Evaluation Panel: SOCIAL SCIENCES - Language Sciences

R&D Unit: Centro de Linguística da Universidade Nova de Lisboa (CLUNL)
Coordinator: Maria Rute Vilhena Costa
Integrated PhD Researchers: 36

Overall Quality Grade: VERY GOOD
Evaluation Criteria Ratings
(A) Quality, merit, relevance and internationalization of the
    R&D activities of the Integrated Researchers in the R&D Unit Application: 4
(B) Merit of the team of Integrated Researchers: 4
(C) Appropriateness of objectives, strategy, plan of activities and organization: 4

Base Funding for (2020-2023): 473 K€
Recommended Programmatic Support
PhD Fellowships: 4
Programmatic Funding: 310 K€, including for 1 (Junior) New PhD Researcher Contract.

Justification, Comments and Recommendations
CLUNL is a high-performing and very active R&D Unit, well-organised and ambitious, with a track record of high-quality outputs that promises continuing impact at this level. The Unit focuses on both fundamental and applied research, with a particularly strong 21st century (Portuguese) society-oriented emphasis on the latter. It has a very clearly defined structure, with four explicitly defined research groups, three of which are longer-standing, while G(roup) 4, which was created in 2015, had to be restructured in 2018, following the departure of an ERC grant holder to another Unit. Overall, this is a Unit with an impressive number of strengths across the research, training and outreach domains, and there is no question that it has achieved a great deal on all of these fronts during the reporting period.

Gs1-3 all gave the impression, both in the submitted documentation and during our site visit, of being very well organised, productive Units, but the same unfortunately cannot be said for G4. For example, while Gs1-3 are praised by the three external evaluators, whose specialisations reflect the research foci of these groups, the same is not true for G4, which is not specifically represented on the Advisory Board. Similarly, the five main successes reported in the Unit application barely register G4, while the ten top publications reflect only the work of Gs1-3; further, at the time of our initial evaluation, only Gs1-3 had an on-line presence on the CLUNL site, with the CLCM site having been under construction – this had, however, been addressed to the same extent by the time of our visit. Also, these three groups are impressively balanced in terms of numbers (G1 & G2 both have 12 PhD researchers and 19 PhD students, while G3 has 15 PhD researchers and 14 PhDs); by contrast, G4 currently comprises only Aberta-based CLUNL member, Hanna Batoréo, and three further affiliates based in Portugal, three in Brazil and one in Poland. The Group has been active during its first 18 months, having met in October 2018 with a special issue of CLUNL's on-line working papers, Cadernos WGT, in the pipeline and participation in this year's Summer School on the cards, but there are no PhD students or younger researchers or, indeed, anyone at NOVA involved in this group. Given the above, the Unit as a whole clearly cannot be evaluated as consistent in quality, merit, relevance and internationalization, although it is clear that the bulk of the Unit is strong.

In terms of output, there is evidently much highly original research underway, an admirable amount of which has also fed into the very wide-ranging resources and applications that the Unit has produced during the evaluation period, and beyond. Unit members have produced research published in top-ranked journals (e.g. Cognition and Language Acquisition) and researchers in all three groups have also been invited to contribute to leading Handbook and research overview publications. Unit members also have strikingly strong international links, i.a. being involved in COST actions, in a Heritage Languages Consortium and also in collaborations with universities, government agencies and other groups in Europe, Africa and South America. The high standing of individual Unit members, both in Portugal and beyond, is also apparent, with appointments including the presidency of the European Languages Council, membership of the ISO technical committee, and the appointment of G1 lead, J. Costa, as Secretary of State for Education. Further, CLUNL hosts a now biennial international conference on the relationship between grammar and text (GRATO), and a steadily growing annual Summer School which attracts significant numbers of PhD students, not only from Portugal, but also from abroad (74 participants from 18 nationalities were registered for the 2019 edition at the time of our visit).

The KRUse doctoral programme is a notable strength, and both the submission and what we were told in the course of our site visit underlined CLUNL commitment to study programmes and other opportunities that will allow its graduates to gain both wider-than-usual advanced knowledge of theoretical and applied linguistics and exposure to aspects of academic life – summer schools, collaborative research, conference organisation, and consultation with invited/visiting speakers/researchers – that are not always prioritised. Graduate students are also encouraged to develop and promote their own initiatives, e.g. within the Young Researchers Group. As CLUNL's graduate-oriented activities – notably the annual Summer School – benefit graduates elsewhere too, they should be a funding priority.

