fwo
Opening new horizons
Applying for a FWO postdoc fellowship

Info session – call 2020

October 2019
Preface

• What you should learn today...
  • to understand the evaluation & selection process
  • to prepare an application that meets the evaluation criteria

• This presentation
  • serves as applicant’s “quick starting guide” (key topics only)
  • more details: postdoc webpages incl. documents & regulations

• DISCLAIMER
  • Official & binding documents: regulations in Dutch
    • English regulations: no legal status

Oct 2019
Outline

1. FWO mission & key numbers
2. Postdoc fellowships at a glance
3. Evaluation & selection process
4. Preparing your application
5. ... further reading & contact
Welcome to the FWO

Our mission

- Funding of *fundamental* & *strategic* research
- Funding programmes
  - *Individual researchers* (pre-, post-doc, mobility *Pegasus*)
  - *Research teams* (projects, *SBO, Odysseus,...*)
  - Research infrastructure
  - Scientific prizes

Principles

- *Bottom-up* in all disciplines
- *Scientific excellence* and interuniversity (incl research institutes) competition
- Transparent and *equal opportunities*

Opening new horizons...
The FWO by numbers

Budget 2020: **364 MEUR**

- **2018**
  - Fellowships: 27%
  - Projects: 53%
  - Infrastructure: 20%

- **2018**
  - Fundamental: 56%
  - Strategic basic: 19%
  - Clinical: 5%
  - Infrastructure: 19%

- **2019**
  - PhD fellows: 82%
  - Postdocs: 18%

- **2019**
  - PhD fellows: 32.4%
  - Postdoc JR (170): 23.4%
  - Postdoc SR (86): 27.1%

- **Numbers**
  - PhD fellows: 1573
  - Postdocs: 703

- **Gender**
  - PhD fellows: 50%
  - Postdocs: 42%

- **Region**
  - Belgium: 63%
  - Postdocs: 37%

- **2019**
  - PhD fellows: 32.4%
  - Postdoc JR (170): 23.4%
  - Postdoc SR (86): 27.1%
Outline

1. FWO mission & key numbers
2. Postdoc fellowships at a glance
3. Evaluation & selection process
4. Preparing your application
5. ... further reading & contact
FWO Postdoctoral fellowship at a glance

• Target group
  • young researchers developing international independent research career
  • parallel calls junior/senior: 0-3 resp. 3-6 years after PhD
  • All PhD’s & nationalities

• 3-year grants
  • start Oct or Nov 1, 2020 (your choice)
  • fundamental research ≠ Innovation mandates (PhD exploitation & utilization: @VLAIO)
  • flexible bench fee 4 – 10 k€/year
FWO Postdoctoral fellowship at a glance

• Key dates
  - Call open: Sep 23, 2019
  - Submission: Dec 2, 2019
  - Decision Board: June 2020
  - Start fellowship: Oct / Nov 1, 2020

• 2020 call additional mandates
  - ‘ALS’ fellowship (Legacy Mr. Van Eyck)
  - Meise Botanic Garden
Eligibility window

- Extensions eligibility window: regulations Art 6
  - maternity-, parental-, sickness leave > 3m
  - Applying for ‘senior’ ok if directly following FWO (junior) postdoc

- Senior: min. 2 years as postdoc researcher required (on Oct. 1, 2020)
  (if not as FWO postdoc: declaration by host organisation needed)
Eligible host organisations

• Main host organisation (affiliation)
  • 5 Flemish universities
  • Evangelic Protestant Faculty Leuven / Faculty for Protestant Theology in Brussels
  • Antwerp Maritime Academy
  • Vlerick Business School, Antwerp Management school,
  • Institute for Tropical Medicine
• + Flemish/federal research institutes (collaboration / research location)

• Main supervisor (-> recommendation letter on invitation by FWO)
• Co-supervisors @ main /other host institution(s)
Outline

1. FWO mission & key numbers
2. Postdoc fellowships at a glance
3. Evaluation & selection process
4. Preparing your application
5. ... further reading & contact
Single submission 2-step evaluation & selection process

**Step 1**
- **Remote assessment:**
  - 2 ext reviewers + 2 panel members
  - > synthesis by panel rapporteur
- (online) panel meeting
  - consensus scoring & ranking
- Rejected proposals
- Retained for step 2 interviews

