

Madam Minister
Stéphanie Obertin
Ministry of Research and Higher Education
18-20, Montée de la Pétrusse
L-2327 Luxembourg



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Dear Madam Minister,

Thank you for commissioning the evaluation of the University of Luxembourg's (UL) research activities over the 2018 - 2023 period, which resulted in the comprehensive report we received on 3 June 2025.

Ms Katharina Warta and Mr Erik Arnold presented the report on 11 July 2025 during a plenary session of the Board of Governors, which was attended by the Rectorate, the Director of administration and finance, as well as the Deans of Faculties and the Directors of Interdisciplinary Ventures. We welcome the opportunity to share our views on its findings and recommendations, further to your letter of 10 June 2025.

General assessment

We are very pleased to note that the **overall assessment was highly positive**.

The panel found that research at the University, throughout all faculties and interdisciplinary centres, ranges from *"very good to excellent"* across the institution and acknowledged that the University has firmly established itself in Luxembourg's society by providing high level expertise and responding to public demand. As highlighted in the report, in the short span of two decades the University of Luxembourg has rapidly succeeded in fulfilling all three missions of a modern university: delivering high-quality education nationally, *"punching above its weight in research,"* and impacting society through talent generation and knowledge sharing. Creating and growing a successful research-intensive university in just twenty years is, as the evaluation noted, *"a great achievement"* made possible by the commitment of UL's staff, as well as the sustained support of the government and the University's partners. We are proud of this recognition of the University's accomplishments in research and in the transfer of academic knowledge to society.

We agree with the panel that the next challenge is to pivot to a phase of consolidation, in which the University continues to adapt to changes in science and society *"while maintaining or increasing its excellence and relevance"*.

The main recommendations outlined in the evaluation are addressed below, several of which have already been acted upon. Many of the panel's insights have notably informed the University's next four-year plan for 2026-2029 (P4), approved by the Board of Governors in July 2025.

1. Scale up research groups in selected areas

The evaluation states that *"(...) it has proven difficult (...) to establish research groups that have a critical mass, with a core of people together implementing a research agenda over time, and the ability to outlast the careers of their founders (...)".*

We acknowledge that multiple small research groups may lead to fragmented research efforts limiting impact and international visibility. To address this, the University is concentrating academic recruitment in well-established strengths and selected emerging areas. This targeted approach will build larger, more cohesive groups, enabling sustainability and greater scientific impact. The significant number of academic retirements over the coming years will offer an opportunity to reshape the University's profile, with new appointments strategically aligned to consolidate and advance institutional objectives.

Alongside targeted recruitment, the University **leverages external funding** to reinforce key research areas. UL remains agile in pursuing strategic public and private partnerships, including through government conventions. Since the panel's visit, several initiatives have been launched: a chair in private assets with the Ministry of Finance and the Association of the Luxembourg Fund Industry (ALFI); a chair in actuarial sciences with the Ministry of Finance and the Luxembourg association of insurers and reinsurers (ACA); a chair in materials and manufacturing with Ceratizit; renewed support for the ArcelorMittal chair as well as the chair in sustainable finance. Furthermore a €15 million agreement on climate readiness has been signed with the Ministry of Environment, Climate and Biodiversity involving multiple University entities.

Substantial incentive schemes for external funding for researchers¹ are already in place at the University. In parallel, the University is **reinforcing support structures** to assist researchers apply for external funding and secure prestigious grants-particularly through dedicated assistance for EU programmes such as the European Research Council (ERC) and the upcoming Framework Programme 10.

2. Develop more strategic capacity at department and IC Level

The report mentions that *"(...) research strategies in the departments and ICs need more focus and at least a medium-term perspective (...) "(...) it becomes increasingly necessary not only to start new things but also to consolidate or stop doing old ones, otherwise the University cannot change in line with developments in sciences and societal need."*

The University of Luxembourg shares this concern and has **embedded long-term strategic thinking** into its institutional culture. It operates within a long-term strategic framework (2020-2039). This strategy is implemented through four-year plans aligned with government agreements. The upcoming P4 was shaped through a collaborative process involving deans and directors. The University's strategic planning consistently reflects the intertwining of research, education and socio-economic partnerships, an essential feature of UL's identity as a research university. University-wide activities, from departmental programs to individual teaching and research, will align with these shared priorities. The **University's Management Team**² remains a central forum for strategic reflection. In parallel, Deans of Faculties and Directors of Interdisciplinary Centres are encouraged to **foster a culture of collaborative strategic thinking** across their respective entities.

The panel highlights that *"maintaining strategic capacity across the University also requires balance between the external governance interest in making sure it pursues its societal missions and the internal governance's pursuit of an autonomous academic logic".*

We endorse this recommendation to **balance external expectations** for societal missions with the University's commitment to **academic autonomy** and see it as a guiding principle in our activities.

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¹ Cf Self-evaluation report p. 16

² The Management Team comprises the rectorate, director of administration and finance, deans of faculties and directors of interdisciplinary centres



3. Improve human resources policies to support both internal career development and external recruitment

The report states that "(...) the legally defined quotas for promotion impose a serious constraint on acquiring and developing human resources. (...) at present, UL has a legacy of people hired some years ago when all appointments were external and whose opportunities for success in the available promotion competitions are limited. It has also a small, newer generation of hires on a career path similar to a short-duration tenure track, in which assessment has to be complete within 48 months."

