



Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur et de
la Recherche

Attn. Monsieur le Ministre de l'Enseignement
supérieur et de la Recherche
18-20, Montée de la Pétrusse
L-2327 Luxembourg

Belval, le 15 juin 2023

Objet : Réponse du LISER au rapport d'évaluation INTERFACE 2023

Monsieur le Ministre,

Par la présente j'ai l'honneur de vous faire parvenir la réponse de notre institut de recherche au rapport d'évaluation 2023. Cette réponse a été élaborée en étroite collaboration avec notre Conseil d'administration.

Je tiens tout d'abord à vous remercier très chaleureusement pour le caractère particulièrement constructif de ce processus d'évaluation qui ne manquera pas d'enrichir la poursuite de notre travail dans les années à venir.

En 2017, le Conseil d'administration du LISER a doté notre institut d'orientations stratégiques fortes dont le niveau d'exigence technique et organisationnelle était particulièrement élevé et ambitieux. La mise en œuvre de ces orientations stratégiques nous a amenés à transformer profondément notre organisation et à la doter de capacités d'innovation et de développement nouvelles. Voir le fruit de ce travail collectif reconnu, valorisé mais aussi enrichi à travers ce processus d'évaluation représente une valeur inestimable pour la poursuite de la progression de notre institut.

Je vous remercie pour l'attention que vous porterez à notre réponse, demeure à votre entière disposition pour tout complément d'information y afférent et vous prie d'agréer, Monsieur le Ministre, l'expression de mes salutations les plus respectueuses.



Aline Muller
Directeur général du LISER

In general, the evaluation of LISER's performance over the years 2018-2021 was very good. According to the experts, LISER amply fulfils its mission to promote scientifically sound and socially relevant knowledge. This statement was based on several quantitative and qualitative performance indicators. The experts recognized the enormous growth in competitive funding as well as in contract research, including a remarkable increase in funding at the European level. Not only the inputs, but also our outputs were highly valued. Compared to the resources invested in the research institute, the research outputs and generated outcomes have been evaluated as impressive. LISER's working environment contributed to this excellent performance. The experts underline that the working culture is characterized by openness, exchange and collaboration. This creates a working environment in which employees feel included, encouraged and motivated.

The evaluation of the performance of LISER's Urban Development and Mobility (UDM) department over the years 2018-2021 was very good. Based on the bibliometric analysis, more than half of UDMs publications were published in the top 10 per cent journals. The publications received 62 per cent more citations than the average in UDMs research field. From a societal impact perspective, UDMs involvement in observatories is very strong, which is highly valued by the national stakeholders. UDMs organizational structure contributed to this performance. The department structure is rather informal and flexible and avoids rivalry and competition between the two research themes. While the highly positive evolution of the department is acknowledged, several points formulated by the experts will need our attention in our future work:

- The undervaluation of societal impact activities in comparison with scientific excellence ;
- The strengthening of UDMs transversal collaborations with other departments and programmes ;
- The diversification of our societal impact through participatory, transdisciplinary and transformative research and new partnerships with societal stakeholders ;
- The further strengthening of the international focus of our activities but not at the expense of the national focus.
- The improvement of the management of workload across departments and staff members ;
- The development of performance-based incentives.

LISER's Living Conditions (LC) department has proven to develop synergies, skills and reinforce scientific and societal impact by working on clusters of projects on well-identified areas as, for example, education & children well-being and climate change over 2018-2021. Indisputably however, inequality and welfare analysis are LC's core topics. It spreads across multiple

dimensions, impacted for instance through the Covid-19 crisis and the long-term climate challenges. These phenomena have huge impact on people's behaviors & living conditions. The understanding of socio-economic trends in Luxembourg and in Europe and the necessity of supporting policy-makers in these matters require an holistic perspective and a multi-disciplinary approach.

The LIS-LISER initiative is a flagship project, consolidating our data and skills expertise, strengthening our network and disseminating our achievements internationally. It embodies also with a rich visiting program, focused on our core competences.

