

## EVALUATION REPORT OF THE UNIT

LECD - Laboratory Ethology Cognition  
Development

UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF THE  
FOLLOWING ESTABLISHMENTS AND  
ORGANISMS:

Université Paris Nanterre

---

**EVALUATION CAMPAIGN 2024-2025**  
GROUP E



In the name of the expert committee:

Martin Giurfa, chairman of the committee

For the Hcéres:

Stéphane Le Boulter, acting president

In accordance with articles R. 114-15 and R. 114-10 of the Research Code, the evaluation reports drawn up by the expert committees are signed by the chairmen of these committees and countersigned by the president of Hcéres.

To make the document easier to read, the names used in this report to designate functions, professions or responsibilities (expert, researcher, teacher-researcher, professor, lecturer, engineer, technician, director, doctoral student, etc.) are used in a generic sense and have a neutral value.

This report is the result of the unit's evaluation by the expert committee, the composition of which is specified below. The appreciations it contains are the expression of the independent and collegial deliberation of this committee. The numbers in this report are the certified exact data extracted from the deposited files by the supervising body on behalf of the unit.

## MEMBERS OF THE EXPERT COMMITTEE

**Chairperson:**

Mr Martin Giurfa, Sorbonne Université

**Experts:**

Mr Nicolas Mathevon, Université Jean Monnet (representative of the CNU)

Mrs Clémentine Vignal, Sorbonne Université

## HCÉRES REPRESENTATIVE

Mr Bruno Guiard

## REPRESENTATIVE OF SUPERVISING INSTITUTIONS AND BODIES

Mrs Carole Brugeilles, Vice-présidente recherche, Université Paris Nanterre

## CHARACTERISATION OF THE UNIT

- Name: Laboratory Ethology Cognition Development
- Acronym: LECD
- Label and number:
- Composition of the executive team: Mr Sébastien Deregnacourt (director) & Ms Maya Gratier (adjunct director)

## SCIENTIFIC PANELS OF THE UNIT

SVE: Life, Health and Environmental Sciences  
SVE5 Neurosciences et troubles du système nerveux

## THEMES OF THE UNIT

The Laboratoire éthologie cognition développement (LECD) is active in the areas of Ethology, Comparative Psychology, Social behaviour, Language, Evolutionary Psychology, and Developmental Psychology. The laboratory consists of a single team. Despite the use of different biological models, primarily birds and humans. This unified structure fosters strong connections among laboratory members, allowing them to organize their work around two primary research axes: communication and the developmental and cognitive aspects of social life. More specifically, the unit's research focuses on two main axes: "Communication: From Vocal to Multimodal Behaviour" (Topic 1) and "Developmental and Cognitive Bases of Social Life" (Topic 2). While some staff members' research aligns exclusively with one of these topics, for most researchers, their work spans both areas.

## HISTORIC AND GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF THE UNIT

The current laboratory is the result of several transformations since the establishment of ethology at the Université Paris Nanterre in 1970, a few years after the founding of the University, initially called "Université Paris X". The laboratory initially housed several animal species, including non-human primates (prosimians). In 1992, however research shifted to reproductive strategies using a single biological model: the domestic canary. At that time, the research team became part of the URA CNRS 667, which also included two other teams based at the Université Paris 13 in Villetaneuse. In 2000, the laboratory left this association and became solely affiliated with Université Paris Nanterre as an associated unit ("Équipe d'Accueil," EA3456) at the Université Paris Nanterre. Over the last 15 years, new research avenues have opened up, particularly in the field of animal cognition, leading to the renaming of the laboratory as the Laboratoire d'Éthologie et Cognition Comparée. During this period, research expanded to new biological bird models, both in the field and in the laboratory. In 2013, three developmental psychologists, with whom existing collaborations were already in place, decided to join the laboratory, which previously consisted solely of ethologists. In 2014, the unit was renamed Laboratoire Ethologie Cognition Développement (LECD). Following this integration, the laboratory space was reorganized to create in 2018 a "Baby Lab," dedicated to research on human infants. The LECD is located on the first floor of the Charlotte Delbo building on the Université Paris Nanterre campus. The animal facilities (240 m<sup>2</sup>) are located in the same building. The Baby Lab is located in another building on campus, the Bianca & René Zazzo building.

## RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT OF THE UNIT

The LECD is part of the Université Paris Nanterre (UPN), a University primarily focused on the Human and Social Sciences (SHS). It is the only laboratory at UPN conducting research in the field of Life and Environmental Sciences (SVE). Despite being unique in this regard, the unit demonstrates a high level of integration within the University by participating in various research and educational programs initiated by UPN. The LECD is also an active member of the research federation 'Fédération de Recherche EPN-R' (Education, Psychology, Neuroscience – Research), alongside six other laboratories. This federation aims to foster research in neuroscience, psychology, and educational sciences at UPN by promoting collaboration and shared expertise among its members. At the regional level, the LECD is a member of the Institut Francilien d'Éthologie, which organizes multiple activities in the field of ethology. The laboratory also participates regularly in the annual meetings of the PaBaLa network, which brings together Baby Lab s across Paris. From 2020 to 2023, the LECD's Baby Lab was part of a coalition of Parisian Baby Lab collaborating on research and outreach projects with the Cité des bébés, part of the Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie. Additionally, the LECD contributes to the Scientific Interest Group (GIS) Institut du Genre (Gender Institute). Established in 2012 at the initiative of the CNRS, this GIS unites around 30 institutional partners conducting research on gender and sexuality. It is dedicated to coordinating, advancing, and promoting this research both nationally and internationally. LECD members maintain strong ties with the maternity ward of the CASH de Nanterre (Centre d'Accueil et de Soins Hospitaliers) through projects involving newborn infants conducted on-site. They also collaborate closely with the Protection Maternelle et Infantile (PMI) of Nanterre, where they carry out observational and survey studies on parent-infant interactions and parenting practices. From 2024 to 2026,

the infancy research team has established a partnership with the early childhood education service of the Département du Val-de-Marne to study language development in 12 public daycare centers. All these interactions, whether at the local or regional level, demonstrate the unit's strong integration within the network of institutions that are essential for the success and development of its research projects.

## UNIT WORKFORCE: in physical persons at 31/12/2023

Catégories de personnel	Effectifs
Professeurs et assimilés	6
Maitres de conférences et assimilés	9
Directeurs de recherche et assimilés	0
Chargés de recherche et assimilés	0
Personnels d'appui à la recherche	5
<b>Sous-total personnels permanents en activité</b>	<b>20</b>
Enseignants-chercheurs et chercheurs non permanents et assimilés	3
Personnels d'appui non permanents	0
Post-doctorants	0
Doctorants	11
<b>Sous-total personnels non permanents en activité</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Total personnels</b>	<b>34</b>

DISTRIBUTION OF THE UNIT'S PERMANENTS BY EMPLOYER: in physical persons at 31/12/2023. Non-tutorship employers are grouped under the heading "others".

Nom de l'employeur	EC	C	PAR
U Paris Nanterre	15	0	5
<b>Total personnels</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

## GLOBAL ASSESSMENT

The overall unit's profile is excellent given its interdisciplinary dimension fostering collaborations between ethologists and developmental psychologists thereby strengthening synergies and cohesion within the unit. The unit's excellent attractiveness is ensured by competitive funding achievements from national research grants (3 ANR projects as principal investigators, 2 ANR projects as collaborators) to local funding, but also by its high-quality technical equipment (baby lab) supported by a highly skilled staff expertise (sound analysis, use of robotic devices...). The unit's excellent research output in international peer-reviewed journals (Science Advances...) provided major scientific contributions notably in the domain of vocal learning. Several funded research projects have a strong publication potential and successes of the group's academics at the "Institut Universitaire de France" are also a mark of progress for the unit and for its national visibility. The links to society are excellent to outstanding given i) the involvement of the unit in disseminating knowledge to a wide range of audiences using different types of support and medias (TV, radio, magazines), ii) the contribution of the unit to the "Université de Culture Permanente" at the Université Paris-Nanterre.

## DETAILED EVALUATION OF THE UNIT

### A - CONSIDERATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE PREVIOUS REPORT

The unit received a recommendation **"to reduce the teaching load of PhD students to enable them to focus more on their research projects."** This recommendation has been implemented, as the unit no longer requires PhD students to complete 64 hours of teaching. The decision to engage in teaching, as well as the number of hours, is now left to each student's discretion.

The unit was advised to **"provide more detailed information about the offices that can support students and junior staff in preparing applications for postdoctoral fellowships and grants"**. Improvements in this area are evident at both the institutional and unit levels. At the institutional level, the University of Paris Nanterre (Research Directorate: DRED; College of Doctoral Schools) now provides PhD students and junior staff with tools and training to help them prepare for their future careers, including support for postdoctoral fellowship and grant applications. The university has also introduced a new status for recent PhD graduates ("jeunes docteurs UPN"), which grants them continued access to a digital account, Google Workspace, software tools, and library resources, including the online documentary portal, for up to three years after their PhD defense. At the unit level, several researchers offer similar training initiatives, such as guidance on preparing applications for the qualification as teacher-researchers through the National Council of Universities (CNU), enabling them to apply for academic positions.

Another recommendation emphasized the need to increase **"the number of HDR so as to distribute supervision and tutoring among the staff scientists"**. Although three members of the unit obtained their habilitation during the last five-year period, two members retired, and one passed away, leaving the total number of habilitations unchanged. Continued efforts are necessary to address this recommendation effectively.