While promotion quotas are a structural limitation, this has been responded to by applying a complementary tenure-track scheme. This instrument provides flexibility to attract and retain talented early-career researchers and offers a clear, structured pathway to promotion and permanent academic positions. While the timeline may be short, the **tenure-track system is considered a cornerstone of the University's academic HR strategy**. In the upcoming P4, recruitment under this scheme is expected to increase, with a focus on junior and mid-career level positions (assistant and associate professor respectively). This builds a long-term talent pipeline, which will be supported by mentoring and multiple training opportunities.

While the experts raised concerns regarding the time limitation for fixed-term contracts for scientists, the Board and the Rectorate would like to specify that the University complies with the Luxembourg labor law.

To support the recruitment strategy and foster academic career development, the University has established in 2024 the **Office for Professorial Affairs**, a central unit tasked with coordinating, standardising, and overseeing all academic recruitment and promotion procedures. Now fully operational, the office ensures that processes are conducted with greater efficiency, transparency, and consistency across the University. It has already proven effective in significantly reducing procedural delays³.

4. Gender, inclusion and research culture

The report states "*The University has taken strides in recent years towards increased gender equality among its employees. While this appears to have helped suppress overt discrimination, there is further to go*".

Through its policies and activities, the University has a pioneering role in the national research landscape. It remains committed to advancing gender equity, diversity, and a family-friendly environment. This is evidenced by dedicated policies and structures in place, such as the Gender Equality Office and the Inclusion Office, which coordinate measures ranging from awareness and training to mentoring and targeted support.

Two recent key instruments have been deployed to strengthen gender equity in academia:

Anne Beffort professorships are open exclusively to outstanding female candidates during the first six months of recruitment, as part of a proactive effort to improve representation in fields where women remain underrepresented. The first four positions were opened in 2025, in computer science, mathematics, and engineering⁴.

Established in 2024, the **Marie Speyer Excellence Grants** support female researchers at all stages of their career with up to €130,000 per award. Open to postdocs, research scientists, and assistant/associate professors, the programme saw applications nearly double in 2025, reflecting its interest and impact.

5. Positioning in the research landscape, coherence with the Luxembourg Institutes.

The report states that "(...) the University has two important opportunities in positioning in the Luxembourg research landscape. (...) One is to work more closely with the LIs (...) The other relates to the desire in government circles and parts of the University to have a medical faculty."

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³ As discussed during the presentation session on 11.07.2025, the evaluation report appears to inaccurately attribute this to the role of the Board of governors

⁴ Rates of female professors as of 2025: Department of Informatics: 0% - Department of engineering: 11.1% - Department of mathematics: 17.6%



The University endorses the recommendation to deepen collaboration with public research institutions to reduce fragmentation and increase critical mass. To that end, the new P4 establishes **two targeted alliances**. The **Luxembourg Quantum Alliance** with LIST focuses on quantum technologies. It includes joint appointments of leading researchers, shared labs, and co-investment in infrastructure and the development of joint education programmes in quantum science. The goal is to build a national quantum hub through integrated resources and expertise. The **Medical Alliance** with LIH targets biomedical and clinical research. It supports joint recruitments, shared clinical research infrastructure, and collaboration in focus areas including oncology, neurosciences, public health, data sciences and AI for health.

UL fully acknowledges that the success of the development of education and research in **medicine and healthcare** relies not only on the University's efforts, but also on sustained government support and strong commitment from the hospitals and other stakeholders, including LIH. UL has already signed several cooperation agreements with clinical institutions enabling the recruitment of clinical professors who combine academic teaching, research, patient care, and student supervision. In alignment with the panel recommendations (*"it appears to make sense for UL to establish a faculty of medicine and health and explore niche opportunities"*), the University will carefully prepare the establishment of such a faculty in close cooperation with its partners and the ministries.

6. Other transversal recommendations from the entities reports

The panel acknowledges *"the big contributions to disseminating knowledge and understanding its importance for society"*, while it highlights opportunities to develop for a wider knowledge transfer. As indicated by the experts, this requires a strengthening of **support structures for knowledge and technology transfer**. The University fully endorses this recommendation and embraces the opportunities leading from knowledge creation to application. New initiatives to foster a start-up culture among students and scientists will be introduced, including entrepreneurship training, incubator spaces, and seed funding for promising spin-offs. In addition, dedicated processes will be put in place to support IP development and spin-off creation. The goal is to enable high-potential ideas translate into real-world applications that benefit Luxembourg's economy and society.

The evaluation confirms the excellence of the University's **buildings as well as research infrastructure**. We acknowledge the expressed concerns about the need for careful planning to ensure buildings and infrastructure evolve in step with institutional development. We collaborate with the Ministry of Higher Education and Research on a coordinated plan to upgrade facilities and are exploring shared core facilities to increase efficiency in the national research landscape. These efforts aim to align infrastructure investments with strategic priorities and to reinforce national-level coordination.

The University of Luxembourg is grateful for the panel's evaluation and valuable recommendations, and remains committed to addressing them with clarity and ambition, building on what works, tackling what must improve, and staying focused on long-term impact.

Yours sincerely,



Yves Elsen
Chairman of the Board of Governors



Prof. Jens Kreisel
Rector