



Opening new horizons

Reforms for selection procedures
fundamental programmes and SB
grant

June 2017

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Objectives

- Optimise procedures for the future
- Address concerns about current procedures

Principles

- The central objective remains to select the most excellent researchers.
- The FWO remains a researcher-friendly institution.
- The FWO uses transparent and efficient procedures.
- The evaluations are based on international best practices.
- Optimisation of the application flow / pressure.
- More resources need to be allocated to fundamental research.

Focal points current procedure

- Application pressure
- Alignment of PhD and SB fellowship grants
- Competitive disadvantage for junior researchers
- Senior postdoctoral fellowship
- Panel members associated with Flemish institutions
- External peer review
- Possible Conflict of Interest among panel members
- Candidate interview & rebuttal

Decisions

- Autumn 2016: start of exercise
- 21 October 2016: large-scale stakeholder dialogue
- Targeted sessions with representatives of "Researchers for a strong FWO" and the Research Policy working group
- 31 May 2017: approval of main lines of the reform by the Board of Trustees
- 9 June 2017: approval of €30.3 million extra budget the FWO's fundamental channel by the Flemish government
- Mid-June 2017: start of communication on the reform from the FWO
- Autumn 2017 & 2018: concrete elaboration and implementation of the reforms
- Autumn 2018: opening of first calls for the reformed programmes
- 2019: first year of the reformed procedures

Introduction of reforms

- Calls opening in 2017 remain under the **'old'** regime
 - 6/2017: SB grants (deadline 15/9/2017)
 - 11/2017: PhD fellowships, postdocs, etc. (deadline 1/2/2018)
 - 11/2017: Research Grant, fundamental projects (deadline 1/4/2018)
- SB grant call opening in 6/2018: also based on the 'old' regime (deadline 15/9/2018)
- Calls opening in 2018 based on **new** regulations, taking into account the transitional measures
 - 7/2018: opening postdoc call (deadline 01/12/2018)
 - 12/2018: opening PhD fellowship, SB grant call (deadline 01/03/2019)
 - 12/2018: opening projects call (deadline 01/04/2019)
(restricted research grant call (see slide 12))

Reforms for fellowships

A. PhD Fellowship and SB Grant

Eligibility criteria:

- maximum 2 application attempts for predoctoral fellowship (PhD fellowship and SB grant combined)
- maximum 3 years seniority (on start date of the fellowship: 1 Nov) after obtaining the master's degree
 - Applications can still be made in last year of master
 - This time limit is extended by one year per period of at least 3 months of maternity leave or per continuous period of at least 3 months full-time parental leave/sickness between the date of the relevant master's degree and the application.

=> Transitional measure: in application year 2019, applications can still be made under the old seniority rules if it is not the first application and the candidate has not yet exhausted the number of applications allowed under the old regulations.

Reforms for fellowships

A. PhD Fellowship and SB Grant

Eligibility criteria:

- Maximum 18 months scientific seniority (on start date of the fellowship: 1 Nov) for PhD fellowships and SB grant
 - **Transitional measure: in application year 2019, applications can still be made under the old seniority rules if it is not the first application and the candidate has not yet exhausted the number of applications allowed under the old regulations.**

| Year | Fellowship | Submission deadline | Start date | Eligibility criteria |
|------|----------------|---------------------|------------|--|
| 2017 | PhD fellowship | 01/02/2017 | 01/10/2017 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Max. 5 years after master, if older than 31 years- Max. 36 months scientific seniority- Max. 2 applications for same fellowship |
| | SB grant | 15/09/2017 | 01/01/2018 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Max. 5 years after master- Max. 18 months scientific seniority- Max. 2 applications for same fellowship |
| 2018 | PhD fellowship | 01/02/2018 | 01/10/2018 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Max. 5 years after master, if older than 31 years- Max. 36 months scientific seniority- Max. 2 applications for same fellowship |
| | SB grant | 15/09/2018 | 01/01/2019 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Max. 5 years after master- Max. 18 months scientific seniority- Max. 2 applications for same fellowship |
| 2019 | PhD fellowship | 01/03/2019 | 01/11/2019 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- If 1st submission (not yet applied for SB or PhD fellowship):<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Max. 3 years after mastero Max. 18 months scientific seniorityo Max. 2 applications for either SB or PhD fellowship- If already applied for SB and/or PhD fellowship<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Existing eligibility criteria for SB or PhD fellowship continue to applyo Choice PhD fellowship/SB taking into account prior history and resp. eligibility criteria:<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Max. 5 years after Master (for PhD fellowship: if older than 31 years)▪ Max. 2 applications for same fellowship▪ Resp. max. 18 months (SB) and max. 36 months scientific seniority (PhD fellowship) |
| | SB grant | 01/03/2019 | 01/11/2019 | |
| 2020 | PhD fellowship | 01/03/2020 | 01/11/2020 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Max. 3 years after master- Max. 18 months scientific seniority- Max. 2 applications for either SB or PhD fellowship |
| | SB grant | 01/03/2020 | 01/11/2020 | |

