



SOCIONEWS



LAW

REFORM OF THE NATIONAL RESEARCH FUND AND OF THE SUPPORT GRANTED TO DOCTORAL CANDIDATES

A law of 6 July 2026¹ revised the legal framework of the Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR), created in 1999, to adapt its missions, organisation and functioning.

The FNR in brief

The FNR is a public establishment whose missions are to fund and promote research, encourage the valorisation of scientific results, and contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of Luxembourg.

FNR staff are employed under a private-law regime governed by the Labour Code. The board of directors sets the career management policy and the conditions for recruitment and remuneration.

Relations between the State and the FNR are formalised in a four-year multiannual agreement, which lays down objectives, means and financial commitments. The FNR receives an annual State contribution, may receive donations and income from agreements, and is exempt from certain taxes. Its accounts are audited by an external auditor and submitted to the Government in Council. This framework is intended to ensure financial sustainability and transparency of management.

What is changing

The suggested amendments seek to harmonise the FNR's legal framework with the corresponding provisions of the amended law of 3 December 2014 on the organisation of public research centres and the amended law of 27 June 2018 on the organisation of the University of Luxembourg, so as to ensure consistency in legislation relating to public research.

¹ <https://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/loi/2026/07/06/a383/jo>





In parallel, the law thoroughly redefines the system of support granted to researchers in training. From now on, doctoral training aid becomes the general scheme for all individual support granted to doctoral candidates enrolled in a third-cycle programme leading to the degree of doctor. Consequently, doctoral studies are no longer covered by the 2014 law on State financial aid for higher education.²

This law repeals the law of 31 May 1999 on the FNR and amends the 2014 law on financial aid for higher education. Transitional provisions ensure continuity of the existing bodies, the recruitment of the new positions, and the maintenance of support for researchers who are already beneficiaries.

1. HISTORY OF TRAINING-RESEARCH AID

The Law of 19 August 2008 on training-research aid, on the one hand, reformed the training-research scholarship instrument introduced by the Law of 9 March 1987 on research and development and, on the other hand, entrusted the management of the training-research aid programme to the FNR.

The mechanism introduced in 2008 distinguishes two categories of aid: the training-research grant and the training-research scholarship. The training-research grant has since constituted the main scheme. It consists in the award, by the FNR, of a grant intended to finance an employment contract to be concluded between the beneficiary and the institution in which he or she carries out research work as part of research training. The conclusion of an employment contract (generally a fixed-term contract) was therefore meant to become the rule.

However, the award of a scholarship remains possible where the host institution is legally or administratively unable to conclude a contract with the researcher. In that case, the researcher in training may claim a scholarship as provided for by the amended Law of 24 July 2014 on State financial aid for higher education, which constitutes a lump-sum contribution intended to cover the beneficiary's living and study costs.

The amending Law of 27 August 2014 moreover introduced the possibility of a collective training-research aid grant, intended to enable Luxembourg public host institutions to benefit from a grant grouping together several items of training-research aid, on the basis of a multiannual research and training programme submitted by the institution to the FNR. This grant is intended to finance individual training-research contracts to be concluded between researchers in training and the host institution.

2. THE "TRAINING RESEARCH AIDS" BECOME "DOCTORAL TRAINING AIDS"

The main amendments are as follows:

- The doctoral training aid scheme henceforth becomes the general scheme for individual aids granted to researchers in training who are enrolled in a third cycle programme leading to the degree of doctor. As a result, they no longer fall under the State financial aid scheme for higher education provided for by the law on State financial aid for higher education³. These aids are reserved for doctoral candidates abroad or in a private company in Luxembourg (see section 2.2).
- In this context, the present scheme will no longer cover researchers in postdoctoral training, since this does not constitute a cycle of studies leading to an academic degree and, in practice, postdoctoral researchers generally continue to benefit from an employment contract fully financed by the host institution.
- Collective grants intended for the main actors in public research in Luxembourg will no longer form part of the doctoral training aid scheme, insofar as the contracts of researchers in training are an integral part of the funding granted by the FNR to projects selected following calls launched under the various programmes (see section 2.1).
- In view of the foregoing, the eligibility conditions for applicants who may submit their application for doctoral training aid have been amended.

² See Socionews n°5-2026

³ <https://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/loi/2026/07/06/a350/jo>

2.1 Collective aid for doctoral candidates via funding of research projects in a research institution in Luxembourg

This law broadens and clarifies the categories of entities eligible for FNR interventions, and now expressly includes economic interest groups (GIE) among the potential beneficiaries.

The first category covers public establishments for which research is a statutory mission, notably the University of Luxembourg and the three public research centres (LIST, LIH and LISER), which play a central role in innovation and scientific development.

The second category extends eligibility to bodies, services and public establishments carrying out research activities in their respective fields of competence, even if research is not their main mission.

The third category encompasses non profit associations and foundations governed by the law of 7 August 2023, research infrastructures in the form of economic interest group (GIE), and societal impact company governed by the amended law of 12 December 2016 whose capital is entirely made up of impact shares and whose research activities are specified in their statutes.

These various entities must obtain approval from the Ministry. At the time of the application, they must have carried out research activities for at least three years on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

The selection of projects that may benefit from such financial contributions is carried out following a call for projects procedure.

