

## 2026 Guide for Reviewers

For further information please  
visit the webpage:

[Marie Speyer Excellence Grants  
- University of Luxembourg |  
Uni.lu](https://mariespeyer.grants.uni.lu)

And/or contact the MSE team at:  
[mariespeyer.grants@uni.lu](mailto:mariespeyer.grants@uni.lu)

# Marie Speyer Excellence Grants

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equality  
office



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## Description and application guidelines

The Marie Speyer Grants are open to all disciplines and sectors. The scheme is organised by the Gender Equality Office in collaboration with the Vice-Rector for Research, following strict criteria of research excellence.

These grants aim to enhance existing research endeavours or facilitate the inception of innovative research concepts by researchers at the University of Luxembourg. In the year 2026, up to **four** scholars can be awarded who will receive an allocation of **130.000 Euro each** (total budget).

## Description of the Marie Speyer Excellence Grants call

The University of Luxembourg (Uni.lu) established the Marie Speyer Excellence Grants in 2024. The grants aim to support and empower outstanding female postdocs, research scientists, assistant and associate professors who wish to further develop their research at the University. Driven by excellence, the Excellence Grants are open to all disciplines and sectors. The funding scheme aims to make the University of Luxembourg an attractive workplace for women in academia.

## Eligibility for participation

- Applicants must be researchers with a valid contract at the University of Luxembourg (Uni.lu), the call targets:
  - Postdoctoral fellows.
  - Research Scientists.
  - Assistant professors, and associate professors (full professors excluded).
- Applicants are women.
- Scholars from any discipline are encouraged to apply.

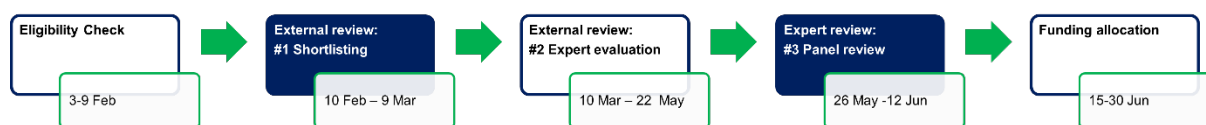
**Note:** *applicants on non-permanent contracts are eligible to apply if they submit a support letter from a researcher (line manager) at the University of Luxembourg, who commits to hosting the project in their unit.*

## Evaluation Procedure

The MSE team, together with the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres) will ensure that strict ethical procedures are upheld.

The evaluation and selection process consists of several steps:

1. **Eligibility check** (3-9 February): The MSE team will perform an initial check to ensure that all proposals meet the eligibility criteria.
2. **External review** (9 February -12 March): The MSE Team and High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres) will coordinate an external review of eligible proposals, as described in the dedicated section below.
3. **Funding decision process:**
  - i. **Ranking by the Oversight Committee:** The Oversight Committee will rank the proposals based on the evaluation reports and select the proposals to recommend for funding.
  - ii. **Final Decision by the Rectorate:** The Rectorate will review the recommendations and decide on the awardees.
4. **Communication of results:** The decisions will be communicated to applicants by the



**Figure 1:** 2026 MSE evaluation timeline (filled boxes indicate steps coordinated by Hcéres)

## External review

The University of Luxembourg has commissioned the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (**Hcéres**) to conduct an in-depth and impartial academic assessment of research proposals submitted to the MSE 2026 Call.

Hcéres will coordinate the external evaluation of the MSE proposals following internationally recognized standards for research and higher education assessment, ensuring **rigour, transparency, fairness, and consistency**. The goal is not just to rank proposals but to provide **balanced, constructive feedback**. The process is guided by three principles: **independence, confidentiality, and evidence-based reasoning**.

The external review is a 3-step procedure, designed to ensure both disciplinary coverage and cross-disciplinary coherence:

**Step 1 – Shortlisting** (up to 20 applications): A multidisciplinary panel comprising approximately twelve external experts will review all proposals and select a shortlist consisting of the top 25% most competitive submissions, with a maximum of 20 proposals. Each proposal will be evaluated individually according to the established selection criteria, and these assessments will collectively determine the final shortlist.

## Stage 2 – Expert review

1. Hcéres shares the final shortlist with the MSE team, and for each of the shortlisted proposals, the MSE Team will identify two independent experts from research databases based on the abstract and keywords, looking for recognized scholars in the

### About Hcéres

*Hcéres is an independent public authority in France, established in 2013 and legally reinforced in 2022 under the Research Programming Law. It is responsible for quality assurance in research and higher education, operating with full independence, scientific integrity, and evidence-based methods. Hcéres conducts rigorous evaluations of universities, research organizations, academic programs, and major infrastructures, both in France and internationally. Each year, it mobilizes 3,500 high-level experts across disciplines to ensure comprehensive, impartial assessments. Its work supports strategic improvement, policy guidance, and institutional development. Internationally, Hcéres is a recognized leader in quality assurance, accredited by ENQA and listed in EQAR, guaranteeing compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). It has evaluated over 50 institutions and 100 programs across Europe, adapting its robust methodology to diverse academic contexts while maintaining transparency, consistency, and independence. Through its membership in global networks (ENQA, EQAR, INQAAHE, ECA, FraQ-Sup), Hcéres promotes mutual trust and harmonization in higher education quality assurance. Its reputation for scientific rigor, methodological adaptability, and neutrality makes it a trusted partner for external evaluations.*

same field as the applicants. The procedure will be as follows:

- a. Invitations are sent out together with the abstract and a conflict-of-interest declaration.
  - b. Once the reviewer accepts the invitation and sends the signed declaration stating they have no conflict, the full proposal and a written evaluation form (see annex 1) is sent to the reviewer.
  - c. The process is iterated until each proposal is sent to two reviewers.
5. The MSE team will compile the written reviews and will share them with the Hcéres committee, without disclosing the reviewers' identity.