B. Postdoc

Eligibility criteria:

- Maximum 2 application attempts for a postdoctoral fellowship
- Maximum 3 years seniority after obtaining the PhD degree
 - Submission possible in last year of PhD period
 - This time limit is extended by one year per period of at least 3 months of maternity leave or per continuous period of at least 3 months full-time parental leave/sickness between the date of the relevant master's degree and the application.
- Introduction of a flexible bench fee
 - Together with postdoc application
 - From €4,000 (standard) to €10,000/year (subject to specific prior justification)

Reforms for fellowships

C. Postdoc renewal / Senior Postdoc

Eligibility criteria:

- From call with deadline 01/12/2018, renewal of the postdoctoral fellowship (second term) will be replaced by a senior postdoctoral fellowship, for everyone with:
 - a maximum postdoctoral seniority of 6 years;
 - minimum 2 years of prior financing as postdoctoral researcher;
 - maximum 4 years of postdoctoral financing;
 - candidates who are eligible for a junior fellowship cannot apply for a senior fellowship and vice versa.
- Holders of a 1st postdoctoral fellowship of the FWO are at all times eligible to apply for a senior (previous renewal).

Evaluation of fellowship applications

- Applicants evaluated in 2 phases: preselection and interview round:
 - no ranking in first phase (only division into quartiles);
 - based on a score system where the evaluation of the applicant counts for 60% and that of the project for 40% of the total;
 - for SB grants, the project evaluation is further divided into 20% research and 20% innovation potential;
 - maximum 200% of the number of candidates proceed to the 2nd phase (interview);
 - for postdocs, external referees are invited to submit reports in phase 1,
- Weighting candidate / project = 60%/40% for PhD fellowship/SB grant/postdoc
 - For SB grants, the 40% breaks down into 20% project and 20% valorisation

Evaluation of fellowship applications

- Alignment of the timeline for postdoctoral fellowships takes the following elements into account:
 - no gap after graduation;
 - choice between PhD fellowship or SB channel per call;
 - alignment with exams:
 - submission deadline: 1 March;
 - the 1st phase is completed before the summer holiday;
 - the 2nd phase starts in the last week of August and runs until the first week of October;
 - fellowship starts on 1 November.
- The evaluation of the postdoctoral will continue to take place in the spring (see below).

Reforms for Research Grant

- The Research Grant channel disappears and is replaced at the postdoc level by the flexible bench fee

→ **Transitional measure:**

FWO postdocs in their 1st or 2nd fellowship year are given one more chance to apply for a Research Grant.

- Introduction of flexible bench fee for Postdocs
 - Together with postdoc application
 - From €4,000 (standard) to €10,000/year (subject to specific prior justification)

Reforms for projects (fundamental research)

- Projects are broken down into junior and senior categories to create more equal competition.
 - Both channels have equal chances of success.
 - Equal admission conditions apply for junior and senior PI.
 - Definition of a junior PI: maximum 12 years after obtaining a PhD
- Maximum 2 projects per round per supervisor and co-supervisor can be applied for and the total sum of projects applied for and in progress is also limited to 2 on the start date of the newly allocated project.
 - An application can be made in the last year of the ongoing project (the latter will therefore not be included in the calculation of the maximum of 2 projects).
 - By the end of September 2017 it will be decided which transitional measures for projects can be taken.
- The supervisor must guarantee in advance that he/she will continue to supervise the project for the entire duration.

- The evaluation consists of a one-step procedure, but includes a **rebuttal**:
 - between external peer review and internal panel review;
 - the PI is given the opportunity to respond to comments from the external reviewers and to provide clarifications, corrections, extra info to the panel;
- The budget does not constitute a selection criterion, but is a focal point for the evaluators.
- The rules for 'subcontracting' are applied FWO-wide (cf. SBO).