**Step 2**
- Panel meeting: interviews
  - consensus scoring & ranking
- Selected candidates
- Rejected proposals

Oct 2019
Info session postdoc fellowships FWO
Submission to panels

• Panel structure fundamental research
  • ‘Fellowships’ panels (PhD/postdoc)
  • 31 panels: 30 in 5 scientific domains + interdisciplinary panel (cross-domain)
• Updated panel members list published Jan 2020
  • 12 members incl. scientific chair
  • >50% members with non-Flemish affiliation

• Choose panel that best fits your application!
  • Check panel scopes < - > “out-of-scope” = score ‘0’
  • Interdisciplinary panel? Follow acceptance criteria decision tree
Evaluation of your proposal

- **Consensus** panel decisions (scoring & ranking) in both steps
- **Roles** in panel (per application):
  - *Rapporteur* (synthesis & feedback)
  - 2 panel members as *internal evaluators* in step 1
  - +2 *external reviewers* (on-topic specialists) in step 1
    - selected by FWO - you may suggest (up to 3) experts to be excluded (motivation)
- **Evaluation criteria:** “candidate” & “project”

**Step 1 (preselection)**
- Scientific contribution
- Relevant competences & motivation

**Step 2 (interviews)**
- Competence as postdoc researcher

**Step 1 + 2**
- Scientific quality, relevance and challenge, originality
- Quality research approach, feasibility
Uniform evaluation: scoring descriptors and grids

### Scoring range (all criteria in step 1 and step 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0/ D</td>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/ C</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/ B-</td>
<td>Fair/reasonable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/ B</td>
<td>Good/very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/ B+</td>
<td>Excellent/outstanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Weighted total score (both steps)
e.g.:

- **60%**
- **40%**

---

**Step 1 (preselection)**

**Step 2 (interviews)**

**Step 1 + 2**
Selection process – step 1 preselection

- Each panel: max. “Q” grants (Q=panel quota) available
  - Q: based on number of applicants and total available grants
  - Max. Qx2 candidates to pass preselection
  - (online) panel meeting starting from (2+2) internal/external reviews + synthesis
  - Panel consensus score candidate & project -> weighted total score -> ranking

Example (Q=4)
Selection process – step 2 interview

- **New consensus scores** candidate & project -> weighted total score -> ranking
- **Max Q grants directly attributed:**
  - best ranked weighted total score, AND also **min. scores per criterium**
  - min. scores: quality threshold (4 and 4)
- ‘Wildcard’: best remaining candidates (~weighted total score)

Example (Q=4)
Remaining grants: ranking the wild cards

- After all panel sessions: remaining grants (10%) attributed
  - Overall ranking of remaining valuable candidates
  - Using standardized (z-)scores per panel
  - Example:
    1. 1 panel A
    2. 1 panel C
    3. 2 panel A
    4. 1 panel B
    5. 2 panel B

- Reserve list ranking (~Sept.11)
- FWO/Botanical Garden
- Host institutions bridging

Panel A
Panel B
Panel C
Feedback to candidates

All feedback AFTER selection decision Board (≥ July 2020)

- Out in step 1
  - Scores preselection
  - Synthesis rapporteur

- Out in step 2
  - Scores interview
  - Synthesis step 1 & 2

Scores (step 1 OR step 2)

| 5,0 | 4,5 | 4,8 |

(C) P WTS

Grant

- Scores interview
- Synthesis step 1 & 2
2020 call: timeline evaluation & selection

- Submission: Dec 2, 2019
- Eligibility: Dec 2019
- End preselection: Early April 2020
- Interviews: End April - May 2020
- Selection: June 2020
- Feedback: July 2020
- Start contracts: Oct-Nov 2020
Outline

1. FWO mission & key numbers
2. Postdoc fellowships at a glance
3. Evaluation & selection process
4. Preparing your application
5. ... further reading & contact
Preparing your application – e-portal

- E-portal (www.fwo.be) (*register in time!* -> FWO Validation /48hrs)
Preparing your application – e-portal

- E-portal (www.fwo.be)

Your e-application:

- Edit your personal details.
- Start a new application or complete an unfinished application.
- Apply for expert panel(s).
- Submit a scientific report.
- Communicate conflict of interests.
- Manage conflict of interests.
- Preliminary reports / feedback reports.
- Write a review or give a recommendation.
Preparing your application - overview

- E-portal (www.fwo.be)

Your e-application:

- Edit your personal details.
- Start a new application or complete an unfinished application.
- Write a review or give a recommendation.
- Apply for expert panel(s)
- Submit a scientific report
- Help
- Communicate conflict of interests
- Manage conflict of interests
- Preliminary reports / feedback reports
- FWO extractor

FWO processing:

- Admin
- Positioning
- Eligibility
- Evaluation 'candidate'
- Evaluation 'project'

FWO-admin -> panel
Preparing your application – personal details

- Personal details: ORCID registration [https://orcid.org/](https://orcid.org/)
- Studies & career: correct & complete!
- Discipline codes: Use level 4
- Publications: updated!
- Contact details: (future) ‘Belgian service address’!
  *Legal domicile address*

**FWO processing:**

- Admin
  - Positioning
  - Eligibility
Preparing your application – various items

- **General:** free text keywords
- **Host institution(s)** incl. (main) supervisor / co-supervisor(s)
  Main host institution + Main supervisor (-> recommendation letter) (+ co-supervisor(s))
  Additional Flemish/federal institutions (optional) (+co-supervisor(s))
  ‘Other’: only if intense collaboration
- **Peer review:** select panel + (exclude ext. reviewers)
- **Ethics:** EU-conform ethical questionnaire
- **Data Management Plan**  
  -  

FWO processing:

Admin  
Positioning  
Eligibility

"junior or senior" - start “Oct 1” or “Nov 1”
Preparing your application – ‘candidate’

**Evaluation ‘candidate’ step 1**

- **Scientific contribution**
  - Quality & impact publications & other output
  - Emerging reputation & upload trajectory
  - (sr) Developing scientific independence

- **Relevant competences & motivation**
  - Skills & expertise (acquired / developing)
  - Building research career
  - (sr) supervision & mentoring

---

**Motivation statement!**

- Career breaks
- Supervision & mentoring
- Research stays

---

5 main publications
Other scientific output + impact
Scientific awards

---

**Personal details**

- Diplomas / Current studies
- Posts / Career
- Disciplines
- Publications
- Contact details

---

**General**

- PERSONAL DATA
- HOST INSTITUTIONS
- PROJECT
- BENCH FEE
- PEER REVIEW
- ETHICS
- DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

---

October 2019
Preventing your application – ‘project’

**Project description** – **WORD template ≤10 pages**
- Improvements wrt 1st application
- Rationale and positioning w.r.t. the state-of-the-art
- Scientific research objective(s)
- Research methodology and work plan
- references

- Submitted to other funding? Be transparent!
- Positioning (research group, (inter)nationwide)

**Bench fee /year**
Motivate if >€ 4,000 /year

Approval/adjustment bench fee

**Evaluation ‘project’ step 1**

- Scientific quality, relevance and challenge, originality
  - International state-of-the-art
- Quality of the research methodology and feasibility
  - Risk mitigation
Submitting your application

State of application
In preparation

Overview of your applications
Download application pdf
Download personalia pdf
Submit application

Help

DON'T FORGET

≤ December 2 2019 – 5:00 pm CET

Submitted

- automatic confirmation follows
- registration number sent
- eligibility check: Q&A with FWO admin

Oct 2019
Info session postdoc fellowships FWO
Additional fellowships

**ALS fellowship**
- Research on Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (legacy Mr. Van Eyck – 322 kEUR)
  - indicate 'ALS-fellowship' in the application title
  - Submit e-portal application + announce the application by email to med@fwo.be
  - project outline: additional paragraph motivating use of 50 kEUR additional bench fee

**“Meise Botanic Garden – FWO” fellowships**
- 1 postdoc fellowship (< - reserve list) funded by MBG
- Agreement MBC on being additional host institute (before submitting)
- FWO contract + collaboration agreement Meise Botanic Garden & host institute
Invited? Preparing the interview

• Course of the interview
  • ‘Elevator pitch’: 5 min.
  • Interactive discussion (Q&A): 10-15 min.
  • Evaluation by panel 10-15 min.

• Your pitch
  • Add value! <-> summarise project proposal
  • Highlight aspects that appeal
  • Try to stand out! ‘Uniqueness’ & capability
  • Additional achievements (since submitting application)

• Discussion
  • Specific & generic questions
  • Questions along scoring descriptors
  • Encouraging vs. confrontational debate
Invited? Preparing the interview

• Prepare and practice!
  • Be the devil’s advocate!
  • Let colleagues & supervisor(s) put you through the grill...

