Guidelines for panel members

About this document

This document is intended to be complementary to the existing code of conduct for panel members, and the general regulations on scientific panels. It is meant to provide more operational details on the course of a panel meeting.

PART I: GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Introduction

Mission of FWO

The Research Foundation Flanders (Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Vlaanderen, FWO) is an independent funding agency that supports fundamental research in all disciplines in Flanders (Belgium). The FWO's mission is to stimulate and to support groundbreaking research in all areas of science at Flemish universities, possibly in collaboration with other research institutes.

FWO funds excellent and promising researchers as well as research projects on the basis of an interuniversity competition and an evaluation by national and international experts. The most important criterion is the scientific quality of the researcher and the research proposal. The selection is made regardless of scientific discipline, host institute, gender, political or religious conviction.

FWO does not propose research themes and invites researchers to come up with their own proposals. FWO has put in place an expert panel for each research domain, and researchers can decide to which expert panel they submit their proposals.

Peer review as the basis

FWO uses peer review as its standard evaluation method. The peer review should be exclusively driven by scientific excellence. Panel members are therefore selected on the basis of their scientific expertise, and should refrain from any strategic behaviour.

The panel meetings are the second step in the overall peer review system of FWO. The remote (external) referees, who are asked for advice prior to the meeting, provide input for this meeting. For the regulations on remote refereeing, see the general regulations on peer review.

For some funding schemes, no external referees are consulted. See further below for specific information on each funding scheme.

2. Scientific fields and panels

Starting in 2010, the FWO has elaborated a new panel structure comprising 29 mono-disciplinary panels, and one interdisciplinary panel. When submitting their proposal, candidates are required to choose a panel, and to motivate this choice, taking into account the specific scope of the panel.
When evaluating applications, panel members should take due note of the candidate’s motivation to choose this specific panel. It is not acceptable to discard a proposal without considering this motivation.

In a large majority of cases, the panel choice will not be problematic. However, there are some cases requiring special consideration:

- Due to the specific definition of “interdisciplinarity” used by the FWO, which excludes “instrumental” interdisciplinarity, many proposals submitted to the interdisciplinary panel are declared ineligible by it beforehand. FWO then leaves the choice of a new panel to the applicant. The fact that a proposal has first been submitted to the interdisciplinary panel should under no circumstances be construed as an argument to reject it in the mono-disciplinary panel chosen by the applicant. A mono-disciplinary panel does not have the authority to redirect a proposal to another panel within the same application round.
- Along the same lines, it sometimes happens that a proposal falls on the borderline between panels. This is not the fault of the candidate, but is due to the inherent partial arbitrariness of any panel structure. Therefore, the panel should do its best to evaluate the proposal on its scientific merits. Strategic considerations are not acceptable.

In general, panel members should have in mind that their role in the peer review process is that of broad experts (“generalists”) within their field, who can rely on the specific expertise provided by external referees. Even proposals that clearly fall within the panel’s scope may sometimes not be covered entirely by the panel members’ specialties. This is no reason not to evaluate them properly.

3. Roles and responsibilities of the chair, the vice-chair and the members

Each panel consists of 16 members¹, including the chair and the vice-chair. All members are appointed for a term of three years, renewable once. 9 of the members are affiliated to non-Flemish universities or research institutions. The chair and vice-chair, however, are always from a Flemish University and are the members with the most seniority. In case several members possess the same seniority, the oldest one is appointed as (vice)chair.

Panel members are selected on the basis of their expertise and not as representatives of their university or research institution. During the discussion, they should refrain from using strategic and/or institutional arguments.

Panel chairs and panel members have the following responsibilities in common:

1. Familiarize with (and preferably read fully) all the proposals submitted to the panel and familiarize with them in preparation of the panel meeting
2. Provide a more thorough review (“preliminary report”) on a subset of the proposals
3. Participate actively to the panel meetings

In addition, panel (vice-)chairs have the following responsibilities:

1. To chair the panel meetings
2. To assign proposals to individual panel members for preliminary assessment (cf. above)

¹ With the exception of Med8 and Cult4, which have 18 members.
3. To ensure, together with the FWO delegate, that the panel produces all required deliverables, such as a strict ranking of applications (for fellowships), a budget proposition for selected research projects, and the feedback to applicants afterwards.

4. To attend the preliminary meeting of chairs and vice-chairs which is held at the beginning of every year, and where specific novelties or changes are discussed and best practices among other panels are exchanged.

4. The preliminary assessments (or “pre-reports”)

Assignment of proposals to panel members

As stated above, each panel member will be assigned a number of proposals for more thorough review. The proposals are assigned to panel members by the chair and vice-chair, taking into account the specific expertise of each member, and bearing in mind that no one should have to review applications from their own university (see below, “conflict of interest”). The chair and the vice-chair shall see to it that there are at least two, and preferably three, preliminary reports available for each application. They may use a system with “reserve” reporters in order to meet this goal.

Templates

To the extent possible, panel members are asked to complete these templates by computer and to avoid handwritten comments.

This template lists all selection criteria with space for scores/comments. Panel members are asked to provide comments where possible, especially with respect to the quality of the proposal itself.

Possible marks are in the form of letter scores ranging from A+ (outstanding) to D (not to be ranked). As an initial guideline, and to anticipate on possible differences in scoring behaviour, panel members are advised to observe roughly the following distribution:

- A+ marks for the top 5% of the proposals;
- A marks for the top 10% of the proposals;
- A- marks for the top 20% of the proposals;
- B range only for the top 50% of the proposals;
- C or D for the lower half of the proposals.

At the end of the process, the applicants will not get to see the marks that are given, so this should not be used as an argument to avoid giving C or D marks. The letter scores are intended as a tool for panel members. Using scores over the entire range will facilitate the discussion and save time during the ranking phase.

