

EVALUATION GUIDE
FOR THE AWARD OF THE “TITLE” AND OF “COMPLEMENTARY BASE FUNDING”
OF “ASSOCIATE LABORATORIES”

August 2020

Introduction

The Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), the Portuguese research funding agency, is responsible to carry out a national assessment for the award or renewal of the title of “Associate Laboratory”, as well as to provide “complementary funding” to those R&D units that will be awarded that title. This assessment is established under the current legal framework for scientific institutions, as defined by Decree Law 63/2019, from 16th May.

An Associate Laboratory is defined as an R&D institution, or a consortium of R&D institutions, with significant critical mass and excellent research capacity to pursue objectives of national science and technology policy in addition to providing research careers. The Associate Laboratories are formally consulted by the government and by the public administration regarding the definition of national scientific and technological policy instruments.

Only large R&D Units, or consortia of R&D Units, with a coherent identity and critical mass (i.e., with more than 80 PhD holding researchers) are able to apply to the award of the title of “Associate Laboratory”. The evaluation procedure to be carried out by FCT in this national assessment will be based on the following three criteria:

- a) The **contribution to public policies** responding to scientific, health, environmental, cultural, social, economic or political challenges within or beyond the scope of the R&D program already evaluated in the context of the national assessment exercise conducted in 2017-2018 for all R&D units funded by FCT;
- b) The **development of scientific or technical careers for doctorates through permanent employment contracts**, according to the applicable legal regime, as well as the capacity to attract research talent to Portugal, in particular PhD students and researchers;
- c) The **capacity to diversify the sources of funding and to attract funding from the European Union or from other international organizations** for R&D activities in Portugal.

The process of awarding, or renewing, the title of Associate Laboratory, as well as of providing possible complementary funding beyond that attributed under the national assessment exercise conducted in 2017-2018 for all R&D units, includes the following steps:

1. the submission of an application for the renewal of the title (if already existing) or for the creation of a new Associate Laboratory;

2. a public presentation of the application;
3. the response to the questions set forth by the Evaluation Panel.

An application for the award or renewal of the title of Associate Laboratory is eligible for evaluation only if it complies with the following criteria:

- 1) The Associate Laboratory comprises one or more R&D Units that were **rated “Excellent” or “Very Good”** in the 2017-2018 national assessment of all R&D units (which comprised five rating levels: “Excellent”, “Very Good”, “Good”, “Fair” and “Poor”). The award of the title of Associate Laboratory can be attributed to:
 - a. Private not for profit Research Institutions which have been granted a public interest statute, or for which FCT will determine the deadline to obtain this statute;
 - b. Public Research institutions that are not State Laboratories, including those integrated in higher education institutions;
 - c. Consortia of institutions as referred in one of the above-mentioned points (a. or b.), or in both, as long as it complies with the requirements under the Associate Laboratory Regulation.
- 2) The R&D Unit has a minimum number of 80 integrated PhD researchers or, when involving more than one R&D Unit, the whole consortium has a **minimum of 80 integrated PhD researchers**.

Under the current evaluation, the following issues must be considered:

- FCT opens the possibility to award, for the 2020 evaluation exercise, the title of “Associate Laboratory” to **up to 30** R&D Units, or consortia of R&D Units with a coherent identity, out of over 300 R&D Units funded by FCT following to the 2017-2018 national assessment. The call for proposals will remain open in the following years for additional awards up to a maximum number of awards that will be specified each year.
- Candidates must present **5 cases of successful collaboration with exceptional impact in the support of public policies** in the last 5 years and give evidence of agreements and procedures that support and ensure a permanent collaboration with higher education institutions, other R&D institutions, hospitals, companies or other public or private institutions that are relevant to the Associate Laboratory’s mission.
- Apart from the contribution to national public policies, as well as to the international standing and capacity to attract European or international funding for research activities in Portugal, **the main feature of an Associate Laboratory relies on its capacity to develop sustainable scientific and/or technical careers for doctorates**, which is considered essential for the pursuit of the Associate Laboratory goals. This differentiates Associate Laboratories from the other R&D Units.
- Each Associate Laboratory will need to make a **commitment over time to offer permanent employment contracts to researchers and/or technical staff holding a PhD degree**, according to the applicable legal regime. The award of a permanent employment contract to researchers and technicians holding a PhD may follow an experimental period of work, in line with international best practices.

