

May 2025

Evaluation of the Research Part of the University of Luxembourg: Evaluation Report

Department of Law (DL)



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Prof Pascal de Vareilles-Sommières (chair), Prof Helena Soleto Muñoz, Prof Christoph Teichmann

Executive Summary

Context

The Department of Law is a small department compared with equivalents abroad. It has 12 research groups working across five research areas: banking and commercial law; criminal law and legal theory; private law; European and Luxembourg public and tax law; and technology law. Most of the research is applied and benefits from the proximity of both the Luxembourg and the European courts and institutions as well as an advanced financial sector. It is unusual in operating in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual context and spanning Luxembourgish, French, Belgian, German, European and international law frameworks.

Performance

The department has a good strategy and organisation for working within this exciting context, which have been built in a bottom-up fashion and require careful succession planning to retain the department's edge. It is well organised and punches above its weight in terms of scientific quality, contributing to global developments in legal research, though its very applied focus makes it important to learn from and contribute to advances in more fundamental research and philosophy of law. The recent incorporation of the former Max Planck institute into the university to form the Luxembourg Centre for European Law (LCEL) provides new opportunities to the department.

The research infrastructure and working conditions in the department are very good by international standards. The department provides a good context for undergraduate and graduate studies and early career development, though there is scope for improvement in promotion processes and opportunities. It contributes strongly to teaching, to the extent that teaching loads are close to starting to crowd out research.

The department has significant societal impact, especially in Luxembourgish and European law.

Recommendations

The department should seize the opportunities provided by the presence of LCEL and new lines of development in the European courts, communicate better the transnational and global aspects of its research, and ensure it keeps up with and participates in developments in fundamental research.

The university should recognise the specificities of research in law, and adapt some of its rules and processes (which are more tuned to the needs of the 'hard' sciences) to cope with them, converge promotion schemes for early-stage researchers to make them fairer and more attractive to potential younger researchers, and explore ways to reduce the inefficiencies involved in separating undergraduate teaching in Belval and the rest of the department's activities in Kirchberg.

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1 Introduction and background

1.1 Introduction to the evaluation

The Ministry of Research and Higher Education (MESR) of Luxembourg mandated Technopolis Group with the evaluation of the research part of the University of Luxembourg. This evaluation was conducted from May 2024 to June 2025. According to Art. 50/2 of the modified law on the organisation of the University of Luxembourg of June 27th, 2018, based on the original law of 2003, the University is subject to external evaluation every four years, the present evaluation assesses both the research and institutional aspects of the University¹. The main time period to be covered by this exercise is 2018-2023. Next to a retrospective assessment of achievements, the evaluations' prospective elements include the evaluation of the strategies and plans of the University as well as the evaluators and the panel assessment of challenges and opportunities ahead.

The University's mission, as defined by law, is threefold: to offer higher education courses leading to degrees, diplomas and certificates; to conduct research; and to contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of Luxembourg.

This report is part of the assessment of the research performance of the Universities' 13 research departments and three interdisciplinary centres and, covers the Department of Law in the Faculty of Law, Economics, and Finance. The evaluation is based on international external peer review and covers the performance of the research department, taking into account various aspects such as inputs (e.g., finances, human resources, infrastructure, strategy) and outputs/impacts (e.g., research outcomes, innovation activities, services). A separate report covers the assessment of organisation, management, and governance matters.

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

- Prof Pascal de Vareilles-Sommières (chair), Université Paris1 Panthéon-Sorbonne
- Prof Helena Soleto Muñoz, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid
- Prof Christoph Teichmann, Universität Würzburg

The assessment is based on a self-evaluation report submitted by the Department of Law, background information on the Luxembourg research system information provided by Technopolis Group, and an on-site visit of the entity in January 2025. The hearing, which was organised and moderated by Technopolis, consisted of a self-presentation by the department of its research areas as well as group interviews with external partners and clients.

The committee applied the following evaluation criteria and organised the present report accordingly: quality of the research, impact of the research (third mission), and future potential of the research in the department/IC.

The evaluation team would like to thank all those who helped us prepare the evaluation, those who provided information and those who were interviewed during the consultation.