As to the nature of the comments provided, they should be of good quality, succinct but substantial. The entire content of all sections, except for the content of the section ‘confidential information’, will be anonymous presented to the applicant as feedback after the evaluation and funding decision. Therefore it is important to use appropriate phrasing, i.e. dispassionate and analytical language, and to make sure that the comments are polite in tone (so no dismissive statements about the applicant, the proposed science, or the scientific field concerned) and provide an overview of key strengths and weaknesses of both the proposal and the applicant(s) in the light of the selection criteria. The use of the first person or equivalent should also be avoided.

Moreover, the reviewers are encouraged to give comments that are more than a description or summary of the proposal, since such summaries are not useful for the discussion and the feedback
towards the applicant. They are only useful as a reminder for the individual panel members in formulating their ideas during the discussion, but should be kept to a minimum.

*It must be stressed that the content of the pre-reports is entirely confidential, and should remain within the panel, just like every other aspect of the discussion. These reports will only be used by the FWO-administration to provide the necessary feedback to the applicants. The section “confidential information” can be used in case the pre-rapporteur want to point out some important information only intended for the other panel members.*

**Confidentiality**

During the period preceding the panel meeting, there should be no discussion about the proposals or the preliminary reports among the panel members. Panel members should not disclose any proposals to experts other than the panel members themselves. In case a panel member thinks (s)he is not in a position to review the proposal, (s)he should contact the panel chair or vice-chair as soon as possible. The chair/vice-chair will then see whether the proposal can be reallocated to another member.

The reports must be sent to the FWO administration (and only to the FWO administration) one week before the panel meeting, and will be used – along with other information sources – to draft feedback letters to the applicants after the panel meeting.

**Pre-reports may not leave the meeting room at the end of the meeting.**

5. The panel discussion

As stated above, the preliminary reports are only an introduction to the discussion, and cannot be considered as a final decision. It is the panel as a whole which decides on the ranking and/or funding level for each application.

The discussion should be based on the selection criteria which are listed below for each funding scheme, and which in general constitute a balanced mix of criteria related to the applicant or the research team (study marks, track record, mobility, etc.) on the one hand, and criteria related to the scientific quality of the proposal, on the other hand. Also, the context in which the proposed research will be carried out may be taken into account.

*Panel members should respect the balance between these different elements. Although FWO does not impose any formal weighting of the different criteria, it is not considered acceptable to overemphasize one or the other of these criteria from the outset. For example, for PhD fellowship applications, it will not be allowed to base the discussion almost exclusively on the study marks of the applicants.*

Concerning the evaluation of candidate’s track records, panel members should be very cautious with bibliometrics. Impact factors, citation frequencies, h-indexes etc. may provide valuable information, but cannot be counted mechanically, as there are several problems associated with this. *In general, regarding publications, quality should preside over quantity.* Purely mathematical assessment tools can never replace the panel discussion which is at the core of the FWO’s peer review procedure.
The panel will try to reach decisions by consensus. If no consensus is possible, voting may be used as a last resort, but should be avoided as much as possible.

Within the lines set out by the FWO regulations and by the present guidelines, the panel chair has a certain degree of autonomy on how to organize the panel meeting. Usually, however, the meeting begins with a discussion of each proposal and the attribution of a letter score, and ends with the decision on which proposals to rank, followed by the establishment of a strict order among all ranked applications (for fellowships), or the decision to rank proposals in 1st order or 2nd order (for research projects).

6. Eligibility criteria vs selection criteria

Each application presented to a panel has been checked for its formal eligibility on the basis of straightforward criteria for which no scientific review is needed. Panel members are asked to base the discussion on the scientific selection criteria only.

This means in particular that age as such cannot be taken into account when scoring applications for fellowships. The FWO has gradually banned all age limits, and does not wish to reintroduce them implicitly through the panel discussions. If a candidate is formally eligible, (s)he must be evaluated according to the same standards as the other candidates who may perhaps have a more typical profile.

Of course, the scientific output of a candidate may be measured against the number of years in which the applicant has been active in research. On the other hand, this entails that the panel pays due attention to career breaks and takes these into account when evaluating proposals. Career breaks or intersectoral mobility (private sector, public management, ...) should not be held against candidates, but evaluated as an experience in their own right. In particular intersectoral mobility can be valuable.

The most common form of career break for female researchers is probably pregnancy, maternity leave and/or child care. Gender is a high priority issue for FWO. Panel members are asked to take this into account to the extent possible, and bearing in mind, of course, that scientific excellence should always prevail.

Needless to say, nationality can under no circumstances be used as an argument to differentiate applications, even when, for example, study results of foreign candidates are harder to evaluate.

In general, panel members should be aware that the FWO has signed the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. This document is available at http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/index.

7. Conflict of interest

There should not be any doubt on the impartiality of panel members in evaluating proposals. Therefore, strict rules regarding conflict of interest have been set up, and are listed in the regulations and the code of conduct for panel members.
In general, panel members are asked to declare any potential conflict of interest. If they are personally related to a proposal in any way – be it as a supervisor, a relative, or even as a member of the same research unit – they should leave the meeting, both during the initial discussion and when the proposals are being ranked and/or when the funding level and possible budget cuts are being discussed.

Regarding the preliminary assessment, they should never evaluate proposals for which they have a potential conflict of interest and are asked to disclose any such conflict beforehand.

*Failure to comply with these rules may lead to sanctions imposed by the Board of FWO.*

8. What happens after the panel meeting

At several occasions, panel members have asked questions about the eventual outcome of the evaluation procedure. This section of the guidelines intends to provide clarity on these matters.