Further elements that will require our attention and efforts over the upcoming years are:

- The constant focus on the quality of new recruitments, especially for PhD students and postdocs, to ensure they fit within the department research agenda and can contribute to its publishing strategy. Senior researchers are expected to increase international partnerships, improve publications quality and generate spillovers in favor of young researchers and policy-oriented colleagues ;
- The importance of risk management at research management level: COVID restrictions played some role in few collaborative project delays (surveys, meetings, and in-person interviews). This experience has allowed us to improve our risk-management strategy, by better accompanying the genesis of projects and adopting risk-sharing schemes at inception of projects ;
- A targeted resource allocation to consolidate international partnerships in Europe and US and to reach publications in top-5 journals ;
- The continued investment in microsimulation as a key research infrastructure of the department (contributing to several projects covering different thematic areas and to the DSS Competence Centre). LC's success also hinges upon its mastery of advanced skills that push the boundaries of inequality measurement, from causality analysis to new machine learning techniques.

We have seen the research agenda and research strategy of LISER's Labour Market department appreciated, strengthened and enriched in both its relevance and focus through the evaluation process. Over the coming years, the department will be consolidating its ambitious and relevant research strategy with core topics. The focus of the annual appraisals, training and hiring activities will be even more geared toward aligning researchers around the common research topics and fill gaps in expertise. Further efforts will be undertaken to find more synergies between research and contract work aligning around the core topics and choosing contract work wisely.

We will continue our international strategy of organizing high-level workshops and conferences and co-founder of a European network of labor market research institutes (ELMI). To strengthen our research potential and international visibility further, we will expand our visiting and fellows program to bring both established and young promising researchers to Luxembourg to collaborate with us and mentor junior researchers. Finally, we will follow through with our roadmap to build up a data infrastructure for labor market and skills data at the national but also international (Greater Region) level in close collaboration with Information Systems Platform (ISP) and the Center of Competence in Data Science and Simulation (DSS).

While unfortunately too little time and attention could be given to LISER's research programmes during this evaluation, we are nevertheless most grateful to the experts for having shared their assessments and evaluations of the roll-out of our interdisciplinary research programmes, which stimulate collaborations and interactions within and across LISER's various research departments. More specifically, we appreciate the generally very positive comments on the performance of LISER's Health and Health Systems research programme. The evaluation raises concerns about the extent to which the research programmes are integrated into the departments. The recommendation invites to consider possible measures to further strengthen their organisational anchoring in the departments. The HHS is collaborating with researchers in all departments and hopes to be able to foster collaboration across LISER via the recent establishment of the Joint Research Group "CARES" with LIH. This should also help address the suggestion of the Evaluation to strengthen collaboration with external partners (esp. LIH).

LISER's research programme on Crossing Borders (CB) was similarly established as a unified research agenda to consolidate research activities and initiate new projects focused on cross-border flows of people. It fosters collaborations among all three departments at LISER, not just UDM. The UDM department, renowned for its extensive research on commuting flows in various regions of Europe, plays a vital role at LISER. The research programme effectively coordinates studies on both commuting and migration flows, which hold significant importance for Luxembourg and are interconnected with UDM (on topics such as the housing market and congestion) and with LM and LC (on topics such as racism, discrimination, inequality, employment and growth). Importantly, the research program has successfully secured funding that benefits all departments, ensuring it never restricts the activities of any department but rather enhances complementarity within the institute.

