for increased contact among researchers at the different institutes to capitalize on the potential of the confederation. To increase the synergies, the experts recommend considering the organization of, and support for, more joint events and opportunities for informal networking. This could strengthen the potential for innovative cross-institutional research.

Recommendation 3: Secure future appointments to fill identified gaps in expertise

The experts identify three particular gaps in expertise that the INSIDE should prioritize in future recruitment processes. The research unit should consider recruiting expertise within:

- comparative European social policy;
- health behaviour change;
- methodologies using mobile technologies for physiological and behavioural data.

Recommendation 4: Improve visibility of impact

The experts were impressed by the amount of impact that the INSIDE has on a practice and policy level. The experts recommend that the INSIDE strive to improve the visibility of its influence through accumulation and documentation of evidence of the impact.

Recommendation 5: Maximize use of the laboratories

The laboratory facilities are excellent, and the experts see it as pertinent that the equipment available be utilized to its full potential. In the self-assessment report, the INSIDE lists the lack of large-scale neuroscience equipment (fMRI) as a weakness. The experts recommend the research unit undertake a full assessment of the costs and potential benefit of an investment of that kind.

Recommendation 6: Increase collaboration with research bodies inside and outside the University of Luxembourg

The experts recommend that the INSIDE in general and the IRSEI in particular should seek to strengthen further the collaboration with national research bodies such as LISER, LIH, and LIS but also with other research units at the University of Luxembourg. The co-location of a number of these research bodies and facilities in Luxembourg provides an important competitive advantage for the country. To maximize this advantage, there should be improved collaboration, including integrative steps such as joint appointments and grant applications. In areas such as social policy evaluation and the use of data resources, collaboration with other research bodies is likely to be beneficial. The experts stress that the collaboration with national research entities should be secured through joint projects rather than through top-down steering by the University of Luxembourg or the government.

Recommendation 7: Develop participant panel

The experts recommend that the INSIDE in collaboration with the FLSHASE and the University of Luxembourg develop an appropriately selected panel or pool of potential participants who would be available to participate and therefore contribute data in research projects. This would represent an important asset for researchers, especially for PhD candidates, and would constitute a valuable resource.

The following recommendations are relevant to the University of Luxembourg as well as to the MESR:

Recommendation 8: Secure transparency in funding processes

A number of the persons interviewed found that decisions on funding within the University of Luxembourg were insufficiently transparent. The experts recommend that the University of Luxembourg take the necessary steps to maximize transparency in all processes concerning funding. This would improve the motivation of researchers to apply for such funds.

Recommendation 9: Secure access to administrative data (e.g. the national social security database)

The experts recommend that the government of Luxembourg secure access to administrative data for research purposes, subject to satisfactory security and confidentiality guarantees. For example, the national social security database should be reopened and made available to researchers in order to maximize the research output and the input to governmental planning and policy. This would help to ensure that Luxembourg could become an international research laboratory.

Recommendation 10: Secure optimal access to facilities

The experts identify issues concerning INSIDE researchers' access to the infrastructure at the new Campus Belval (i.e. use of meeting rooms, the library, and kitchen facilities). It is recommended that the University of Luxembourg look into these issues and facilitate optimal access to the infrastructure.