For all “minor” funding schemes, such as mobility grants, sabbatical leaves, etc. (handled by the International Collaboration Committee), the decision of the panel is final and automatically leads to funding or to rejection.

For fellowships and research projects, the system is as follows:

**Selection of Fellowships:**

The main task of the FWO-Expertpanels is the ranking of the applications.

The applications that are considered to be of insufficient quality are not ranked and are excluded from further discussion. The other applications, for PhD and postdoctoral fellowships, are ranked without the possibility of *ex aequo* ranking. The outcome of this ranking is then sent to the universities (next step).

After all panel meetings, the share of each university in the number of ranked applications is calculated for each category of fellowships. Each university can then select that share among the available fellowships. For example, if University X has 25% of all ranked candidates in a given category, then it can also take 25% of all available fellowships in that category. However, it can decide in which panels it does so².

It is important to stress, however, that the universities can never overrule the ranking established by the panel, in the sense that, if they wish to select the third ranked candidate, they will also have to take the applications ranked first and second of that university.

The proposed selection by the universities is then sent to the Board and subsequently to the Board of Trustees which takes the final funding decision.

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² In exceptional cases, this may lead to a situation where a candidate ranked higher than another candidate of another university, does not get the fellowship whereas the other one does, because his or her university decided to take up more fellowships in this specific panel (or because there were fewer high-ranked candidates from this university in that panel). This also explains why the actual success rate in a specific panel may be lower than the theoretical success rate indicated in advance of the panel meetings.
As soon as the Board of Trustees has taken the final decision, the candidates are informed about the outcome of their application. The results are also made public on the FWO-website. When the outcome is negative, the letter specifies whether the candidate was ranked or not. In both cases, candidates can, upon written request, receive more information on the decision taken.

**Selection of Research projects and research Grants:**

The FWO-Expert Panels decide which applications to rank and which not. The applications for research projects that are considered to be of a high enough quality to be financed are ranked into first and second priority applications.

The interpretation of the different ranking is as follows:

- **1st priority applications** are outstanding research proposals at the frontier of knowledge in their field and of a high international level.
- **2nd priority applications** are very good research proposals that build upon credible results and are of high international standing.

When ranking the research proposals, the Panels need to take into account the available budget. The budgets of research proposals can also be reduced. This should be done to a lesser extent for applications ranked as 1st priority compared to applications ranked as 2nd priority.

Applications for research projects ranked as 1st and 2nd priority are submitted to the Boards of Trustees for approval. This means that the host institutions do not intervene in the selection process, contrary to what is the case for fellowships.

9. Feedback to applicants

Rejected applicants are encouraged by the FWO to ask for feedback, especially if they consider re-applying in the following round.

Feedback letters are drafted on the basis of all the available information: the preliminary reports, the external referee reports (where applicable), and the discussion within the panel.

The draft letter is sent to the panel chair for approval, and then to the candidate. As a general rule, no further correspondence is possible regarding this feedback letter.

*It must be stressed that panel members themselves can under no circumstances provide feedback to applicants. In case such questions arise, they should always refer the candidate to the FWO administration.*
PART II: SPECIFIC GUIDELINES PER FUNDING SCHEME

This section comprises general information on the main funding schemes handled by the 30 regular FWO panels.

This information can also be found on the FWO website, along with details on smaller funding schemes

1. Ph.D. fellowships

Objective

The FWO aims to provide young and promising researchers with every opportunity to do a PhD in the best possible circumstances. The PhD fellowships represent the most important funding channel for achieving this objective.

These fellowships are intended for young researchers who are doing their PhD. The PhD research must be fundamental in nature. There is no restriction as regards the topic. The FWO employs a strictly bottom-up approach, in which the researcher can choose the topic of his/her research.

Each year sees an influx of 214 new PhD fellows, who are appointed for a period of 2 x 2 years (after a favourable evaluation). In 2010 this translates into a success rate of 21.4%.

Procedure

Who can apply

Starting with the new call 2011, it is no longer possible to apply more than 2 times for the same fellowship.

The candidate must be of Belgian nationality, or belong to one of the member states of the European Union or the European Economic Area (*). He or she should also possess a degree that would be required by a university in the Flemish Community for mandatory enrolment as a PhD or final year student at the time of the application. Non-EU candidates must have a basic degree from one of the countries within the European Union or the European Economic Area (*). The candidate must submit proof which will allow the university trustees to grant him or her permission to do a PhD thesis.

Candidates are only eligible for a PhD fellowship within the first five years of obtaining their Master’s degree, calculated on the start date of the fellowship (1 October). If a candidate has more than one Master’s degree, this rule only applies to the degrees obtained in the same study area as the PhD proposal. The 1st Master’s must in any case have been obtained no more than 10 years before the start date of the fellowship (1 October). This restriction does not apply to candidates who have not yet reached the age of 31 at the start of the fellowship (1 October).
The FWO Board can make an exception to this rule in cases where, for social and medical reasons, either there is an interruption in the preliminary stage, or there has been a reduced capacity to work.

Candidates cannot apply for a fellowship of which they have previously, if only partially, been the beneficiary.

**What can be applied for**

Young university graduates can do a PhD at a Flemish university with the PhD fellowship (2 years, renewable once, the size of the scholarship is based on a research assistant’s salary).

From the 2007-2008 academic year onwards an annual fixed bench fee will be given to the PhD fellows and Post-doctoral fellows of the FWO to cover the bench costs of their research. This bench fee is granted for each fellowship year.

**When can be applied**

The final submission date is **1 February at 17.00h**. If this day is a Saturday or a Sunday, the closing date is moved to the following Monday at 17.00h. In order to ensure that all candidates get an equal chance, no bibliographical additions will be accepted after this date.