**Step 3 – Panel Review:** Three reviewers of the initial multidisciplinary committee will re-examine the shortlisted proposals, considering the reviews of the independent experts, and will give a third independent assessment.

The quantitative and qualitative scores of each of the shortlisted proposals will be shared with the oversight committee, which will produce a ranking of the proposals and select four applications to be recommended for funding. The Rectorate will review the recommendations and decide on the awardees.

## Conflict of Interest

All external reviewers involved in the review process are required to declare any potential conflict of interest. A conflict of interest (COI) is a situation in which personal or financial considerations have the potential to compromise or bias professional judgment and objectivity. Any private, personal, or commercial interests relating to an application for funding to MSE projects must be declared in this document.

A conflict of interest exists if a reviewer:

- was involved in the preparation of the proposal,
- is a director or partner or is in any way involved in the management of the candidate,
- is employed or contracted by the candidate,
- is a close relative of the candidate (and any persons living in the same household),
- has been, or is involved, in publications, patents, and projects with the candidate within the last 5 years,
- has or has been a relationship of scientific rivalry or professional hostility with the candidate,
- has or has been a mentor or been in a mentee relationship with the candidate,
- Exceptions may be made if:
  - the reviewer works in a different department/laboratory/institute from the one where the action is to be carried out and
  - the departments//laboratories/institutes within the organisation concerned operate with a high degree of autonomy.

## Proposal documents

For each proposal, the following documents will be shared with the reviewers:

1. Application form
2. Letter of motivation
3. A support letter from a line manager at the University of Luxembourg committing to host the project in their unit (only for postdoctoral fellows and research scientists not authorized to lead research projects at the University of Luxembourg).

## Selection principles

The selection criteria are academic excellence, originality, and research impact of the application submitted.

In the case of project proposals of equal assessment, the “academic excellence” criterion will be used to determine the final ranking. Furthermore, priority will be given to proposals from disciplines with a significant gender imbalance.

The selection criteria are:

- Academic excellence of the candidate (5 points)
  - The phase of the applicant's career, including diverse career paths, as well as possible breaks and the effects of major life events or pandemic restrictions, will be considered.
- Originality of the project proposal (5 points)
  - According to the aim of this scheme how the project proposal will enhance existing research endeavours or facilitate the inception of innovative research concepts.
- Research impact (5 points)
  - The potential impact of the project proposal also including the impact of the project on the applicant's future research endeavours (for example, funding applications).

Each of the criteria will be evaluated on a 5-point rating scale in a written evaluation report:

<b>Score 5</b>	The project proposal is original, and exceptionally strong and the use of the grant will generate <b>forefront knowledge</b> . <b>The research produced</b> will likely have an <b>important and substantial impact</b> on science and research.
<b>Score 4</b>	The project proposal is quite original and expected to support research that will make a <b>significant contribution to science and research</b> .
<b>Score 3</b>	The project proposal contributes to research that is <b>competitive at the national level</b> and will probably make a <b>valuable contribution</b> in the international field.
<b>Score 2</b>	The project proposal is solid and is in principle worthy of support. It is considered <b>of less priority</b> than work in the above categories.
<b>Score 1</b>	The project proposal is weak, and it is associated with work that is neither solid nor exciting, flawed in the scientific and or technical approach, repetitions of other work, etc. <b>not worthy of funding</b> .

## Contact information

For any questions related to the MSE program, please contact the support team by email: [mariespeyer.grants@uni.lu](mailto:mariespeyer.grants@uni.lu).

## Annex 1

### Evaluation Report

<b>Academic excellence of the candidate (5 points)</b>	<b>Grade:</b>
Has the applicant demonstrated the ability to conduct excellent research?	
To what extent is the applicant's existing professional experience appropriate regarding the proposed project proposal?	
<b>Originality of the project proposal (5 points)</b>	<b>Grade:</b>
To what extent are the proposal's objectives pertinent and realistic?	
To what extent does the project proposed research address important challenges?	
To what extent does the project proposal go beyond the state-of-the-art?	
To what extent is the proposed research methodology appropriate to achieve the project's objectives?	
To what extent are the proposed project plan and resources adequate and properly justified?	
<b>Research impact (5 points)</b>	<b>Grade:</b>
To what extent will the proposal create a scientific impact?	
To what extent will the proposal impact the future research endeavors of the applicant?	
To what extent will the proposal have a societal and/or technological/economic impact?	

### Conclusion and your overall judgment

Please indicate an approximate ranking of the proposal within its area of expertise:

- top 5%
- top 10%
- top 20%
- other