Following the present assessment exercise, the Associate Laboratory title is granted **for a period of up to 10 years**. The institutions will sign a contract with FCT whereby the underlying commitments and the allocation of the possibly assigned complementary funding will be established.

Evaluation Criteria

This document outlines the assessment criteria and clarifies the decision-making process to award or renew the title of Associate Laboratory and the possible providing of complementary funding.

The assessment of the Associate Laboratory applications builds upon the FCT 2017-2018 national assessment of all R&D units, that established the quality, merit and internationalization relevance of the R&D activity, and the scientific merit of the R&D Units' members included in the application. **These aspects are not under evaluation in the present application.** The present evaluation will focus only on the next three criteria:

- A) Capacity to sustainably design and promote **science and technology policies on scientific, health, environmental, cultural, social, economic or political challenges**. This includes evaluating the **contributions and support provided to public policies in the last 5 years** by the constituent entities of the Associate Laboratory, as well as the evaluation of the **relevance and scope of the proposed thematic lines and specific objectives**;
- B) Capacity to develop own **scientific and technical careers for doctorates** with permanent or open-ended employment contracts, according to the applicable legal regime, considering that, after a period of 5 years, the number of those permanent or open-ended contracts (excluding contracts as teaching staff of higher education institutions) should be **at least 10% of the total number of integrated PhD researchers**. This capacity should be evaluated by the institutional track record and the number of current and planned permanent or open-ended contracts with doctorates. The ability to **attract talent to Portugal**, in particular PhD students and researchers, required to reinforce R&D activities of basic or applied nature should also be evaluated. The **commitments, plans and structures for the future development and promotion of scientific or technical careers** through permanent or open-ended employment contracts should also be evaluated. When applicable, this includes the evaluation of the relevant collaboration with higher education institutions, hospitals, companies, other R&D institutions or other public or private institutions, for which evidence of the commitments of these institutions will have to be produced;
- C) Capacity to **diversify the Associate Laboratory's funding sources and to access European Union and/or other international funding** for R&D activities in Portugal, in order to **ensure the international prominence** of science and technology activities carried out in the country. The track record evaluation should take into account the percentage of international funding that the Laboratory has been able to attract in the last 5 years.

Each criterion will be evaluated independently according to the following aspects and weights:

Criterion A: 25%	Criterion B: 50%	Criterion C: 25%
<p>Relevance, scope and impact of the support to public policies in the last 5 years by the constituent entities of the Associate Laboratory.</p> <p>Relevance and scope of the proposed thematic lines and their specific objectives in response to public policies.</p> <p>Adequacy of the governance model to secure effective support to public policies.</p>	<p>Demonstrated track record and capacity to develop and sustain scientific and technical careers for PhDs through permanent or open-ended employment contracts.</p> <p>Capacity to attract talent to Portugal, in particular PhD students and PhD researchers.</p> <p>Adequacy of the governance model to secure careers and employment for PhDs and attract talent.</p>	<p>Demonstrated track record and capacity to secure international funding, in particular from EU R&D Programmes.</p> <p>Scientific and technological capacity to leverage the international prominence of science and technology activities</p> <p>Adequacy of the governance model to leverage international prominence and secure funding.</p>

It should be clear that **Criterion B is the most relevant and is weighted with 50%**, while criteria A and C are equally weighted with 25% each.

The scores applied to each criterion are described in the table below:

SCORE	Description
5	Excellent performance in all three aspects of the criterion
4	Fully complies with the three relevant aspects of the criterion, without weaknesses
3	Complies with most of the relevant aspects of the criterion, with minor weaknesses
2	Complies only with some of the relevant aspects of the criterion with no weaknesses in those
1	Complies only with some aspects of the criterion and shows weaknesses

Each criterion is rated using a 1-5 (one to five) score, in whole numbers. The classification of each proposal will correspond to the weighted sum of the scores obtained in each criterion, as follows:

$$\text{TOTAL SCORE (20-100)} = (0,25 \cdot \text{score A} + 0,50 \cdot \text{score B} + 0,25 \cdot \text{score C}) \cdot 20$$

Therefore the final scores for each proposal will be in the interval:

- Maximum: 100
- Minimum: 20.