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that the FWO is **not responsible** for the temporary unavailability of the system. Therefore, we advise you to submit **at least one to two weeks before the closing date**.

**Extra Information**

The funding of a limited number of fellowships is possible due to FWO’s collaboration with the following:

- **SCK•CEN**
- **L’Oreal – Unesco**
- **VITO**

**Selection**

**Criteria**

- research capability and potential (including course results)
- research skills and methodology
- scientific independence
- originality and innovative nature of the project
- feasibility of the project
- purposefulness of the project
- quality of coaching and assistance
Procedure

The applications will be evaluated by the FWO-Expertpanels, who will judge the qualifications of the candidates. The Expertpanels will give an advice to the Board. The Board of Trustees makes the final decision.

The FWO demands a letter of recommendation of the supervisor (and co-supervisors, if applicable). The supervisor makes an undertaking to assist the PhD student closely and to ensure sufficient coaching and guidance to facilitate the latter in completing a PhD within the period of the fellowship.

The supervisor and co-supervisors (if applicable) have to write a letter of recommendation. These letters should attempt to give an impartial assessment of your qualities, related to the selection criteria for the FWO fellowship.

The application has to be accompanied by a personal statement.

Your personal statement is the opportunity to discuss personal motivations, your (research) interests, your experience and activities, and future goals. Your Personal Statement should focus on your personal background or experience that have significantly influenced you and your goals. It should be a document that describes your abilities, skills, and accomplishments as evidence of your aspirations for pursuing a career in research.

This Personal Statement should be one-page, set in English.

Expertpanels

The FWO has 29 subject specific Expertpanels and 1 interdisciplinary panel, each consisting of 16 experts. Most of these experts are affiliated to a non-Flemish university.

Budget

In 2011 the FWO had a budget of € 200.000.000, 44% of which was spent on funding fellowships.

The fellowship grant is based on the salary of a research assistant.

From the 2007-2008 academic year onwards an annual fixed bench fee will be given to the PhD fellows and Post-doctoral fellows of the FWO to cover the bench costs of their research. The bench fee for PhD fellows is yearly € 3,720.
2. Special Ph.D. fellowships

Objective

The Special PhD fellowship is intended to enable persons not employed within scientific research to complete a PhD within a year and to obtain study leave from their current employer for this purpose.

Procedure

Who can apply

A temporary fellowship, without any obligation to repay, can be granted to Belgians, in order to help them complete their research, with a view to obtaining a PhD. The fellowship can exceptional be granted to persons belonging to another country in the European Union or the European Economic Area (EU-countries, Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein), but only if it will benefit scientific research in Flanders. The candidates must be employed in a permanent position. They must be able to obtain study leave (for scientific activities or for activities of a general nature) or unpaid leave (not a sabbatical) for one year, with the guarantee of being able to return to their job at the end of this period of leave. The candidates must possess a degree that would be required by a university in the Flemish Community and by virtue of its office registered higher education institutes (article 7 of the Decree on the structure of Higher Education), who can allocate the degree of PhD (articles 54-55 of the Decree on the structure of Higher Education), for enrolment on a PhD course.

Clinicians cannot apply for the Special PhD fellowship, because the Clinical PhD fellowship exists for that purpose.

A Special PhD fellowship cannot be applied for by a candidate who has previously been the beneficiary of a pre-PhD fellowship, even if it was only partial.

Due to the specific aim of the Special PhD fellowship, those working in scientific research at the moment of application are not eligible to apply.

What can be applied for

A one-year fellowship for completing a PhD.

When can be applied

The final submission date is 1 February at 17.00h. If this day is a Saturday or a Sunday, the closing date is moved to the following Monday at 17.00h. In order to ensure that all candidates get an equal chance, no bibliographical additions will be accepted after this date.

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that the FWO is not responsible for the temporary unavailability of the system. Therefore, we advise you to submit at least one to two weeks before the closing date.
Selection

Criteria

- research capability and potential (including course results)
- research skills and methodology
- scientific independence
- originality and innovative nature of the project
- feasibility of the project
- purposefulness of the project
- quality of coaching and assistance

Procedure

The applications will be evaluated by the FWO-Expertpanels, who will judge the qualifications of the candidates. The Expertpanels will give an advice to the Board. The Board of Trustees makes the final decision.

The FWO demands a letter of recommendation of the supervisor (and co-supervisors, if applicable). The supervisor makes an undertaking to assist the PhD student closely and to ensure sufficient coaching and guidance to facilitate the latter in completing a PhD within the period of the fellowship.

The supervisor and co-supervisors (if applicable) have to write a letter of recommendation. These letters should attempt to give an impartial assessment of your qualities, related to the selection criteria for the FWO fellowship.

The application has to be accompanied by a personal statement.

Your personal statement is the opportunity to discuss personal motivations, your (research) interests, your experience and activities, and future goals. Your Personal Statement should focus on your personal background or experience that have significantly influenced you and your goals. It should be a document the describes your abilities, skills, and accomplishments as evidence of your aspirations for pursuing a career in research.

This Personal Statement should be one-page, set in English.

Expertpanels

The FWO has 29 subject specific Expertpanels and 1 interdisciplinary panel, each consisting of 16 experts. Most of these experts are affiliated to a non-Flemish university.

Budget

In 2011 the FWO had a budget of € 200.000.000, 44% of which was spent on funding fellowships.

The size of the fellowship grant corresponds to the last net salary of the main activity. For those with a permanent position in education, account is only taken of the salary of a full
assignment. Moreover, pursuant to the general nature of the pre-PhD fellowships, any additional activity and resulting remuneration, should be relinquished.