Also clear from the documentation is CLUNL commitment to Open Access via the NOVA Institutional Repository and the Scientific Open Access Repository of Portugal (RCAAP). Additionally, many of the 2013-17 outputs are e-outputs and on-line resources. This seems exemplary, and deserving of (further) funding. The Unit also (now) has an exceptionally informative, up-to-date website, which serves as an excellent indicator of the Unit remarkable range and activity.

Also quite exceptional is CLUNL's varied and Unit-wide commitment to outreach: there are PhD training-related collaborations with eight universities beyond Portugal; training courses for teachers and translators; consultation and evaluation work for the FCT, the Portuguese Ministry of Education, and the Institute for School Evaluation. Additionally, much of the experimental, lexicographic and grammar-text research being undertaken is aimed at producing linguistic resources for use in various kinds of more challenging linguistic contexts – e.g. clinical evaluation and support for children and adults with linguistic impairments, multilingual contexts, complex language-contact situations in which Portuguese is spoken (e.g. in Angola), the growing Portuguese L2 domain, industry, etc.

The comments in this section relate only to the staff and students associated with Gs1-3, given the limited information that we have about G4 and its seemingly uncertain future. This is evidently a team of talented, and, as we discovered during our site visit, also very enthusiastic and energetic researchers and PhD students. Each of the active research groups is led by at least one researcher who is very senior nationally and also an internationally respected researcher (G1: J. Costa & Lobo; G2: Rute Costa & Lino; G3: Coutinho); as noted in connection with Criterion A, some of these have held key national and international positions during the reporting period. It is striking that Gs1-3 are each committed not only to producing high-quality fundamental research, but also to developing applications of this research to themes of direct social relevance, e.g. gaining a better understanding of typical and atypical language development, language impairment, and the language of migrants and heritage speakers, and developing tools to aid education, diagnosis and therapy. The researchers' enthusiasm for engaging with contemporary varieties of Portuguese, world-wide, and also with languages beyond Portuguese is also a distinctive feature of this Unit: this is an "outward"-looking team.

During our site visit, we met a team of senior researchers who evidently work together very effectively, despite the very considerable demands that are placed on their time. The facts that (i) the Unit has only two administrative staff and (ii) each senior researcher also has an average of 9hrs/week teaching load means that the existing sharing-oriented ethos among them is crucial. The postdocs, too, typically have significant teaching loads (generally 12 hrs/week, and often at other institutions), but their commitment to their research, in particular in cases where this is collaborative, and their appreciation for the personal and financial support that they receive from the seniors were very evident. This gratitude was also a marked feature of our interaction with the Unit PhD students, a significant number of whom are beneficiaries of the very generous funding that has supported the KRUse doctoral programme in recent years. Individual supervision aside, group meetings are frequent, with members who cannot be on-site being included via Skype or other appropriate means. Further, the students in the various groups also emphasised the extent to which they appreciate all the freedom they have, not only in their own research, but also in relation to opportunities like the production of the Open Access student publication, NOVALing, and the enabling way in which they are included in collaborative research from a very early stage of their academic development. The support given to the Unit younger members, then, deserves great praise, as does the more general fairness that seems to govern decision-making, resource allocation and co-working in this Unit.

Turning to the actual funding application, the submitted application was very helpfully structured, and it is clear that much careful thought went into it. That this careful thought included serious thinking about prioritisation of activities was also evident during our site visit: when asked to highlight PhD funding priorities for the coming period, for example, there was general agreement that the proposed experimental rather than formal work should be the chief priority for the proposed G1 PhD allocation, and, more generally, that the Linguistics requests should enjoy priority over those relating to Translation. While the significant focus on training in this application is to be strongly commended since it contributes to sustainability and succession planning, the extent of the training-related funding requests here is exceptionally high. The Unit has evidently been successful in attracting funding via the FCT and European funding programmes, and it also seems to have excellent links with non-academic bodies and industry, which could be further

exploited to ensure that the first-rate KRUse programme is appropriately sustained. The need for a computer scientist and part-time statistician is certainly clear.

We recommend, based on discussion during our visit, that experimental rather than formal work should be the chief priority for the proposed G1 PhD allocation, and, more generally, that the Linguistics requests should enjoy priority over those relating to Translation.

We recognize the need for a computer scientist and part-time statistician; the postdoctoral post should go to one of these.

The Unit identified their need for more requested PhD research posts and postdocs than it is possible to fund within this FCT Program. The Unit need for further salary support for researchers at this level is nonetheless recognised. Programmatic Funding has therefore been assigned in such a way to allow the Unit to provide more flexible hiring and top-up support, tailored according to its specific needs. We envisage and recommend that the majority of funding in this category will indeed be assigned to the salaries of new researchers. We also approve any remaining (non-personnel) funds within this category being assigned to the other forms of expense requested and allowable under programmatic funding.