The unit was advised to achieve **"a flexibility in the programming in case of strong biases in grant distribution. Researchers could be invited to join groups that were successful in receiving funding. This strategy may help in reducing the unevenness in the publication output within the members of the unit."** This recommendation does not appear to have been explicitly implemented, as researchers within the unit are free to decide whether or not to participate in successful projects. As a result (see below), there is a potential dispersion in the number of projects undertaken within the unit.

Another recommendation suggested **"increasing the number of joint PhD students between ethology and psychology, as well as promoting collaborative projects between these two fields, preferably funded by third parties, to enhance interdisciplinary exchanges"**. This recommendation was followed, as during the five-year period, two PhD students were co-directed by an ethologist and a psychologist from the unit. Additionally, an ANR-funded project involved both ethologists and developmental psychologists from the unit, including one postdoc and one PhD student. Other initiatives were also launched, involving an ethologist from the lab and members of other disciplines from different universities. These transdisciplinary projects should be actively encouraged and given even greater prominence, as they represent a unique strength of the Unit, stemming from its diverse composition. Stabilizing the roles of non-permanent staff who act as interfaces between different research domains could further enhance transdisciplinary collaboration.

Regarding the unit's organization and daily operations, the unit was advised to **"establish annual face-to-face meetings between the Directors and the staff to discuss issues that do not typically arise at larger meetings, which could help identify personal needs, strengths, and career development goals."** The recommendation was implemented, and annual meetings were established between the director, the deputy director, and the staff (researchers, PhD students, technical and administrative staff). A full week in spring is dedicated to these meetings.

The unit was encouraged to implement **"training modules aimed at improving the statistical skills of students and junior staff."** In this regard, several training modules offered by members of the LECD at the doctoral school ED139 help achieve this goal, as they focus on enhancing the statistical skills of students, junior staff, and even permanent researchers.

Finally, the unit was advised to **"improve and regularly update the laboratory website to enhance the attractiveness of the unit."** While unit members are regularly encouraged to update their information (such as publications and funding) on the website, there is still considerable room for improvement in this area.

## B - EVALUATION AREAS

### EVALUATION AREA 1: PROFILE, RESOURCES AND ORGANISATION OF THE UNIT

#### Assessment on the scientific objectives of the unit

The unit is renowned for its research into animal communication, particularly in birds. The scientific environment of the unit has been greatly enriched by the involvement of developmental psychologists. Their contributions have added a new interdisciplinary dimension to the unit's projects. The two main aims outlined – to continue research on vocal and multimodal communication, and explore the developmental and cognitive bases of social life in material environments – are both relevant and feasible given the unit's current resources and staff. These aims also offer exciting opportunities to foster transdisciplinary collaborations between team members. However, in translating these two main directions into scientific programs, there is a risk of dispersion becomes apparent. Within the five-year scientific plan, at least 13 projects are identified as goals, with a further 5-7 listed as ongoing, resulting in a total of 20 different projects. Given the size of the unit (i.e. 20 permanent members, including part-time technical support) this multiplicity of projects poses a significant risk of dilution of efforts, despite the inherent value of the topics. Although the unit operates as a single team structure, it functions more like a department, with each research and teaching staff member has the potential to serve as the principal investigator of a project. Focusing resources on a smaller number of strategic projects would be more practical and better aligned with the unit's current capacity. Unit members actively participate in University committees, including those focused on research ethics. However, an important issue such as gender parity should also be addressed at the unit level through the appointment of a dedicated "equality correspondent" ("correspondant égalité").

Overall, the unit has made significant achievements and progress over the past five years, which are particularly noteworthy given the context: an environment lacking other life-sciences laboratories and predominantly focused on Social and Human Sciences. In this context, the unit performance is certainly **excellent**.

#### Assessment on the unit's resources

The unit benefits from the support of two administrative staff members, which might seem reasonable for a team of 15 permanent researchers. However, neither of these staff members works full-time. It would be highly advisable for at least one of them to be fully dedicated to the administrative and financial needs of the unit. Support from the University in this regard would be greatly appreciated. The annual funding provided by the University is approximately €35,000. This sum is modest, even for a small unit. The University is encouraged to increase this sum, based on the investment and scientific achievements of the unit. An increase in the University's financial support would significantly enhance the unit's capabilities. Requests for funding from the laboratory's budget are collected in advance. Decisions regarding funding are made collectively. This approach is effective in supporting research programs that lack dedicated funding. Priority is also given to supporting doctoral students, including funding for training (e.g. animal experimentation, bioacoustics) and for travel, especially for participation in national or international conferences. Despite the limitations in institutional funding, the unit's researchers have been successful in securing several competitive grants from sources such as ANR, Fondation de France, University Paris Nanterre, and COMUE University Paris Lumières. Over the past five years, these grants have amounted to a total of €887,000, demonstrating the commitment of the unit's members in highly competitive funding landscapes. The unit also benefits from animal facilities covering approximately 240 m<sup>2</sup>, conveniently located on the same floor as the researchers' offices. These facilities accommodate various bird species used in the unit's research programs. However, issues with heating and ventilation have been reported, raising concerns about their potential impact on animal welfare and researcher/technical staff integrity. However, a recent improvement of these aspects was also mentioned. Additionally, the unit has access to a Baby Lab (35 m<sup>2</sup>) located in a separate building (Espace Régine Scelles). This facility is well-equipped for research projects on human infants conducted by developmental psychologists and provides valuable resources for studies in this domain. The maintenance and operation of these resources, as well as other activities, require smooth communication with the university's financial department. However, this dialogue is almost nonexistent due to the department's lack of response to the unit's requests and the absence of solutions to the problems it faces.