• Practical:
  • Powerpoint (free template) to send to FWO (>1 week before interview)
  • Physical presence recommended
    – ‘remote’ interview: to be motivated
‘Performing’ the interview

- Meet the criteria:
  - Evaluation criterium ‘candidate’ step 2

- Competence as postdoc researcher
  - Expertise/knowledge in own research field
  - Insight in project approach and positioning
  - Reasoning skills and critical scientific mindset
  - Clear vision on professional future and motivation

- Evaluation criterium ‘project’
  - Scientific quality, relevance and challenge, originality
  - Quality of the research methodology and feasibility
Outline

1. FWO mission & key numbers
2. Postdoc fellowships at a glance
3. Evaluation & selection process
4. Preparing your application
5. ... further reading & contact
Further reading / regulations

- Programme webpages junior NL - EN / senior NL - EN
- Regulations (legal version: Dutch)
  - General / Postdoc programme / bench fee / peer review
- Supporting documents
  - This presentation / Screenshots e-application
  - Scoring grids
  - Guidelines interview
Contact

- Help! Who to contact
  - **Additional info & specific questions**
    - *FWO file administrators per domain*
  - **FWOhelpdesk@fwo.be**
    - (e-portal/IT problems)
  - **dirk.otte@fwo.be**
Finally: Research Integrity!

• As part of FWO Policy:
  
  • Clause in call text, application and contract on commitment to RI
  • Profiles for (co)promoters and researchers
  • Adaptations in General Regulation and Regulation pre- and postdoc fellowships on procedure and sanctions in case of RI violation
  
  • ! Read the detailed information and the RI Clause

Every applicant and beneficiary is expected to know the rules and what (s)he will be committed to.
Good luck!
More information about the FWO

www.fwo.be
Information about FWO’s operation, regulations, scientific prizes and appeals...
All publications are free to download

www.geschiedenisfwo.be
Module about FWO’s history

Join us
Thank you for your attention
Appendix: Scoring descriptor grids
POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP: scoring descriptors criterion “Candidate” (preselection)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0 / D</th>
<th>1 / C</th>
<th>2 / B-</th>
<th>3 / B</th>
<th>4 / B+</th>
<th>5 / A-</th>
<th>6 / A</th>
<th>7 / A+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Fair/Reasonable</td>
<td>Good/Very good</td>
<td>Excellent/Outstanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.a. Scientific contribution of the candidate

Please take into account the candidate's scientific seniority (in a "jr." resp. "sr." context, and taking into account possible career breaks).
Assess important research results and scientific contributions to the field as evidenced by (rather than the quantity) the quality and impact of the publication record, as well as other scientific output (invited contributions, conferences, patents, teachings, monographs, ...), and impact beyond publications. An emerging scientific reputation and an upward trajectory are relevant criteria as well.
For senior post-docs, scientific independence (as e.g. evidenced by publications without PhD supervisor, ...) is a relevant asset.

No scoring possibility

- Rather limited scientific contribution to the state-of-the-art, and little evidence of an upward trajectory.
- Average scientific contribution to the state-of-the-art. Some evidence of a starting upward trajectory or (sr.) earlier upward trajectory is not continuing.
- Meaningful contributions to the state of the art, properly acknowledged in the scientific community. Evidence of emerging (international) reputation in a clear upward trajectory.
- Impressive scientific contribution: original, clear achievements beyond the state-of-the-art. Emerging international recognition for influential research output.

AND
- (sr.:) Developing scientific independence.
- (sr.:) Proven clear path towards scientific independence.

1.b. Motivation and substantiation of relevant competences of the candidate

This criterion assesses whether the candidate has the right scientific background and competences, in relation to the proposed project, and as required for a postdoctoral researcher in general. Has the candidate gained relevant experience and performed relevant collaborations outside the host institution (mobility)? In general, is the candidate acquiring the proper skills in terms of the anticipated career development, and does the application (motivation statement) reveal proper motivation and vision?
Senior postdoc candidates: research supervision and mentoring and the involvement of the candidate as (co-)promoter in research projects can be taken into account.

No scoring possibility

- Little evidence of development of some crucial competences, such as scientific background and the building up of proper career-related expertise as mobility and collaboration, (sr.:) supervision/mentoring.
- One or more of the following items apply:
  - Proper scientific background and built-up expertise is substantiated, but still shows some flaws, that are not all being dealt with in the application.
  - There is less evidence of acquiring or acquired career-related competences as mobility and collaboration, (sr.:) supervision/mentoring ...
- All of the following items apply:
  - The candidate is developing (jr.) or has developed (sr.) good skills and expertise to execute research beyond the state-of-the-art. Potential flaws are identified and being dealt with.
  - The candidate provides evidence of carefully and motivatedly building up a research career as well as the required skills (w.r.t. mobility and collaboration outside host institution, (sr.:) supervision and mentoring, ...
- All of the following items apply:
  - The candidate is developing (jr.) or has developed (sr.) excellent skills and ample scientific experience, and shows the ability and potential to propose and conduct groundbreaking research.
  - The candidate is ready to acquire (jr.) or has acquired (sr.) competences, as well reveals the drive that improve the prospects of reaching/reinforcing a position of professional maturity and independence.
POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP: scoring descriptors criterion “Candidate” (interview)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0 / D</th>
<th>1 / C</th>
<th>2 / B-</th>
<th>3 / B+</th>
<th>4 / A-</th>
<th>5 / A</th>
<th>6 / A</th>
<th>7 / +A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Fair/reasonable</td>
<td>Good/very good</td>
<td>Excellent/outstanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Competence as a post-doctoral researcher (criterion “candidate”)