¹ The external evaluation of the University covers teaching and research activities, central administration and internal organisation. The focus alternates between research and education. All evaluation reports are published by the Ministry. <https://mesr.gouvernement.lu/fr/dossiers/dossiers/rapports-d-evaluations.html>

1.2 The Department

The Department of Law is part of the Faculty of Law, Economics and Finance. It is small compared with many law departments, but is unusual in operating in a multicultural environment. It is the only group doing teaching and research on law in Luxembourg, and in practice is a guardian of the Luxembourgish legal tradition. It has 12 research groups working across five research areas: banking and commercial law; criminal law and legal theory; private law; European and Luxembourg public and tax law; and technology law. Most of the research is applied and benefits from the proximity of both Luxembourg and European courts as well as an advanced financial sector.

In 2023, 69% of its €11.8m research income was provided through institutional funding with the balance mostly coming from FNR (21%), other Luxembourgish sources (7%), and EU research programmes (3%). It had 21 full and 6 associate professors, as well as 5 research scientists and 15 postdocs. It also had 113 PhD students, up from 74 in 2018. The department is based on the Kirchberg campus, but does its undergraduate teaching at Belval, about 25km away.

2 Research strategy and organisation

In the view of the panel, the organisation and composition of the department is appropriate for conducting its research activities. It supports interdisciplinary approaches, as the department includes a broad range of research areas and is very well connected with other university departments as well as external institutions. All members of the department meet in a regular *jour fixe*, that creates a good channel for coordination and communication.

The department has a cohesive and adequate strategy in recruitment and internationalisation. There are enough different opportunities available to obtain research funding to allow the researchers to “choose the kind of scholars they want to be” in a bottom-up manner. This does, however, mean that the department needs to monitor its composition and ensure that it has critical mass where needed. Gender literacy is included as a challenge in the research strategy and should be pursued, even though the department has a relatively good gender balance in its employment.

Succession among the full professors is a key issue for ensuring that human resource development remains consistent with the department's overall strategy and needs. In the next five years, six or seven of the twenty-one full professors in the Department of Law will retire. The department anticipates that the recruitment of new talent will continue to be done in cooperation with the university, ensuring that research groups are adequately staffed, expanded and integrated.

The research integrity of the department is ensured by the peer-reviewed publication system, publishing many open publications, and adherence to the relevant codes and governance structures. Open science is part of the university's and the department's strategy, so researchers are encouraged to put final versions of their research publications in the repository.

The strategic priority of the government, and therefore of the university, is digital transformation as well as sustainable and social developments, with special recognition of European and international law as well as the needs of the financial centre, while socially significant areas such as family law receive fewer resources.

The department is a multicultural and multilingual environment. It works internationally and in an interdisciplinary manner. It gives high priority to maintaining connections with France, Belgium and Germany and their legal professionals and institutions. Researchers are usually at

least bilingual (French-English). Classes are usually taught in English and French (and some in German).

The Luxembourg Centre for European Law (LCEL), derived from the former Max Planck institute, has become part of the university. This can be expected to provide new opportunities to the Department of Law as LCEL becomes embedded in the university.

Recommendations

The panel recommends that:

- The conversion of the Max Planck institute into a university entity is an opportunity for UL to achieve a stronger international impact. Cooperation and further development of activities with all research areas is advised, as well as participation of researchers from all European countries.
- While interdisciplinary research is a strategic commitment and well developed in practice, the department should pursue interdisciplinary research with additional social fields, for example, the sociological field, as the department describes cooperation with the Faculty of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences and Political Sciences.
- The department should build on its strategic Interactions with the European Court of Justice, for example by cooperating in the new developing areas for the Court such as AI and Criminal law.
- The department may wish to take further steps to ensure that women with children have specific inputs in their evaluation regarding research (as gender roles concerning care in practice may slow the academic career).
- The open science strategy should be improved ensuring that as far as possible all works in final format (not only summary) are available in the repository.
- The *jour fixe* could include additional initiatives from the younger researchers.

3 Quality of Research

The Panel found that the quality of research is uniformly high across the department. Research is organised in five groups reflecting areas of legal practice: (i) Banking, financial and commercial law; (ii) Criminal law and legal theory; (iii) Private law; (iv) Public law and tax law; (v) Technology law. Thus, the Department predominantly does applied research, in the sense of research on the law in force in one or more particular jurisdictions. It also does high-quality fundamental research, in the sense of more global legal reflection, disconnected from the law in force in particular jurisdictions. However, this is mainly done *ad hoc*, when needed for the development of applied research. Fundamental research does not appear to be a goal encouraged by the department separately from applied research.