Overall, while the resources are **excellent** considering the constraints faced by the unit (there is the only animal facility in the entire campus), the institutional support required to support them should be improved and increased.

### Assessment on the functioning of the unit

The unit operates as a cohesive team comprising 20 permanent staff members and 11 PhD students. Members convene twice weekly for a laboratory seminar and a journal club. Staff participating in the animal welfare structure also meets regularly. A laboratory council convenes every two months, a frequency that may be insufficient for making prompt executive decisions. The council is composed of: 1) all research and teaching staff; 2) two doctoral student representatives; 3) the animal facility manager; 4) the laboratory secretary/administrator; and 5) the research support officer. Although all staff categories are represented, including all research and teaching staff in the council does not align with the principle of elected representation. This approach resembles a general assembly more than a focused council. This also contrasts with the fact that students have two elected representatives. A general assembly is held annually, during which all members of the laboratory are invited to attend. The unit is encouraged to create an executive council meeting monthly where representatives from various staff groups can interact and address multiple aspects of the unit's operations. Functioning as a unified team is not incompatible with establishing such a board, which could ensure that the diverse interests and perspectives of all staff categories are represented. Other initiatives, like retreats and happy-hour events mentioned in the report are important for social cohesion and should be maintained.

Given the unit's unique structure as a single large team and its horizontal decision-making approach, its functioning is **excellent**, though there is room for improvement.

#### *1 / The unit has set itself relevant scientific objectives.*

##### Strengths and possibilities linked to the context

The unit has identified two main priority areas for the next five-year term: vocal and multimodal communication, and the exploration of the developmental and cognitive foundations of social life within material environments. These focus areas are both highly relevant and achievable given the unit's existing resources and personnel. Moreover, they foster meaningful dialogue and collaboration between ethologists and developmental psychologists, strengthening synergies and cohesion within the unit.

##### Weaknesses and risks linked to the context

By allowing each researcher the freedom to pursue as many projects as they wish, the unit risks spreading its efforts too thin across numerous initiatives. While research freedom is undoubtedly vital, fostering discussions to consolidate efforts around priority research projects would enhance the unit's focus and visibility. This approach could lead to more impactful outcomes, such as higher-tier publications.

#### *2 / The unit has resources that are suited to its activity profile and research environment and mobilises them.*

##### Strengths and possibilities linked to the context

The unit presents a unique constellation allying ethologist and developmental psychologists. Their coexistence in the same laboratory has fostered original research projects that received competitive funding. The unit benefits from animal facilities and a Baby lab, which support efficiently the activities of researchers and teaching staff. The unit has participated in research initiatives launched by the University Paris Nanterre and is also part of a research federation (FDR EPN-R), which includes seven other laboratories specializing in psychology, neuroscience, cognitive science, and education. This affiliation fosters numerous opportunities for transdisciplinary collaboration and the development of innovative research questions and projects. For example, the federation secured significant funding from the Île-de-France Region (€540k) for the Mobikid project, in which the unit actively participates. Collaborations with other member laboratories of the federation have been initiated, paving the way for exciting transdisciplinary initiatives. Additionally, the LECD is a member of the Institut Francilien d'Ethologie and of the Scientific Interest Group (GIS) "Institut du Genre" (gender



institute), which focuses on gender and sexualities. Moreover, developmental psychologists have also strong ties with hospital and care structures, which facilitate their work on parent-infant interactions and parenting. Overall, there is a rich, stimulating context for the development of research activities by LECD members.

## Weaknesses and risks linked to the context

The University's funding support for the unit is modest, even when accounting for its small size. Basic infrastructure issues, such as inadequate ventilation and heating in the animal (bird) facilities, remain unresolved by the University authorities, posing serious concerns for both the birds and the staff working in these conditions. A permanent solution to this issue is urgently required. Although support is provided by the University for data storage, management and sharing, it is insufficient for the unit needs. Institutional support would be required to expand these possibilities. Furthermore, the teaching load for unit members is notably high, limiting their ability to devote substantial time to research activities. Staff members with a strong academic profile are encouraged to apply for the IUF (*Institut Universitaire de France*) to alleviate these constraints and enhance their research opportunities.