3. Clinical Ph.D. fellowships

Objective

To narrow the gap between fundamental clinical research and clinical practice, specialists are encouraged to obtain a PhD. These fellowships are aimed at doctors, veterinary surgeons, dentists and pharmacists, recognised as specialists who are employed in a full-time clinical role at a university hospital in the Flemish Community. During the 2-year fellowship, the beneficiaries are released part-time from clinical and academic duties in order to pursue fundamental clinical research.

Procedure

Who can apply

This fellowship is aimed at doctors, veterinary surgeons, dentists and pharmacists, who, no later than 1 June preceding the fellowship, are recognized medical specialists, veterinary specialists, dental specialists, general practitioner or pharmacist specialists in Belgium.

At the time of application and at least up to the final date of the requested fellowship the candidates are employed at an academic hospital or a university veterinary surgery affiliated to a university in the Flemish Community, where they perform a full-time clinical function.

When candidates are recognised as general practitioner, they must have an employment contract at a university department of general practitioner medicine and at the same time performing a role in general practitioner medicine for the remaining %.

The candidates for such a fellowship must, at the time of submitting their application, present a testimony from their promoter, in which the latter declares that the work is sufficiently advanced so that with the intended fellowship, a PhD can be obtained within the duration of the fellowship.

A Clinical PhD fellowship cannot be applied for by a candidate who has previously been the beneficiary of a pre-PhD fellowship, even if it was only partial.

What can be applied for

A 2-year fellowship that must be dedicated part-time to PhD research.

When can be applied

The final submission date is 1 February at 17.00h. If this day is a Saturday or a Sunday, the closing date is moved to the following Monday at 17.00h. In order to ensure that all candidates get an equal chance, no bibliographical additions will be accepted after this date.
We would like to draw your attention to the fact that the FWO is not responsible for the temporary unavailability of the system. Therefore, we advise you to submit at least one to two weeks before the closing date.

**Selection**

**Criteria**

- research capability and potential (including course results)
- research skills and methodology
- scientific independence
- originality and innovative nature of the project
- feasibility of the project
- purposefulness of the project
- quality of coaching and assistance

**Procedure**

The applications will be evaluated by the FWO-Expertpanels, who will judge the qualifications of the candidates. The Expertpanels will give an advice to the Board. The Board of Trustees makes the final decision.

The FWO demands a letter of recommendation of the supervisor (and co-supervisors, if applicable). The supervisor makes an undertaking to assist the PhD student closely and to ensure sufficient coaching and guidance to facilitate the latter in completing a PhD within the period of the fellowship.

The supervisor and co-supervisors (if applicable) have to write a letter of recommendation. These letters should attempt to give an impartial assessment of your qualities, related to the selection criteria for the FWO fellowship.

The application has to be accompanied by a personal statement.

Your personal statement is the opportunity to discuss personal motivations, your (research) interests, your experience and activities, and future goals. Your Personal Statement should focus on your personal background or experience that have significantly influenced you and your goals. It should be a document the describes your abilities, skills, and accomplishments as evidence of your aspirations for pursuing a career in research.

This Personal Statement should be one-page, set in English.

**Expertpanels**

The FWO has 29 subject specific Expertpanels and 1 interdisciplinary panel, each consisting of 16 experts. Most of these experts are affiliated to a non-Flemish university.

**Budget**

In 2011 the FWO had a budget of € 200.000.000, 44% of which was spent on funding fellowships.
The fellowship grant is half the salary paid by the university hospital or university veterinary surgery, with a maximum of 35,000 EUR per year. This sum is paid to the university hospital, after the university hospital or university veterinary surgery has submitted a detailed salary calculation. The grant paid to the institution by the FWO must be spent exclusively on a clinical replacement.

4. Postdoctoral Fellowships

Objective

The postdoctoral fellowships from the FWO are intended to help researchers who already have a PhD to develop an independent research career.

Procedure

Who can apply

Starting with the new call 2011, it is no longer possible to apply more than 2 times for the same fellowship.

The candidate must have a PhD (*) (the thesis defence must have taken place no later than 1 June preceding the fellowship) or a degree or certificate that is legally recognized as equivalent, either in application of the guidelines of the European Union or a bilateral accord pertaining to this, in compliance with the provisos of the Decree concerning universities in the Flemish Community of 12 June 1991, Art. 60. (Belgian Law Gazette, 4/7/1991).

* A Higher Education Faculty Qualification or a Special PhD is regarded as equivalent to a PhD when applying for a PhD research fellowship.

Researchers can only apply for a postdoctoral fellowship within three years of obtaining their PhD, calculated on the start date of the fellowship (1 October). This time limit is postponed by one year in the case of pregnancy or parental leave, calculated from the time of the application. This does not apply to candidates who have not yet reached the age of 36 at the beginning of the fellowship (1 October). (**)

The FWO Board can only make exceptions to this limit in cases where, for social and medical reasons, either there is an interruption in the preliminary stage, or there has been a reduced capacity to work.


Candidates cannot apply for a fellowship of which they have previously, if only partially, been the beneficiary.
What can be applied for

PhD graduates can reach an internationally acclaimed level as a Postdoctoral Researcher (3 years, can be renewed once if necessary, with a wage at the PhD assistant level).

When can be applied

The final submission date is **1 February at 17.00h.** If this day is a Saturday or a Sunday, the closing date is moved to the following Monday at 17.00h. In order to ensure that all candidates get an equal chance, no bibliographical additions will be accepted after this date.