Since its inception in 2019, the Research Program on Crossing Borders has initiated several noteworthy projects and activities. These include an in-depth analysis of the prevailing situation in Luxembourg concerning racism and discrimination, conducted in collaboration with LM and LC. Another significant endeavor focuses on exploring the interplay between globalization, inequality, and populism across Europe, which aligns with the research priorities of LC and UDM. Additionally, the program investigates the connection between cross-border mobility, housing market development, and spatial inequality in the Greater Region, bringing together the expertise of UDM and LM. Moreover, the program encompasses projections on the impact of climate change on global mobility, a research topic that involves LM. Lastly, the program analyses the effects of Luxembourg's development and humanitarian policy, forging a partnership with LM. Furthermore, the program coordinates a dedicated doctoral training unit focused on the analysis of cross-border mobility, engaging supervisors from both LM and UDM. These activities highlight the breadth and significance of the Research Program on Crossing Borders.

The evaluation reports also raised a number of transversal questions that our research institution needs to analyse and in relation to which it will need to articulate clear management and development strategies.

Regarding the oft-cited issue of societal impact in the report, for instance, it should be stressed that the types of societal impact (awareness, attitudes, decision-making/behavioural change, enhancing capacity), the overarching - but normative - aim of creating impact 'Improving the functioning of society' and the measurement of societal impact need to further be discussed. Although in science several metrics have been developed to measure scientific impact, their legitimacy is often criticised. Large differences exist between disciplines in publishing and citation practices, there are differences between quantitative and qualitative impacts, it is often difficult to link impact to a particular publication and many factors (often outside the control of researchers) determine whether a publication leads to a scientific impact. Actually, similar arguments can be used for measuring societal impact. Our opinion is not to focus only on measuring the impacts but also on the conditions to be created by the research organization to have an impact. Examples: offering training on societal impact, discussing impact during annual appraisals, networking with professional knowledge translators, and organizing public events.

The optimal balance between permanent and fixed-term contracts has also been raised several times in the evaluation report. It triggers the question whether LISER should aim to increase or decrease the proportion of fixed-term staff. It is challenging to determine the optimal ratio, while our institute's ratio is comparable to those of similar institutes and departments in the research sector. Due to the age pyramid at LISER, where many researchers on permanent contracts are in the "more mature" stage and less likely to leave soon, there is a limit to the number of permanent positions becoming available. This is until the top of the pyramid retires, and then there may be a risk of a gap in experienced researchers. In parallel, having 40% of fixed-term contracts that allow young researchers or Ph.D. students to work at the institute is invaluable in terms of ensuring innovation, creativity, and keeping up with new trends, scientific approaches, and methodologies. Without regular hiring practices for younger generations and a low turnover rate, the institute could struggle to remain innovative in the medium term.

The allocation of the block grant in a research institute needs to evolve with the development and maturity of the institute, while minimizing radical changes. To achieve this, the institute plans to make its block grant allocation evolve following a strategic investment- and performance-based allocation model. The institute needs as well to integrate in its allocation model strategic associated dimensions such as cross-functional collaboration, workload management, skills management, and off-project time investment and management. To ensure consistency, the evolution of LISER's allocation model should balance between entities and people across various levels like individual, organizational, and departmental/programme levels. The institute's goal is to generate efficiency and better invest off-project time, which is key to Liser's innovation and development capacity.

In the next coming time, these points of attention with others raised in the evaluation report regarding e.g. the representation of Ph.D. students, the career support for post-doctoral researchers, the development of a workload model, will be included in policy measures and guidelines at corporate and /or department's level.

To conclude, our institute and research community would like to express our utmost gratitude for the constructive nature of this evaluation and the valuable insights gathered through continuous, inspiring dialogues throughout the entire process. The evaluation's outcomes will undoubtedly enrich our work in the years to come.

In 2017, LISER's Board of Directors provided our institute with strong strategic orientations setting highly challenging technical and organisational requirements. We are proud of the progress we have made in embracing and implementing these orientations. The stringent directions set by the board necessitated a complete transformation of our institute, and we can now boast new innovation capabilities and growth opportunities.

We are immensely thrilled that our collective efforts have been acknowledged, esteemed, and reinforced through this evaluation process. This recognition is immensely valuable and will encourage continued progress toward achieving our goals and fulfilling our missions to serve society.