*3/ The unit's practices comply with the rules and directives laid down by its supervisory bodies in terms of human resources management, safety, environment, ethical protocols and protection of data and scientific heritage.*

## Strengths and possibilities linked to the context

The University Paris Nanterre has established clear rules and committees dealing with the different aspects mentioned in this point (health & security, research ethics, data protection, etc.) and unit members are well aware of these initiatives.

## Weaknesses and risks linked to the context

The unit does not appear to have designated staff members for critical roles such as equality representatives (*correspondant égalité*). Appointing staff specifically trained and sensitized to address this important area would be a valuable step forward.

## EVALUATION AREA 2: ATTRACTIVENESS

### Assessment on the attractiveness of the unit

The unit scientific activity is recognized at the national and international level. Through collaborations inside and outside academia, active participation to conferences, expertise networks and science evaluation, the unit has a well-established situation in its field. The success of the unit to grant applications and recognition prizes is growing, and PhD funding sources are diverse and regular. The unit has high-quality technical facilities and technical expertise. Although career opportunities for associate professor to become full professors show a relatively high rate, career support process and policy for all staff (including PhD, postdocs, technical staff) could be strengthened. Overall, the attractiveness of the unit is **excellent**.

*1/ The unit has an attractive scientific reputation and is part of the European research area.*

The unit has built several local, national and international scientific collaborations. Its scientific activity is visible and strongly recognized. The unit has also built multiple partnerships outside academia that serves its scientific projects (health units and facilities, museum...). As an example of the unit's attractiveness and visibility, 2 members received national recognition of their work ("*Institut Universitaire de France*"). The unit members are regularly invited to teach in master curricula in other Universities and to present their research results in seminars and conferences (e.g. International Ethological Congress – Behaviour 2023, CEU Conference in Cognitive Development 2023). The unit regularly hosts visiting professors on UPN funding, as well as visiting researchers and visiting students from Universities members of EDUC Alliance (EDUC-SHARE program, European commission Horizon 2020). The unit members are active in conference and workshop organizations (e.g. Pet Revolution, biannual conference for a general audience), as well as in scientific societies (SFECA, French Society for the

Study of Animal Behaviour) and expertise networks (e.g. CNREEA National Committee for Ethical Thinking on Animal Experimentation). The unit members participate in science evaluation (reviews of papers and grants, scientific committees, thesis committees).

## *2/ The unit is attractive because for the quality of its staff support policy.*

The quality of staff hosting policy is partly supported by UPN policy. In particular, newly appointed faculty members benefit from a lower teaching load and a small research budget, PhD students have a flexible teaching load and have access to training programs to prepare their future. Other on-boarding processes should be defined (mentoring, formation plan...). Teaching assistants (ATER) are a significant part of the unit and their mentoring should be defined. The unit share resources between funded researchers and newly appointed researchers or researchers without success in grant applications. The unit has structured different levels of participation and expression (monthly board meetings, weekly animal care and experimentation meeting, weekly scientific meeting, weekly journal club) that should ensure a good collective dynamic. Annual appointments for each unit member with the director or adjunct-director offer opportunities of the expression of individual needs and career projects. Nevertheless, how careers of administrative and technical staff are accompanied is not explained. Although several unit members originally appointed as associate professor became full professors, the career support process and policy of the unit is not described. Especially with 2 well distinct scientific groups in the unit (ethology vs. psychology). It is unclear how situations with 2 potential candidates for a full professor position are settled. A stronger attention on equality in career prospects are perhaps necessary: currently 60% of men researchers of the unit are full professors (3/5), whereas only 40% of women researchers have this position (4/10). Overall, 6 faculty members over 15 are full professors, which is exactly at the 40% national target. The unit may also strengthen the prevention of psycho-social risks, particularly among PhD Students and staff at an early stage of their career.

## *3/ The unit is attractive through its success in competitive calls for projects.*

The unit has a growing success in competitive grant application (3 ANR projects as principal investigators, 2 ANR projects as collaborators, 2 members of IUF, and diversifies its funding sources at the local and national levels (GIS, COMUE, FDR). Over the last five years, this funding has amounted to 887 k€, or around 85% of the annual budget. The unit is very good at finding PhD fundings, with a yearly funding from the local graduate school, but also external fundings (CIFRE, associations, Région Ile-de-France, Agence Innovation Défense...). The success in grant application seems uneven between researchers, and what collective plans are made to compensate or correct this situation are not clear.

## *4/ The unit is attractive for the quality of its major equipment and technical skills.*

The unit has animal facilities for housing, breeding and experimentations on 3 species of birds, located on the same floor as laboratory members offices. The space and equipment seem fully adapted to the scientific projects. Regular interactions with animal caretakers ensure efficient functioning. The unit also has a state-of-the-art Baby lab, located in another building, allowing a larger space and scientific interactions inside the Federation de Recherches EPN-R. The unit also settled experimental locations inside partners institutions (Veterinary school, Health care units....).