All the department's research areas operate at the forefront of science and the needs of society. For example, the Technology Law research area developed projects in space law and cybersecurity. However, there are also important gaps in some disciplines, e. g. in private law, the panel found there was little research in family law.

Collaboration generally results in a good volume of high-quality research results. Research groups' collaborations vary in type and volume, depending on the kind of collaboration, and are of three types:

- Informal collaboration – that is, where Department of Law researchers include in their publications the outcomes of studies published by external researchers – is important
- More formal collaboration, implying cooperation between Department of Law researchers and other researchers outside the department (either within the University of Luxembourg, or outside), is also high, and provides interesting results, as illustrated by the list of publications made available to the Panel.
- More integrated cooperation, taking place in the framework of joint projects, is less numerous.

The mentoring done with the new researchers ensures adaptation to the peculiarities of the University and Department of Law.

The Department has a very ambitious strategy for interdisciplinary research in many fields. The research policy of the Department, including funding or support for applying to funding, produces an active working atmosphere amongst the researchers.

While the monographs listed in the departments' self-evaluation report are of the highest in international standards, and the other publications are of high international scientific quality, the panel nonetheless found that the connection between the transnational goals and methodology of the Department of Law in teaching and the treatment of the global law issues when it comes to research surprisingly lacked visibility.

All the research areas have a high performance. Generally speaking, published research work is original, of relevant significance and accuracy. The impact of the research is very big, mostly in Luxembourg and the European Institutions. Some of the research areas are especially important for current and future legislation (e. g.: company law, contract law) specifically in Luxembourg. The very high numbers of downloads from SSRN in all research areas are impressive, and, in all areas, work is cited by national and European Courts.

Recommendations

The panel recommends that the Department of Law should:

- Clarify and take a more systematic approach to the importance of fundamental research, either as such, or as part of applied research.
- Clarify the connection between department's current research and transnational/global law approaches.

4 Resources

4.1 Financial resources and infrastructure

With 21 full professors², 6 associates and 1 assistant professor, as well as 33 doctoral researchers at the end of the evaluation period, the Department of Law is well equipped sustainably to produce high-level research. It is located in a building on Kirchberg that meets the requirements of a modern law department, the only downside being that teachers have to commute to Belval to teach Bachelor courses.

² This number has subsequently risen to 26 by June 2025

During the site visit, researchers reported convincingly that research facilities at the department were good. The university library can access the electronic collections necessary for doing academic research. Researchers also mentioned the possibility to go on fully-paid sabbatical leave every seventh year. They are encouraged to go abroad during their sabbatical³.

Researchers also positively mentioned the university's policy that taking over administrative tasks is compensated by reducing the teaching load. However, researchers also pointed out that the level of institutional funding was sufficient that it was also possible to do research in the department without recourse to external funding.

The panel concludes that the university provides adequate resources for ensuring the basic functioning of the department and, at the same time, offering academic freedom to its researchers.

Recommendation

- While the financial resources and infrastructure of the Department of Law are fully adequate, the university, in the long run, should try to find a way to avoid commuting between the Department of Law at Kirchberg and the teaching facilities in Belval.

4.2 Human resources, careers, and related policies

The Department of Law has a good mixture of advanced and younger researchers. The relevant areas of expertise needed for teaching are well covered. The growth in the number of PhD students from about 70 to about 90 is adequate for the number of professors. There is no formal limit on the number of PhD students a professor may supervise, but the performance of the tutoring scheme is monitored and measures can be taken if necessary to ensure students receive adequate supervision.

Normally, the department expects that a PhD dissertation should be finished in a maximum of 4 years, and generally only admits persons who are fully financed or fully self-funded. Funding is obtained by means of structural positions (every full professor has a structural position every few years), projects (in particular from FNR), *cotutelle* and funding by the other institutions, or European funding such Erasmus or Marie Curie.