The evaluation panel is expected to:

1. Rank all applications by the final score;
2. In case of equal final classification among candidates, the ranking will follow two untying criteria: first criterion B, second criterion C;
3. Propose to FCT up to 30 applications to be awarded with the title of “Associate Laboratory”;
4. Propose to FCT the potential need to provide “complementary funding” to those awarded with the title of “Associate Laboratory”, with a clear justification.

Evaluation Panel

The Evaluation Panel is an **independent body**, appointed by FCT’s Board of Directors. It will be responsible for the assessment of each application, and for the proposal of the award or the renewal of the title of Associate Laboratory, as well as for providing recommendations to FCT for the possible complementary funding.

The following aspects are considered:

- The Evaluation Panel is composed by experts of renowned merit and experience in the definition and management of national scientific and technological policy related activities, namely former directors or senior integrated members of Associate Laboratories. Panel

members will be excluded from the evaluation of an Associate Laboratory in case of conflict of interest, as it is the normal practice of FCT and other funding agencies.

- The constitution of the Evaluation Panel is made public at the FCT website before starting the assessment exercise.
- The Evaluation Panel is advised by an **International Scientific Council** and the Evaluation Panel may also resort to external experts, whose identity is not disclosed, for additional comments. The Evaluation Panel will specifically address to two members of the *International Scientific Council* up to three questions to clarify to what extent the research capacity of the applicant addresses each of the three assessment criteria.
- Each application will have at least two members of the Evaluation Panel who will act as readers and one of them will act as *rapporteur* who will be responsible for consolidating the readers' assessment and present it to the Evaluation Panel.
- The Evaluation Panel members will use this information together with their own assessment of the applications to form an opinion.
- After the public presentations of the proposals, the Evaluation Panel or the *rapporteurs* may request to the applicants complementary information in order to obtain clarifications before the final decision is made.
- An Evaluation Panel member who identifies possible conflicts of interest with one or more applications will not be a reader nor participate in the evaluation of these applications, but will fully participate in the evaluation of the remaining applications.
- The Evaluation Panel should justify in detail the scores given to each of the three evaluation criteria as well as the total score, and providing substantive comments and recommendations, regarding any aspects that may be considered relevant.

International Scientific Council

FCT will create an **International Scientific Council** to support the Evaluation Panel who will resort individually to the members of the Council to request comments on the applications. Therefore, this Council does not represent a collegial body.

The International Scientific Council is composed by experts in the areas under evaluation for the R&D Units involved in the Associate Laboratory applications, designated by FCT, and that, when possible, have participated in the national assessment exercise conducted by FCT in 2017-2018 for all research units.

The composition of the International Scientific Council is made public at the FCT website before the beginning of the evaluation process of the applications deemed eligible.

For each application, the Evaluation Panel will identify at least two members of the International Scientific Council to whom comments will be requested about the capacity of one or more R&D Units in achieving the proposed national scientific and technological policy goals, including the scientific and technological capability to reach these goals, as well as the nature and dimension of the human and material resources involved, the institutional collaborations, the planning and the internal organization and governance model.

The members of the International Scientific Council will abide to the same rules on conflicts of interests as the Evaluation Panel members do.

Conflicts of Interest

Any conflict of interest (CoI) must be declared prior to the evaluation process. No panel member, member of the International Scientific Council or external reviewer shall make an individual review of an application if he/she has declared a CoI.

i) Disqualifying CoI

In case a disqualifying CoI is identified for one application, the panel member cannot evaluate this application. The Evaluation Panel members are also not allowed to participate in the panel meeting discussion of these applications.