### **Strengths and possibilities linked to the context for the four references above**

The unit attracts several funding sources, from competitive national research grants to local funding, and has diversified its PhD funding sources. The unit is active and recognized at all scales of the academic world and has settled strong partnerships with its socio-economic environment. The unit has high-quality technical equipment (animal facilities and baby lab) and technical expertise (sound analysis, use of robotic devices, field experiments...) for its research goals.

### **Weaknesses and risks linked to the context for the four references above**

The unit would benefit from a stronger technical staff to administrate and manage experimental and technical equipment, as well as perform some experiments. The success in grant application seems uneven between researchers, and what collective plans are made to compensate or correct this situation are not clear. Priority access to PhD funding could be another leverage to help for newly appointed researchers in settling up their research project. The career support plans of the unit could be more detailed. The unit needs to define how associate professors are accompanied to become full professors, how administrative and technical staff careers evolutions are managed, and how young researchers (PhD, ATER, postdoc) are mentored for their future career.

Attractivity could be measured and discussed using the number of candidates to the 2 last associate professors positions open in 2023.

## EVALUATION AREA 3: SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION

### Assessment on the scientific production of the unit

The group's scientific output is of a very high international standard and considered as **excellent**, given its human and financial resources. For instance, the group has published in *Sciences Advances*, one of the highest ranked generalist journals. The committee encourages the group's efforts to publish at this international level. With this objective in mind, it is important to ensure as far as possible that all doctoral students' work is published. It is also important to devote more time to research by limiting the amount of time devoted to useless and unreasonable administrative requests.

#### *1/ The scientific production of the unit meets quality criteria.*

The group's research activity is evidenced by its regular publications in top-ranked international peer-reviewed journals. A number of papers have been published in journals that are widely recognized by the international scientific community (e.g. *Animal Behaviour*, *Journal of Experimental Biology*). It is noteworthy that the team authored a paper in *Sciences Advances*, one of the most stringent generalist journals. Overall, the unit's scientific output is excellent, with 67 articles in international peer-reviewed journals, ~65% of which are in first, last or corresponding position, and half of these publications are co-authored by PhD students. It is noteworthy that, the self-assessment report stresses that the group is not entirely satisfied with its publication rate, pointing out that most PhD students leave the laboratory before having published all the work done during their thesis. The committee shares this view.

#### *2/ The unit's scientific production is proportionate to its research potential and properly shared out between its personnel.*

Given the challenges faced by the group (low level of recurrent funding, a staff composed entirely of academics with heavy teaching loads for most of them, unreasonable administrative constraints), it is remarkable that it maintains a fair level of publications in international journals of good or even excellent quality. PhD students co-author about half of the unit's publications. They are the first authors of most of the publications in which they are involved. As in any research group, some staff members are more active in research than others, which is reflected in their greater publication output. Several members of the group have been appointed to the prestigious "Institut Universitaire de France", which is truly remarkable. These appointments obviously go hand in hand with greater research and publication activity.

#### *3/ The scientific production of the unit complies with the principles of research integrity, ethics and open science. It complies with the directives applicable in this field.*

The group's scientific output respects all the principles of scientific integrity, ethics and open science to the best of its resources. The committee notes that the research group does not receive any support from its University (neither administrative nor financial) to publish in open source journals.

#### Strengths and possibilities linked to the context for the three references above

The strengths regarding the team production rely on regular publications in international peer-reviewed journals. Moreover, several funded research projects underway with strong publication potential. Success of the group's academics at the *Institut universitaire de France* are also a mark of progress for the unit and its national visibility.

#### Weaknesses and risks linked to the context for the three references above

Some of the research carried out during doctoral theses seems never to be published. The group could probably improve its scientific productivity by ensuring (if possible) that former doctoral students publish all their work. However, this would undoubtedly require a significant investment by the team's academics in finalizing the writing of these papers.

## EVALUATION AREA 4: CONTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES TO SOCIETY

### Assessment on the inclusion of the unit's research in society

The unit's research activities contribution to society is **excellent to outstanding**. This is ensured by a strong involvement in disseminating knowledge to a wide range of audiences using different types of support and medias (TV, radio, magazines). Moreover, members of the group are involved in the "Université de Culture Permanente" at the Université Paris-Nanterre and other actively contribute to a number of projects such as in relation with the animal and ethology such as the "Animal University".

#### *1/ The unit stands out for the quality and the amount of its interactions with the non-academic world.*

The research group is one of the major national players in the dissemination of knowledge in ethology. Firstly, because of its rare position within a so-called Human Sciences University, with an unfailing commitment to transmitting knowledge about animal and human ethology to a public unfamiliar with the biological sciences. Secondly, through its involvement in numerous structures at the interface between the academic world and other professional worlds (participation to the Animal University, close interaction with zoos, etc.)