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that the **FWO is not responsible** for the temporary unavailability of the system. Therefore, we advise you to submit **at least one to two weeks before the closing date.**

Selection

Criteria

- research capability and potential (including course results)
- research skills and methodology
- scientific background of the candidate
- scientific independence
- originality and innovative nature of the project
- mobility of the applicant
- feasibility of the project
- purposefulness of the project

Procedure

The applications will be evaluated by the FWO-Expertpanels, who will judge the qualifications of the candidates. The Expertpanels will give an advice to the Board. The Board of Trustees makes the final decision.

The FWO demands a letter of recommendation from the head of the research department.

Each applicant, should propose ten external referees. From this list, the FWO will invite a number of referees to evaluate the application in writing.

Reviewers must be affiliated to a university, research institute or research department of another organizational type and must be active at least at a postdoctoral level. The following persons **are not eligible** as reviewers:

- Members of the Board of Directors of the FWO;
- Members of an FWO Expert panel;
- Persons appointed to a Belgian university, research institute or any other organization;
- Persons with a professional appointment to a foreign institute where the applicant(s) had been enrolled as a student or professional during the past three years;
- Any co-authors with the applicants of a publication that was submitted or published in the three years preceding the final submission date for the applications;
- Any partners of the applicant(s) in a research project that has been applied for or has been running within the three years preceding the final submission date of the applications.

**IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE APPLICANTS TO ENSURE THAT THE PROPOSED REVIEWERS MEET THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA. IF THIS CONDITION IS NOT MET, THE APPLICATION WILL BE DECLARED INELIGIBLE.**

The applicants must see to it that any contact information of the reviewers is up-to-date. If this is not the case, then the FWO will take no further steps for tracking down the reviewer(s) in question and the applicants may be asked to submit new names of candidate reviewers, pursuant to the provisions in §1 of the present article.

**THE APPLICANTS AND THE REVIEWERS MAY NOT IN ANY WAY COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER ABOUT ANY ASPECT OF THE APPLICATION AND OF THE EVALUATION.**

At the time of entry in the application process, the reviewers will need to declare that they comply with the eligibility requirements or reviewers and that they will treat any information contained in the application as confidential and that they will not use any of this information for purposes other than the drawing up of their evaluation.

The supervisor and co-supervisors (if applicable) have to write a letter of recommendation. These letters should attempt to give an impartial assessment of your qualities, related to the selection criteria for the FWO fellowship.

The application has to be accompanied by a personal statement.

Your personal statement is the opportunity to discuss personal motivations, your (research) interests, your experience and activities, and future goals. Your Personal Statement should focus on your personal background or experience that have significantly influenced you and your goals. It should be a document the describes your abilities, skills, and accomplishments as evidence of your aspirations for pursuing a career in research.

This Personal Statement should be one-page, set in English.

**Expertpanels**

The FWO has 29 subject specific Expertpanels and 1 interdisciplinary panel, each consisting of 16 experts. Most of these experts are affiliated to a non-Flemish university.

**Budget**

In 2011 the FWO had a budget of € 200.000.000, 44% of which was spent on funding fellowships.
The salary scale of Postdoctoral Researcher is the salary scale of PhD Assistant according to the Decree of the Flemish Government of 4 May 2001 (Belgian Law Gazette 9/1/2002).

From the 2007-2008 academic year onwards an annual fixed bench fee will be given to Postdoctoral fellows of the FWO to cover the bench costs of their research. This bench fee for Postdoctoral fellows amounts to € 4,000 per year.

6. Senior Clinical Investigatorships

Objective

Translational research bridges the gap between fundamental and strategic biomedical basic research on the one hand, and clinical research on the other. Translational research essentially relies on well-educated medical researchers who must be able to establish a full-time career. The Senior Clinical Investigator fellowships are aimed precisely at this category of researchers and offers them the chance to obtain part-time leave from a clinical position in order to work on a research project.

Procedure

Who can apply

The candidates must submit a detailed scientific research programme.

Candidates must have Belgian nationality or belong to one of the member states of the European Union. They must be a medical specialist, general practitioner or pharmacist specialist in clinical biology (younger than 46) with a PhD, who have a full-time clinical role at a university hospital. The thesis defence must have taken place no later than 1 June preceding the fellowship. As of 1 October, i.e. the start of the fellowship, they must also be recognised in Belgium as a medical specialist, general practitioner or recognised by the Ministry of Public Health as a pharmacist specialist in clinical biology.

The candidates must have an unlimited employment contract at a university hospital in the Flemish Community, where they are exclusively performing an at least 80% clinical role when the fellowship starts (1 October). When candidates are recognised as general practitioner, they must have an employment contract at a university department of general practitioner medicine and at the same time performing a role in general practitioner medicine for the remaining %.

What can be applied for

A 5-year fellowship, with one possible 5 year extension, for medical specialists and pharmacist specialists in clinical biology to work part-time on fundamental clinical research in their speciality.
When can be applied

The final submission date is **1 February at 17.00h**. If this day is a Saturday or a Sunday, the closing date is moved to the following Monday at 17.00h. In order to ensure that all candidates get an equal chance, no bibliographical additions will be accepted after this date.

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that the **FWO is not responsible** for the temporary unavailability of the system. Therefore, we advise you to submit **at least one to two weeks before the closing date**.

Selection

Criteria

- research capability and potential (including course results)
- research skills and methodology
- scientific background of the candidate
- scientific independence
- originality and innovative nature of the project
- mobility of the applicant
- feasibility of the project
- purposefulness of the project
- clinical experience and independence of the applicant

Procedure

The applications will be evaluated by the FWO-Expertpanels, who will judge the qualifications of the candidates. The Expertpanels will give an advice to the Board. The Board of Trustees makes the final decision.

The FWO demands a letter of recommendation from the head of the research unit, and a description of the clinical task by the medical superintendent/head of the clinic or the animal clinic.