Required appointment rates for supervisors and co-supervisors

- A candidate main applicant must meet one of the following conditions:
 - hold at least a 50% ZAP appointment (and specified equivalencies) at a main host institution that is eligible to act as main host institution in the context of an FWO project, notably the five Flemish universities, ITG, Vlerick Business School, AMS and the Hogere Zeevaartschool.
 - being a research director of FWO;
 - being a designated beneficiary of an ERC Grant with a Flemish university or the Evangelical Protestant Faculty in Leuven, the Faculty for Protestant Theology in Brussels, the Hogere Zeevaartschool, the Vlerick Management School, the Antwerp Management School or the Institute of Tropical Medicine as host institution;
 - being a designated beneficiary of an Odysseus II grant with a Flemish university as host institution.
- If the candidate main applicant holds a ZAP appointment of less than 50% but with a minimum of 10% (and specified equivalencies) at one of the above-mentioned main host institutions, he/she must in addition be appointed at:
 - a main host institution that is already eligible for an FWO project (the five universities, ITG, Vlerick BS, AMS and HZS);
 - a Flemish academic hospital;
 - a Flemish hospital with an academic character;
 - a recognised Flemish or federal research institution;
 - a Strategic Research Centre (SOC);
 - the Research Foundation – Flanders.

Required appointment rates for supervisors and co-supervisors

- The total appointment in Flanders, including ZAP appointment (and specified equivalencies) must amount at least to 70% of a FTE (full time equivalent).
- Candidates with both a ZAP appointment of 5% and an appointment as clinical head or assistant clinical head or an equal function in a Flemish Academic Hospital can also act as main applicant.

Expert Panels for fundamental research (PhD fellowship, postdoc, project)

- Panels for PhD fellowship, postdoc and projects are amended; the existing panel system for SB grants is retained
- Principles for composition of the panel:
 - members with an affiliation in Flanders represent less than half of the total number of panel members;
 - The chair or sub-chair has a non-Flemish affiliation.
- Panel members can no longer act as (co-)supervisor of an application, neither for a fellowship nor for a project.
- There will be greater uniformity in the functioning of the panels (score grids, guide for panel members, etc.)
- There will be profile descriptions for panel members and (sub-)chairs and they will also be publicised.
- The discipline boards (BIO, CULT, G&M, MED and W&T) will play a role in monitoring the functioning of panel members and panels in general. For this, clear rules will be established, allowing the FWO to intervene in case of problems and/or complaints.
- The evaluation procedures and activities of the PhD fellowship and SB grant panels will be aligned (use of fixed score grid, etc.).

Appointment of Expert Panels for fundamental research (PhD fellowship, postdoc, project)

- Five discipline boards (composed by the Board of Trustees) advise the Board of Trustees on the composition of the fundamental panels in the respective domains.
 - These are composed of the chairs and sub-chairs of the different panels.
 - The chairs and sub-chairs are appointed by the Board of Trustees on the basis of shortlists prepared by the FWO administration.
- The discipline boards advise on the composition of the panels based on:
 - Spontaneous application of experts;
 - lists of candidate panel members provided by the FWO administration;
 - sources for the compilation of these lists are spontaneous applications, the FWO database, ISI-WOS, Google Scholar, direct suggestions from the panel members, input from the VLAIO agency;
 - potential candidates are then screened by ECOOM.
- The existing rules for safeguarding excellence and the gender rules are retained.
- Both in the first phase for the suggestions from potential panel members and afterwards in the final exercise by the discipline boards, where the chairs and sub-chairs of the panels can make a well-informed decision, the input from the panel itself is taken into account.
- The introduction of the discipline boards implies the creation of an intermediate level in the panel composition, which makes it possible to file an appeal with the Board of Trustees in case of complaints or disagreement on the procedure followed.

External Peer Review (for postdocs and projects fundamental research)

- Applicants no longer propose the external referees themselves.
- The referees are contacted by the FWO itself (through an external partner)

Timeline

- Projects:
 - 1 April: submission
 - April through June: external peer review + rebuttal
 - November: panel meetings
 - December: allocation by Board of Trustees
 - 1 January: start of projects
- Postdocs
 - 1 December: submission
 - January through March: external peer review + preselection
 - May and June: panel meeting with interviews
 - End June: allocation by Board of Trustees
 - 1 October or 1 November: start fellowship

Timeline

- PhD fellowships:
 - 1 March: submission
 - May: preselection
 - End August - September: panel meetings with interview
 - October: allocation by Board of Trustees
 - 1 November: start fellowship
- SB grant
 - 1 March: submission
 - May: preselection
 - End August-September: panel meetings with interview
 - October: allocation by Board of Trustees
 - 1 November: start of fellowship