#### *2/ The unit develops products for the cultural, economic and social world.*

The research group is involved in a number of projects, both long-term (e.g. Animal University, partnership with the Philharmonie de Paris, Musée du Quai Branly, etc.) and occasional (e.g. 2024 conference on the future of childhood). Several members of the group have contributed articles to The Conversation magazine. Every two years, the group takes part in a conference open to the general public on the topic of pets.

#### *3/ The unit shares its knowledge with the general public and takes part in debates in society.*

The group is strongly committed to disseminating knowledge to the general public. Several members of the group are involved in the Université de Culture Permanente at the Université Paris-Nanterre. Members of the group are regularly approached for their expertise in ethology. In particular, the unit's work is covered by a wide range of major national media (TV: TF1, France TV, Arte, etc.; Radio: RTL, France inter, France culture, etc.) and renowned international magazines (National Geographic, The Guardian, The Times, Newscientist, etc.). The group is involved in a project aimed at increasing middle and high school students' interest in science, with a particular focus on career opportunities in science for women.

#### Strengths and possibilities linked to the context for the three references above

The group has a strong commitment to the general public. It plays an active role in popularizing knowledge through a variety of channels.

#### Weaknesses and risks linked to the context for the three references above

It seems that the group is involved in certain activities aimed at the general public without the group's permanent researchers being directly involved. There is a risk here that the unit could be used as a guarantor for the dissemination of practices or beliefs that are not scientifically established. For example, the conference organized every two years in conjunction with the "Université de l'Animal" includes the theme of 'animal osteopathy', which covers practices whose effectiveness science has not been able to demonstrate. However, the committee believes that this risk is largely limited by the vigilance and professionalism of the group's permanent researchers. It is therefore not concerned and strongly encourages the group to continue to invest in activities that are in touch with society and the general public.

## ANALYSIS OF THE UNIT'S TRAJECTORY

The LECD is a dynamic laboratory conducting high-level research. Renowned for its activities in both ethology and child psychology, it also promotes an innovative and fruitful interdisciplinary approach between these two fields. For the next contract, the LECD proposes to remain structured as a single team led by Director Mathieu Amy, assisted by Deputy Director Maya Gratier. The scientific theme, ethology and developmental psychology, is in line with the laboratory's history. The LECD has successfully consolidated funding for a number of projects, particularly multidisciplinary ones. Although convincing PhD students to leave a mono-disciplinary research is not an easy task, the LECD has set itself the goal of integrating interdisciplinarity into the training of PhD students. The committee encourages the LECD to continue to seize opportunities such as those offered by various federative structures (GIS Institut du Genre, FDR EPN-R, Institut Francilien d'Ethologie, etc.), and its privileged geographical position (proximity to the MNHN and the IRCAM, for example). Considering the context (low funding for an experimental laboratory, heavy teaching load and heavy administrative constraints), the committee considers that the LECD is following a remarkable trajectory. It encourages the members of the LECD in their effort to publish at the highest level and to increase the attractiveness of their laboratory to potential doctoral and post-doctoral students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UNIT

### *Recommendations regarding the Evaluation Area 1: Profile, Resources and Organisation of the Unit*

The unit has developed a highly commendable research activity, especially considering its size and its composition, consisting exclusively of teacher-researchers with a heavy teaching load. Yet, focusing resources on a smaller number of strategic projects would be more practical and better aligned with the unit's current capacity. While research freedom is undoubtedly vital, fostering discussions to consolidate efforts around priority research projects would enhance the unit's focus and visibility. This approach could lead to more impactful outcomes, such as higher-tier publications.

The unit is encouraged to create an executive council meeting monthly where representatives from various staff groups can interact and address multiple aspects of the unit's operations. Functioning as a unified team is not incompatible with establishing such a board, which could ensure that the diverse interests and perspectives of all staff categories are represented.

The unit does not appear to have designated staff members for critical roles such as equality representatives (*correspondant égalité*). Appointing staff specifically trained and sensitized to address this important area would be a valuable step forward.

### *Recommendations regarding the Evaluation Area 2: Attractiveness*

The unit has already a strong visibility based on its very good scientific activity and position in the field. To improve its attractivity further, the unit would benefit from a stronger technical staff to administrate and manage experimental and technical equipment. On-boarding of newly appointed associate professors and researchers could benefit from a more formal mentoring process and priority access to PhD funding could be a leverage to help them settling up their research project. The success in grant application seems uneven between researchers. Collective plans could be made to correct this situation, like focusing on collective priority projects. The career support plans of the unit could be strengthened. How associate professors are accompanied to become full professors, how administrative and technical staff careers evolutions are managed, and how young researchers (PhD, ATER, postdoc) are mentored for their future career, all these points are crucial attractivity boosters. Finally, the unit may also benefit from institutional support in the prevention of psycho-social risks, particularly among PhD Students.