Circumstances that could be interpreted as disqualifying CoI are the following:

1. First-degree relationship, marriage, life partnership, domestic partnership;
2. Personal interest in the application's success or financial interest by persons listed under no.1;
3. Affiliation to the R&D units applying in this call for the Associate Laboratory title under evaluation;
4. Members who integrate or are active in an advisory council or governing body of a R&D Unit or Associate Laboratory.

ii) Potential CoI

In the case of a potential CoI, the panel member shall notify FCT and clarify if he/she is able to perform an unbiased evaluation or if the conflict should rather be considered as disqualifying.

A potential CoI may exist, even in cases not covered by the disqualifying CoI indicated above, in the following circumstances:

1. Relationships that do not fall under 1, other personal ties or conflicts;
2. Participation in university bodies other than those listed under 4, e.g. in scientific advisory committees in the research environment, or any other participating entity bodies;
3. Participating in an on-going scientific or inter-personal conflict with the applicant(s).

For all potential CoI, FCT will make a decision whether the situation in question constitutes an actual CoI or whether no CoI exists.

Before starting the evaluation of each application, and in order to be able to access the evaluation form, each reviewer needs to complete a CoI Declaration.

Application Structure

Applications are submitted in English, following the guidelines contained in the Application Guide, and must contain **only information complementary** to that submitted and evaluated in the national assessment exercise conducted by FCT in 2017-2018 for all research units. The contents for evaluation are distributed in the following five parts:

- A. **Identification** of the Associate Laboratory.
- B. **Strategic plan to support public policy response** to scientific, health, environmental, cultural, social, economic or political challenges.
- C. Institutional **organization and governance model** of the Associate Laboratory to **guarantee and foster scientific and technical careers for doctorates**.
- D. Institutional **organization and governance model** to promote participation in international programs and networks, as well as to **attracting funding from the European Union** and other international entities for R&D activities in Portugal.
- E. **Proposal for possible complementary funding from FCT** and due justification, taking in consideration the amounts already allocated to the total of the proposing R&D Unit(s) defined by the 2017-2018 national assessment of all R&D units.

Public Presentation of Applications

Each application will be presented to the Evaluation Panel members in a public session announced at the FCT website. The Evaluation Panel members will interact with the applicants. This step aims to clarify and contribute to the critical analysis and assessment of the application.

The presentation will be led by the Coordinator of the application and up to two integrated members of the R&D Units involved, which are selected by the Coordinator.

The information gathered at, or subsequent to, the public presentation will be considered for the elaboration of reports and for decisions made by the Evaluation Panel on a given application.

Evaluation Panel Decisions

The Evaluation Panel will collegially make the final decisions for each application, in plenary meetings, with nominal voting, without abstention, based on the established evaluation criteria and scoring system, taking into account both the application, and its public presentation, as well as comments requested to members of the International Scientific Council and eventual additional reports from external reviewers.

Each application will be evaluated by all Evaluation Panel members, except for those who have a conflict of interest.

An Evaluation Panel report will be produced giving a summary of the work, indicating the date and place, the members who were present, the matters discussed, the applications which were analysed, and the respective deliberations and arguments, as well as votes cast.

The Evaluation Panel must submit an Evaluation Report, including the global recommendations to FCT. In particular, the Evaluation Panel will propose to FCT:

- a) up to 30 applications to be awarded with the title of “Associate Laboratory”;
- b) recommendations for the providing of possible complementary funding to those awarded with the title of “Associate Laboratory”, with a clear justification;
- c) potential requisites to be included in the respective contract, regarding the specific goals of the national scientific and technological policy to be supported; the implementation plan of the scientific and technical careers for PhD holders; the required collaboration commitments with other institutions; other organizational elements and further aspects that are deemed appropriate.

This information will be conveyed through an **evaluation report** that includes a **global comment to each application**. This comment shall include the evaluation of the proposed internal organization, considering the relevance, complementarities and added value of the consortium regarding the proposed goals, as well as the procedures to assure the coordination of the interaction and contributions of the R&D Units.

The Evaluation Panel will analyse and respond to any complaints that may arise after disclosure of the results in the preliminary hearing period, and prepare a Final Evaluation Report to FCT.