The Department of Law has a clear succession plan, which is sensitive to variations in need among the different research areas. Succession is partly ensured via tenure track positions and partly by open positions which are advertised to the international labour market. As there are few tenure-track positions, increasing their number rather than relying on the competitive promotion scheme would be helpful for succession planning and implementation.

The Department of Law has a formal scheme for monitoring PhD students and younger researchers. PhD students are supervised by committees of three experienced researchers. Young researchers are encouraged to apply for grants and receive support from the department and the faculty in making applications. During the site visit, PhD students also reported that they had the opportunity to present papers on conferences and to organise research stays abroad which again provides an above average level of monitoring and promoting young people.

Younger scholars raised the concern that their prospects of having a career within the university were unclear. Those recruited before the introduction of tenure track posts were free to apply

³ Sabbaticals are offered for 6 months with full pay or 12 months with 50% pay

for internal promotion, but the number of such promotions granted annually was said to be very low compared with the more recently recruited tenure-track hires. Tenure-track staff were concerned that the track has a time limit of 39 months, which is very short by international standards.

For ordinary and assistant professors, sabbatical leave is possible every 7 years, for 6 months. Departmental or FNR research funding supports research visits and stays at academic institutions. FNR has funds for research abroad but sometimes it is difficult to obtain them as FNR uses international evaluators and applications therefore have to be submitted in English. Researchers indicated that this requirement is being revised by FNR. Researchers are obliged to go abroad even if their research project is focussed on national Luxembourg law.

The Department of Law has a special policy for hiring female candidates. In several cases the department has expressly approached female candidates and encouraged them to apply for open positions. As of today, out of 26 professors, 12 are female. The gender balance is therefore more even than in comparable institutions.

Recommendations to the university

The panel recommends that:

- The university should align the career paths of young researchers in order to avoid demotivation of those whose career opportunities are restricted compared to their peer group.
- The university should try to increase the discretion for researchers as to whether they decide to go abroad for scientific leave, since some research goals might be achieved more effectively without having to organise a longer stay abroad.

5 Contribution to teaching

The Panel found that, on the one hand, the staff teaching approach is consistent with realising both the department's teaching and research objectives. The transnational approach of law in teaching, as implemented in the Department of law, provides reasoning patterns that are usable (and indeed used) by researchers for their research activities. On the other hand, teaching and training loads are high, and risk being a constraint for research.

The ratio of PhD students to professors was generally comparable with other leading law faculties (at least those where only funded projects are admitted), though it was notably higher in technology law. This supports the quality of research by PhD students, as well as by their supervisors. Professors' career development is not adversely impacted by having a low amount of PhD supervision.

The Panel found that the training of PhD candidates and post-docs and the mobility opportunities strongly support the production of high-quality research. Interviews conducted during the on-site visit made it clear that the training programme is efficient (through (i) the doctoral training unit scheme and (ii) the introductory class to research), and that the funding of mobility opportunities, as set up in the Department, is rather generous and most helpful for research mobility. Nevertheless, the Panel noted that some PhD students would appreciate having a clearer welcoming package.

PhD have to teach 30 teaching units (45 minutes) per year. The preference is that they do this in their first years and that the fourth results free of teaching. The students have to finish their

PhD dissertation in 48 months after the signature of the contract. Planning and good mentoring is critical.

The Panel also found that PhD and Master students are highly employable, either regarding academic careers or for careers as a practitioner. Explanation of this finding lies in a number of data such as the good quality of job market in Luxembourg, the connection between the job market and the main research areas explored in the Department of law and the close connection between the Department and the EU institutions.

The research in the department contributes significantly to the Master and PhD level education programme, for at least two reasons: (i) young academics are engaged in the research teaching programme for early-stage researchers; (ii) the department offers a strong image of a lively research community, where some good students want to work and start a career.

Recommendations to the department and the university

- Remain vigilant as to the teaching and training workload bearing on the research staff, so that it does not hinder its research activity.
- Make sure that the early-stage researchers receive a clear-cut welcoming package by the university.

6 Contribution to the third mission

The Panel found that the Department of law is very engaged in knowledge transfer, having a high impact on societal developments both in Luxembourg and Europe (or even overseas) in those areas in which the department specialises.