### *Recommendations regarding Evaluation Area 3: Scientific Production*

The committee recommends ensuring, as far as possible, that all PhD students' work is published. It encourages the group's efforts to publish at the highest international level, with a specific attention to high-ranked generalist journals (the fact that the group has already published in *Sciences Advances* is a good step in this direction; other journals, as *Nature Communications*, *Communications Biology*, *iScience*, etc., should also be considered). In order to achieve these two objectives, the committee strongly encourages the group to give priority to the implementation of scientific projects and the publication at an international level over administrative requests that are not considered a priority or do not fall within the primary mission of an academic (i.e. research and teaching).

### *Recommendations regarding Evaluation Area 4: Contribution of Research Activities to Society*

The committee encourages the group to remain committed to disseminating scientific knowledge, both to the University's own students and to other organizations in touch with the general public.

## CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEWS

### Date

**Start:** 13 of December 2024 at 8.30 am

**End:** 13 of December 2024 à 4.30 pm

**Interview conducted: on-site**

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

<b>8:30-8:45</b>	<b>Huis Clos du comité en présence de CS Hcéres</b> <b>Salle : BSL140</b>
<b>8:45-9:00</b>	Présentation du processus d'évaluation par le conseiller Hcéres et du comité d'experts <b>Salle : BSL143</b>
<b>9:00-11:00</b>	Présentation de l'Unité et de ses thématiques de recherche (réunions publiques) <b>Salle : BSL143</b>
	<b>09:00-10:00</b> : Présentation de l'unité avec les principales réalisations par le Dr <b>S. Deregnacourt</b> (30 min de présentation + 30 min de discussion)
	<b>10:00-10:30</b> : Présentation de la trajectoire par le Dr <b>M. Amy</b> (15 min de présentation + 15 min de discussion)
<b>10:30-11:45</b>	<u>Pause et visite des plateformes avec le personnel de l'Unité</u>
<b>11:45-12:40</b>	Discussions à huis clos avec les différentes catégories de personnels
<b>11:45-12:00</b>	Discussion avec ingénieurs, techniciens, personnels administratifs <b>Salle : BSL140</b>
<b>12:00-12:15</b>	Discussion avec les étudiants en thèse et les post-docs <b>Salle : BSL140</b>
<b>12:15-12:40</b>	Discussion avec les scientifiques (sans le chef d'équipe) <b>Salle : BSL140</b>
<b>12:40-13:40</b>	<u>Pause déjeuner (salle BSL140)</u>
<b>13:40-14:00</b>	<b>Réunions à huis-clos du jury pour préparer les échanges/questions avec DU et tutelles</b> <b>Salle : BSL140</b>
<b>14:00-14:30</b>	Discussion avec les DU <b>Salle : BSL140</b>
<b>14:30-15:00</b>	<u>pause</u>
<b>15:00-15:30</b>	Discussion avec les représentants des organismes de gestion/tutelles <b>Salle : BSL140</b>
<b>15:30-16:30</b>	<b>Réunion privée du comité de visite en vue de la préparation du rapport (huis-clos)</b> <b>Salle : BSL140</b>
<b>16:30</b>	<i>Fin de la visite</i>



## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS OF THE SUPERVISORS

Nanterre, March 11, 2025



Carole Brugeilles  
Vice-présidente chargée de la recherche  
[cbrugeilles@parisnanterre.fr](mailto:cbrugeilles@parisnanterre.fr)

**Subject: response from the Université Paris Nanterre to the HCERES evaluation -  
Laboratory Ethology Cognition Development (LECD)**

Madam, Sir, Dear Colleagues,

Paris Nanterre University and the members of the Laboratory Ethology Cognition Development (LECD) thank the HCERES experts as well as the HCERES representative, Prof. Bruno Guiard, for the care they took in evaluating the research center. The evaluation report particularly emphasized its originality with the coexistence in the same laboratory of ethologist and developmental psychology subjects. It also emphasizes that the laboratory output meets very high international standards and could be considered as excellent. The university also thanks the experts for the points of vigilance. The Paris Nanterre university is trying to find solutions in a very constrained logistical and financial context. Similarly, the management of the unit has considered the various recommendations and is already working to implement them: improving governance, preventing psychosocial risks, monitoring the career development of the different categories of staff, promoting the publication of research work in journals with a high impact factor, reducing the number of research programs in order to limit the risk of dispersion, etc. Thanking you again for the evaluation carried out, please accept, Madam, Sir, our distinguished greetings.

Carole Brugeilles

Vice President for Research of the University Paris Nanterre

The Hcéres' evaluation reports are available online:  
[www.hceres.fr](http://www.hceres.fr)

**Evaluation of Universities and Schools**  
**Evaluation of research units**  
**Evaluation of the academic formations**  
**Evaluation of the national research organisms**  
**Evaluation and International accreditation**



19 rue Poissonnière  
75002 Paris, France  
+33 1 89 97 44 00