Each applicant, should propose ten external referees. From this list, the FWO will invite a number of referees to evaluate the application in writing.

Reviewers must be affiliated to a university, research institute or research department of another organizational type and must be active at least at a postdoctoral level. The following persons **are not eligible** as reviewers:
- Members of the Board of Directors of the FWO;
- Members of an FWO Expert panel;
- Persons appointed to a Belgian university, research institute or any other organization;
- Persons with a professional appointment to a foreign institute where the applicant(s) had been enrolled as a student or professional during the past three years;
- Any co-authors with the applicants of a publication that was submitted or published in the three years preceding the final submission date for the applications;
- Any partners of the applicant(s) in a research project that has been applied for or has been running within the three years preceding the final submission date of the applications. 

**IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE APPLICANTS TO ENSURE THAT THE PROPOSED REVIEWERS MEET THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA. IF THIS CONDITION IS NOT MET, THE APPLICATION WILL BE DECLARED INELIGIBLE.**

The applicants must see to it that any contact information of the reviewers is up-to-date. If this is not the case, then the FWO will take no further steps for tracking down the reviewer(s) in question and the applicants may be asked to submit new names of candidate reviewers, pursuant to the provisions in §1 of the present article.

**THE APPLICANTS AND THE REVIEWERS MAY NOT IN ANY WAY COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER ABOUT ANY ASPECT OF THE APPLICATION AND OF THE EVALUATION.**

At the time of entry in the application process, the reviewers will need to declare that they comply with the eligibility requirements or reviewers and that they will treat any information contained in the application as confidential and that they will not use any of this information for purposes other than the drawing up of their evaluation.

Each application must be accompanied by a certificate of the director of the concerned university hospital or animal clinic, and of the dean of the concerned faculty, in which is confirmed that the person concerned, if he receives a mandate, will be excused part time of his current task, to devote himself to clinical research.

The application has to be accompanied by a personal statement.

Your personal statement is the opportunity to discuss personal motivations, your (research) interests, your experience and activities, and future goals. Your Personal Statement should focus on your personal background or experience that have significantly influenced you and your goals. It should be a document the describes your abilities, skills, and accomplishments as evidence of your aspirations for pursuing a career in research.

This Personal Statement should be one-page, set in English.

**Expertpanels**

The FWO has 29 subject specific Expertpanels and 1 interdisciplinary panel, each consisting of 16 experts. Most of these experts are affiliated to a non-Flemish university.

**Budget**

In 2011 the FWO had a budget of € 200.000.000, 44% of which was spent on funding fellowships.
The fellowship grant is half the salary of the candidate paid by the university hospital, with a maximum of 50,000 EUR per year. This sum is paid to the university hospital, after the latter has submitted a detailed salary calculation.

The grant paid to the institution by the FWO must be spent exclusively on a clinical replacement.

7. Research Grants

Objective

In order to support young or established researchers (up to the maximum level of Professor) in their work and, if necessary, in the purchase of small apparatus, an application can be made for a Research Grant.

Procedure

Who can apply

On the advice of the authorised Expertpanel the Foundation can award allowances to postdoctoral researchers with guaranteed continuity in their career, appointed at a level preceding that of a full professorship (i.e. not exceeding the level of ‘hoofddocent’) and affiliated to a university in the Flemish Community or affiliated to the Evangelische Protestantse Faculteit in Leuven and the Faculteit voor Protestantse Godgeleerdheid in Brussels, or to a Flemish or a Federal institute for scientific research.

Applicants, personnel from a federal scientific institute must belong to the Dutch-speaking community.

Candidates must be Belgian, or belong to one of the member states of the European Union or of the European Economical Area (EU-countries, Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein). If not, they should a member of the autonomous academic staff (ZAP) of a university in the Flemish Community or the afore-mentioned scientific personnel of the Dutch-speaking community of a scientific institute.

Allowances can also be given to postdoctoral researchers from a technical school or to independent postdoctoral researchers from the Flemish Community under the direction and responsibility of a Flemish University.

(*) Except in the areas of mathematics, humanities and social sciences, where these limited funds can also be used for supporting key projects with a major scientific impact.

What can be applied for

Consumables and equipment grants (minimum €2,500 and maximum €40,000) for individual research of young and/or established researchers.
A budget with the specification of the amount of the requested Grant en the possible division over more than one year, with the specification of the available means and the division of the expenses, most be presented.

When can be applied

The final submission date is 1 April at 17.00h. If this date falls on a Saturday or a Sunday, the closing date is moved to the following Monday at 17.00h. In order to ensure that all candidates get an equal chance, no bibliographical additions will be accepted after this date.

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that the FWO is not responsible for the temporary unavailability of the system. Therefore, we advise you to submit at least one to two weeks before the closing date.

Selection

Criteria

- scientific production of the applicant
- scientific content of the research department
- research methodology
- originality and innovative nature of the project
- feasibility of the project
- purposefulness of the project
- necessity for the budgeted resources

Procedure

The applications are presented to the FWO-Expertpanels, who assess the merits of the applications. The Expertpanels report to the Board. The appointment is made by the Board of Trustees.

Your head of department of your university has to write a letter of recommendation. This letter should attempt to give an impartial assessment of your qualities, related to the selection criteria for the FWO research grant.

Expertpanels

The FWO has 29 subject specific [Expertpanels] and 1 interdisciplinary panel, each consisting of 16 experts. Most of these experts are affiliated to a non-Flemish university.

Budget

In 2009 the FWO has spend more than €2,100,000 to the financing of Research Grants.

Each Grant amounts to minimum €2,500 and maximum €40,000.
8. Research projects

Objective

The objective of the FWO’s Research projects is to advance fundamental scientific research, on the initiative of researchers from all disciplines. The Research projects constitute an important tool with which to stimulate collaboration between different research teams.

