

Department of Social Sciences

Mission Statement

Adopted by the Departmental Board, 16 April 2021

The Department of Social Sciences (DSOC) is committed to fostering the continued development of internationally leading disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship that addresses key societal challenges at the national, European and global levels – both seminally contributing to academic debates and providing timely advice on policies and solutions. The creation of the new department in 2020, bringing together four existing institutes which had previously been spread across three different research units, is intended both to facilitate the development of greater synergies across different areas within the social sciences and to enhance the national and international visibility of the social sciences in Luxembourg.

In further developing its research programme, DSOC will foster a climate supportive of critical social inquiry that respects the academic freedom of its members to pursue their research interests in terms consistent with the highest standards of scholarly independence and rigour. The Department commits to the continued development of a strong foundational research base and the provision of a wide range of training opportunities in the social sciences, especially for its doctoral candidates, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty. Recognising the distinctive place of Luxembourg as one of the main institutional sites of the European Union, the Department will continue to develop its research in the area of European governance broadly understood, notably through its central role in the University's inter-faculty Robert Schuman Initiative. Consistent with its role as one of the main centres of social science research in the country, DSOC will proactively engage with and develop projects that contribute to the implementation of national and university research priorities and that profit from collaborations with LISER and other cognate research organisations.

The Department of Social Sciences has made and will continue to make major contributions in all four areas designated as **National Research Priorities**.

Members of DSOC engage in a broad spectrum of internationally recognised and nationally relevant research in the area of **Sustainable and Responsible Development**. The Department will continue to enhance its already leading profile in such key areas as *Social cohesion and inequalities; Societal transformation and labour market dynamics; Household finance and risk management; Cultural identities and nationhood; and Contemporary history, memories studies and public history*, while additionally promoting new research projects that interrogate the political and societal consequences of persisting or growing inequalities, ethnic diversity, migration and integration. Work in this area will advance the dynamic research agenda of the previously awarded FNR Pearl Chair on Social Inequality, in particular in a perspective of intergenerational fairness in an aging society. It will carry forward the well-established track record of collaborative, policy relevant research in the area of Childhood and Youth Studies. It will build on the record of accomplishment established by the ongoing ERC grant on the interaction between nationhood, public memories, right-wing populism, and electoral politics. It will also benefit in the current cycle from the award of an FNR Attract Project on Housing Policy and Inequality. Research in the Department will further engage with

understandings of *Climate change and Sustainable behaviours*, notably through the development of both ‘citizen science’ projects and studies of environmental politics and policy.

The Department commits to expanding its profile in the area of **Personalised Healthcare**, particularly in the areas of the *Environmental, lifestyle and socio-economic impact on mechanisms of diseases* and the *Longitudinal dynamics of disease*. The dramatic circumstances of the global pandemic have highlighted the need not only to prioritise public health issues, but to do so in a holistic manner – i.e. understanding and fully incorporating the socio-economic determinants of health, well-being, and illness into both clinical and policy developments. DSOC will build on its existing strengths and national and international collaborations (with, e.g., the WHO), covering disability and health issues through the life course from childhood and youth to aging populations, and their implications for social participation. Leading research in the area of cognitive aging and dementia will be further developed on the basis of a current ERC grant. Large-scale international collaborations will continue to shape the leading role of DSOC in the area of adolescent health. Ongoing research by DSOC members will continue to bring new insight to the rapidly evolving relationship between public health, good governance, and political competition. Across these domains, DSOC will position itself as a key strategic partner providing the necessary socio-economic and public policy dimensions in the wider projected national development of the bio-medical sector.

DSOC will further develop its role as a major centre of educational research within the overall framework of the FHSE, addressing the challenges of **21st Century Education**. The Department will consolidate and expand its distinctive profile as regards the sociology, history, and public policy of education, with a particular focus on questions of educational inclusion – addressing the research areas of *Equality of educational opportunity* and *Adult education, up/re-skilling and lifelong learning*, as well as the complementary roles of *Formal and non-formal education* in childhood and youth. This will benefit from the current Horizon 2020 project PIONEERED – ‘Pioneering policies and practices tackling educational inequalities in Europe’. The Department will further sustain its engagement with more practice-based, Luxembourg-focused research and professional development programmes, including ongoing projects innovatively developing tools of *Digital learning*.

Finally, the area of **Industrial and Service Transformation** is rooted in the growing realisation that the processes of digitalisation are fundamentally transforming industry and services crucial for the health of the economy of Luxembourg. Members of DSOC are currently engaged in and will continue to develop projects important for improving our understanding of the methodological and social consequences of this transformation. For example, members of DSOC are examining the development of European financial regulation and supervision in the context of complex multi-level governance and rapid sector transformation in a project financed by the FNR CORE scheme. Members of DSOC are also using tools of *Space telecommunications, earth observation and space resources* such as remote sensing to better understand socioeconomic development, particularly after armed conflict. As part of a project funded by an ERC grant, they are also developing *Fundamental tools and data-driven modelling and simulations* by relating insights from computer science, mathematics, linguistics, and political science in order to advance social science methods and to shed light

on complex social issues such as changes in social behaviour, norms, ideologies, and the public perception of risk.