The FNR publishes a call for projects on an electronic platform, detailing the objectives, eligibility criteria, submission procedures and selection criteria. In addition to the general eligibility criteria, programme specific eligibility criteria are set out in the FNR programme regulations.

Eligible projects are evaluated by ad hoc expert committees based on selection criteria applicable to all programmes and selection criteria specific to the programme concerned.

2.2.1. New eligibility conditions

To be able to benefit from doctoral training aid, a researcher in training must satisfy all the following criteria:

A. Link with Luxembourg

The applicant must be able to demonstrate a connection with the Grand Duchy by one of the following two means:

- a) **Educational background:** having been enrolled for at least five cumulative years in one of the following institutions:

The selection criteria applicable to all programmes are as follows:

- the scientific quality and innovative nature of the submitted project;
- the feasibility of the submitted project;
- the scientific impact, as well as the economic, ecological, societal or cultural impact of the submitted project.

For each programme, specific selection criteria are specified in the FNR programme regulations.

2.2 Individual aid for doctoral candidates abroad or in a private company in Luxembourg

There is now only one category of individual doctoral training aid: the doctoral training grant. As before, this grant is the main support scheme. It takes the form of funding awarded by the FNR with a view to concluding an employment contract, generally for a fixed term, between the beneficiary and the institution in which they carry out their research work as part of their training. The establishment of such a contract thus remains the standard arrangement for awarding doctoral training aid.

The possibility of granting this aid in the form of a scholarship, which was provided for under the previous legal framework to remedy situations where it was legally or administratively impossible for the host institution to conclude an employment contract, has now been abolished.

The FNR publishes at least twice a year public calls on an electronic platform, inviting researchers in training to submit an application for the award of doctoral training aid within a period not exceeding three months after the call is launched.

The application for doctoral training aid must be accompanied by the following supporting documents:

- 1° a copy of an identity document;
- 2° evidence showing that the eligibility criteria are met;
- 3° a description of the research project.

- a Luxembourgish institution (public or private) of fundamental, secondary or initial vocational education;
- the Deutsch Luxemburgisches Schengen Lyzeum Perl;
- a bachelor's or master's programme at the University of Luxembourg;

- a programme leading to the “*brevet de technicien supérieur*” accredited by the Minister for Higher Education.
- an accredited programme of a specialised higher education institution established in Luxembourg and recognised by the Minister for Higher Education.

or

- b) **Residence:** having stayed in Luxembourg for a cumulative period of at least five years at the time of the application.

This requirement of a link with Luxembourg risks excluding the children of cross border workers who, in most cases, can satisfy neither the schooling requirement nor the residence requirement.⁴

B. Enrolment in a doctoral programme

The applicant must be enrolled in a third cycle programme of studies leading to the degree of doctor. The degree must be recognised and correspond to

level 8 of the Luxembourg qualifications framework, in accordance with the 2016 law on the recognition of professional qualifications.

C. Not already holding a doctorate

The applicant must not already hold a doctoral degree.

D. Place where the research is carried out

The majority of the research work must be carried out in a host institution, which may be:

- a) either a foreign public institution whose missions include research or technological development;
- b) or a company carrying out research work on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and approved for that purpose by the Minister of the Economy.

E. Not receiving a pension

The applicant may not be a beneficiary of an old age pension.

2.2.2. Place where the research is carried out

Most of the research work must be carried out in a foreign public institution whose mission is research or technological development, or in an approved company in Luxem-

bourg conducting research activities and recognised by the Minister of the Economy.

2.2.3. Evaluation criteria

Applications for doctoral training aid are evaluated according to the following criteria:

- 1° the scientific quality and feasibility of the proposed project;
- 2° the development potential of the researcher in training and his or her ability to implement the project;

3° the quality of the supervision provided;

4° the scientific impact, as well as the economic, ecological, societal or cultural impact of the proposed project.

2.3 Ad hoc expert committee and litigation Committee

For the examination of projects, as well as applications for doctoral training aid, the Secretary General sets up an ad hoc expert committee. The ad hoc expert committee is composed of members selected based on their competence and expertise in the relevant field.

Members of the ad hoc expert committee abstain from any participation in the evaluation of an application for which they have a conflict of interest, whether of a personal, professional or institutional nature.

Members of the ad hoc expert committee are appointed by the Secretary General for a term of three years, renewable once.

A litigation Committee is established within the FNR, responsible for ruling on complaints against decisions refusing applications for project funding or doctoral training aid.

The litigation Committee is composed of:

- 1° two representatives of the board of directors;
- 2° three external members of the FNR chosen based on their competence and who do not hold any office or mandate in an eligible entity.

⁴ In this respect, see the opinion of the CSL dated 1 December 2025 on the draft law concerning the organisation of the FNR in the public sector: https://www.csl.lu/app/uploads/2025/12/20251201_csl_avis_-organisation-du-fonds-national-de-la-recherche.pdf



The members are appointed by the board of directors. The litigation Committee may, where necessary, call upon any person likely to shed light on the dispute it is asked to examine.

Where a claim has been filed and no final decision has been issued within one month of the filing date, the claimant may consider the claim as having been rejected.

2.4 Remedies

An action for annulment may be brought before the Administrative Court against a refusal decision within a period of one month.