The department contributes to multiple societal benefits. For example, in the field of consumer law, the knowledge transfer from teaching staff to young researchers leads to concrete societal impacts on Luxembourgish people via the Law Clinic. Outside Luxembourg, cooperation with some developing countries (especially Laos and Mali, with, here again, high societal impact potentially reached) are interesting achievements. Also, the on-site visit made it possible for the Panel to note that meetings on legal topics with EU court staff are frequent, facilitating research side-effects. Hence the Panel found that the department includes non-academic partners to a high extent in their research processes.

Research in the department contributes considerably to the development of national law in Luxembourg (e.g.: company and contract law reforms) and to the case-law of national and European courts, as it stems from the citations of handbooks, monographs, articles and commentaries (especially in certain fields like bank and finance, EU criminal law...) in EU court judgments and Luxembourg court judgments.

Recommendations

- None.

7 Overall assessment and recommendations

The department's organisational structure is well designed to foster applied research, particularly through an interdisciplinary lens. The department encompasses a comprehensive range of research domains and maintains robust synergies with other departments. It cultivates

a rich multicultural and multilingual environment, ensuring the seamless integration of new researchers through well-established mechanisms such as mentoring. The department has a clear research strategy and the research outreach complies with this strategy.

Research integrity is upheld through peer-reviewed publication system, extensive open-access publications, and adherence to established codes and control structures. Open science constitutes a fundamental pillar of UL and the Department of Law's strategic vision, with researchers actively encouraged to deposit the final versions of their work in the institutional repository.

The Luxembourg Centre for European Law (LCEL) has successfully integrated the former Max Planck Institute, which is now fully embedded within the University and closely affiliated with the Department of Law, providing opportunities to enrich the department's research domains and academic contribution.

The quality of the department's applied research is uniformly high, and meets the highest standards as applied in the international academic community. Hence, the department is highly visible in the international context in its areas of expertise and reaches excellent outcomes, despite the youth of the University. However, the approach to more fundamental research is somewhat *ad hoc* and could be strengthened as such.

The department is strong in attracting competitive funding. The university provides adequate resources for ensuring the basic functioning of the department, at the same time as offering academic freedom to its researchers. The department is also very successful in attracting external funding, so it has a good balance of structural and external funding.

The research infrastructure (building, library, offices) is of a high standard. In the long run, however, the university should try to find a solution for avoiding commuting between the Department of Law and the teaching facilities in Belval.

The Department of Law has a good mixture of advanced and younger researchers. The relevant areas of expertise needed for teaching are well covered and mentoring and support for early-career researchers is very developed. However, career opportunities for younger researchers are suboptimal since there are different opportunities for early-stage researchers on a tenure track than for those on the internal promotion scheme. It is recommended to the university to align the career paths of young researchers in order to avoid demotivation of those whose career opportunities are restricted compared to their peer group.

The provision of sabbatical leave is useful, but the university should try to increase the discretion for researchers as to whether they go abroad for scientific leave, since some research goals can be achieved more effectively without having to organise a longer stay abroad.

The gender balance of the Department of Law is better than in comparable institutions, and the department has a convincing policy for increasing the proportion of female researchers.

The department's teaching is to a considerable extent research-based. PhD students appear to be well supported, and graduates from the department appear easily to find good jobs inside or outside academia.

The societal impact of the department is very high, contributing to developments in national and international law and making more local contributions to well-being by providing citizens with advice.

Recommendations to the department

The panel recommends that the department should:

1. Use the opportunities provided by the presence of LCEL to develop a strong co-working relationship and mutually strengthen the groups' research
2. Continue to cooperate and develop new lines of research with and about the European courts and institutions (e.g., criminal justice, AI...)
3. Make the transnational and global aspects of the research more visible
4. Ensure the department keeps up with and participate in developments in fundamental research

Recommendations to the University

The university should:

1. Recognise the specificities of research in law, and adapt processes to cope with them. In particular it should use KPIs relevant to the research culture of a law faculty (e.g., valuing monographs), and modify the rules for sabbaticals to allow researchers working on Luxembourg-specific topics to do so in Luxembourg where appropriate
2. Converge promotion schemes for early-stage researchers to make them fairer and more attractive to potential younger researchers
3. Explore ways to reduce the inefficiencies involved in separating undergraduate teaching in Belval and the rest of the department's activities in Kirchberg