In this context bench fees, equipment and personnel grants are made available to teams of researchers for conducting scientific high-value projects at the centre of scientific interest.

Special attention is focussed on projects that position their own research within a wider scientific arena and presuppose an interuniversity approach.

For the 2010 application round, the success rate was 13.91% of the requested budget.

Procedure

Who can apply

The FWO Board of Trustees can award allowances for research carried out at universities in the Flemish Community and, by virtue of its office, registered higher education institutes (article 7 of the Decree on the structure of Higher Education), that can award a PhD (articles 54-55 of the Decree on the structure of Higher Education), potentially in collaboration with Flemish or Federal institutes for scientific research. If the research is being conducted in collaboration with a technical school, it shall be performed under the direction and responsibility of a Flemish university.

A research project is executed under the direction of a promoter, … in cooperation with one or more co-promoters. The promoters and co-promoters need to fulfill to the conditions stipulated in article 9 of the rules for research projects.

For each host institution, either the promoter or one co-promoter should stay in their position for the duration of the requested research project.

A researcher can only act as a (co-)promoter for maximum two projects per application round. All correspondence with the FWO occurs via the promoter, who is also spokesman. The co-promoters receive a copy of all correspondence.

What can be applied for

The Fund’s Research projects are financed for a limited period of time (maximum for years – once renewable) and have a well-defined scientific conclusion. In this context bench fee, equipment and personnel grants are made available to teams of researchers for conducting scientific high-value projects at the centre of scientific interest. Special attention is focussed on projects that position their own research within a wider scientific arena and cross intrainiversity boundaries. As far as possible within the objectives laid down in the project, the research shall be organised to enable the pre-doctoral researchers to obtain a PhD.

Each year, more than €50.000.000 is spend on the funding of research projects.
For each project, and in case of an interuniversitary project, for each host institution, one can apply for €40,000 till €130,000 each year including research staff and bench fee. In case one of the project partners only requests funding for consumables, the lower limit for this partner is set at €20,000.

Additionally, one can apply for max. €150,000 for equipment. Applying for matching funding up to max. €150,000 is possible.

The amount that is applied for in the first year, has to be equal or higher compared with the funds asked for during the other years.

**When can be applied**

The final submission date is **1 April at 17.00h**. If this date falls on a Saturday or a Sunday, the closing date is moved to the following Monday at 17.00h. In order to ensure that all candidates get an equal chance, no bibliographical additions will be accepted after this date.

This on-line form must be completed and sent to the **university of the official spokesman** for the research project.

You are kindly requested to find out from the rectorate about the final submission date for your application.

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that the **FWO is not responsible** either for the temporary unavailability of the system, or for the timely despatch of your application by the university to the FWO. Therefore we advise you to **send your application at least one to two weeks before the closing date of your rectorate to the host institution (university)**.

For all applications that are sent by the university to the FWO you will receive an automated message confirming the submission. After your file has been registered, the FWO will also send an automated e-mail which contains your file number.

**Extra Information**

All equipment, purchased with a bench fee or equipment grant from the FWO, is the property of the university or institute for scientific research to which the holder of the credit is affiliated or of the technical school, pursuant to an arrangement with a Flemish university that is included in the application.

The host institution is also the employer of the personnel used for Research projects.

No remuneration or accumulation with remuneration can be given to the promotors and co-promotors in the context of an FWO research project, unless the trustee bodies make an exception.

Management or administration costs, rental costs, heating, lighting, maintenance of rooms and furniture, are not entitled to a grant from the FWO.

For further information please consult the Rules for Research Projects.
Selection

Criteria

- international scientific level of the research groups
- methodology
- originality and innovative nature of the project
- importance of the project
- purposefulness of the project
- feasibility of the project
- collaboration and coordination between research departments
- necessity for the budgeted resources

Procedure

The applications will be evaluated by the FWO-Expertpanels, who will judge the qualifications of the candidates. The Expertpanels will give an advice to the Board. The Board of Trustees makes the final decision.

Each applicant, should propose ten external referees. From this list, the FWO will invite a number of referees to evaluate the application in writing.

Reviewers must be affiliated to a university, research institute or research department of another organizational type and must be active at least at a postdoctoral level. The following persons are not eligible as reviewers:

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- Persons with a professional appointment to a foreign institute where the applicant(s) had been enrolled as a student or professional during the past three years;
- Any co-authors with the applicants of a publication that was submitted or published in the three years preceding the final submission date for the applications;
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Expertpanels

The FWO has 29 subject specific Expertpanels and 1 interdisciplinary panel, each consisting of 16 experts. Most of these experts are affiliated to a non-Flemish university.

Budget

In 2011 the FWO had a budget of € 200.000.000, 52% of which was spent on funding projects and grants.

FWO can allocate personnel grants, bench fees (including equipment less than € 20,000 per piece) and money for equipment (minimum € 20,000 – maximum € 150,000) for the execution of research projects.
PART III: ANNEXES

Annex I: practical guidelines for using the online module to download applications

As a Member of an FWO Expert Panel, you have the possibility to log on to the FWO system via http://expertpanel.fwo.be, with a login ID and a password (both are case- and space-sensitive).

After logging on to the system, you get an overview of the proposals to be evaluated by your panel, divided into different folders.

Open the desired folder by double-clicking it. You will see all submitted proposals for this type of fellowship.
You can open each file or save it to your computer by double-clicking it.

You also have the possibility to download an entire folder in zip-format to your computer. To do this, right-click the folder and choose the first option.
Annex II: Code of Conduct


Annex III: FWO regulations on peer review