The Department of Social Sciences similarly will play a leading role in its areas of expertise in relation to the implementation of **University Strategic Priorities**. As detailed above, the Department will continue to undertake and further develop a broad portfolio of research in the area of **Sustainable and Societal Development**, while also strategically prioritising its position as a key partner contributing to the expansion of the national research base on the socio-economic and public policy dimensions of **Health and Medicine**. DSOC will further support projects focused on **Digital Transformation**. Members of the Department will deepen their efforts in computational social sciences (especially by using big data, natural language processing and machine learning algorithms) to advance critical fields in contemporary social science inquiry and to bring new perspectives to some of Luxembourg's most important economic sectors, like the financial industry. On-going international collaborations in higher education and science studies that integrate social and computational science approaches will also be taken forward, similarly utilising big data (bibliometrics) and emphasising the effects of collaboration on science and society.

In defining and developing this research agenda, the Department of Social Sciences commits itself to the realisation of the following objectives:

1). The Department will sustain and develop a broad spectrum of publication and research outputs consistent with the diversity of disciplinary and interdisciplinary research represented within it and its multiple scientific and public missions. It will build on and enhance its strong track record as regards:

- The publication of articles in leading (Q1 and other) journals in our different disciplinary areas as well as peer-reviewed monographs and contributions to volumes accepted by leading academic presses, contributing to the shaping of international scholarly debates and research agendas.

- The development (including data bases) and publication of research on and of specific relevance to Luxembourg, placing national developments within wider comparative and international frameworks.

- The publication of more specialised and policy-related research in relevant academic journals, books and other appropriate venues.

2). The Department will position itself as a hub for social science research in Luxembourg, engaging other academic, governmental and non-governmental actors in developing research projects and agendas that address major contemporary societal challenges and policy problems. It will do so in a manner consistent with its academic mission of contributing to evidence-based policymaking and fostering a climate of open, critical dialogue. The Department will:

- Sustain and develop its role in the coordination of major national reports on education, youth, health, and other areas that provide indispensable reference points for the understanding of our national situation and the attendant development of policy and practice.

- Continue to develop a network of formal and informal relationships with relevant ministries and governmental agencies, including contractual research, in terms consistent with the autonomous academic mission of the university.

- Continue to develop a network of formal and informal relationships with non-governmental and civil society actors, including the development of joint projects, in terms which privilege the role of the university as providing a forum for open, inclusive policy debate and societal dialogue.

- Regularly host public events and engage with national media and relevant social media outlets, as a means both to promote the wider diffusion of research results and to inform more general public debate and discussion.

3). The Department is committed to creating a supportive environment for early-career scholars, providing doctoral and postdoctoral researchers with the guidance, resources, and training opportunities imperative for them to establish their careers in a highly competitive international context. The Department will ensure that all early career researchers have:

- Excellent academic supervision and access to further mentoring opportunities where appropriate.

- Opportunities to attend and present their work at relevant international conferences.

- Support in the preparation of their work for submission to relevant international journals and grant applications to different funding bodies.

- Access to a wide range of training opportunities, both the through the University's doctoral school and externally.

4). The Department will foster a culture of interdisciplinarity and sustain a high level of international engagement, continuing to cultivate a broad range of contacts and participating in a wide range of networks and associations. Specifically, the Department will:

- Actively encourage the development of interdisciplinary research where relevant, supporting initiatives which bring together colleagues from different disciplines within the Department, Faculty, and wider University settings.

- Pursue the strategic development of joint initiatives and projects with other relevant actors in the Luxembourg research eco-system, notably further developing partnerships with LISER in shared areas of interest.

- Continue to support the inward and outward mobility of colleagues through visiting professorships, structured international networks, and other funding mechanisms promoting sustained international scholarly exchange.

- Continue to assume leading roles in developing national disciplinary associations (such as LuxERA), while also actively participating in relevant international scholarly associations in our different areas (such as the Comparative and International Education Society, the International Society for Social Network Analysis, the Population Association of America, the Gerontological Association of America, the Council for European Studies, the European Union Studies Association, the European Consortia for Political and Sociological Research, etc.).

5). The Department will pursue a balanced portfolio of financing consistent with its research objectives. The Department will:

- Deploy departmental and institute-level basic funding in a manner which strategically contributes to the balanced realisation of the full spectrum of identified research objectives.

- Actively pursue competitive national and European-level research council funding in areas that contribute to the realisation of identified research objectives.

- Continue to undertake contractual research with governmental and non-governmental partners in areas of societal and policy relevance, consistent with the autonomous role of the university.