The interview is meant to assess the candidate’s competence as an independent researcher on a post-doctoral level. Important aspects are the scientific knowledge and insight in the proposed project, intellectual capacity and creativity, reasoning skills and critical mindset, and motivation and vision on the own professional future. Descriptions in the score grid (“scientific expertise”, “ability”, “skills”, “mindset”, …) implicitly also take into account the evaluation findings of the preselection phase.

No scoring possibility

- One or more of the following items apply:
  - Manifest gaps and shortcomings in the knowledge of the state-of-the-art. The candidate appears to be quite unfamiliar with the topic of the project and shows insufficient insight in the relevance of the proposed research strategy and techniques.
  - Reasoning skills and/or critical mindset are poor.
  - The candidate doesn’t come across as motivated, and there seems to be no real vision on his/her professional future.

One or more of the following items apply:

- Fair/reasonable, but incomplete knowledge of the state-of-the-art; without real risk for the implementation of the project. Moderate to sufficient insight into the relevance of the proposed research strategy and techniques.
- Reasoning skills or critical mindset do not convince.
- Motivation and candidate’s vision on professional future are less pronounced.

All of the following items apply:

- The candidate has the required scientific expertise to successfully execute the project. (Very) good knowledge of the state-of-the-art within own field of research. He/she has a good insight in the proposed approach and techniques; positions the proposed research in an international context.
- Reasoning skills and critical-scientific mindset are good. The candidate presents new concepts based on well-founded arguments;
- Convincing and motivated candidate, who expresses a clear vision on his/her professional future.

All of the following items apply:

- The candidate demonstrates the ability to conduct ground-breaking research. Excellent/outstanding knowledge of the state-of-the-art, even outside the own field of research. Excellent insight in the proposed methodology and techniques, well positioning the proposed research.
- Candidate demonstrates a proper scientific mindset with creative and independent thinking and reasoning; she/he presents new concepts in a very sound manner.
- Candidate with clear commitment and drive, and a bright, concrete and realistic vision on the own professional future.
## POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP: scoring descriptors criterion “Project” (preselection + interview)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0 / D</th>
<th>1 / C</th>
<th>2 / B-</th>
<th>3 / B</th>
<th>4 / B+</th>
<th>5 / A-</th>
<th>6 / A</th>
<th>7 / A+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Fair/Reasonable</td>
<td>Good/very good</td>
<td>&gt;30%</td>
<td>&gt;20%</td>
<td>&gt;10%</td>
<td>&gt;5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.a Scientific quality, relevance and challenge, originality

**One or more of the following items apply:**
- The project is **out of scope**: it does not comply with the scope of the panel it was submitted to. (preselection only)
- The project does not contain real scientific risks or challenges. There is no contribution to the international state-of-the-art.
- The project focuses on (economic/societal) valorization with one stakeholder (cf. “innovation mandates” at Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship - VLAIO).

**One or more of the following items apply:**
- The project proposal is rather a catch-up effort relative to the state-of-the-art.
- Rather limited level of scientific risks and of pronounced challenges (or challenges not identified).

**One or more of the following items apply:**
- The added value of the project w.r.t. international state-of-the-art is acceptable, but less pronounced or less well elaborated.
- The project is fairly/reasonably challenging or the project is sufficiently challenging but the potential is insufficiently explored.

**All of the following items apply:**
- The project is original and soundly builds upon and significantly contributes to the international state-of-the-art.
- High-quality fundamental research project with good level of risks, challenges and inventiveness.

**All of the following items apply:**
- Highly ambitious and original project of potentially groundbreaking nature and large scientific impact.
- Very high level of scientific risks. Clear inventive and challenging ideas, novel concepts and strategies.

### 2.b Quality of the research methodology and feasibility of the project

**One or more of the following items apply:**
- Evident discrepancy or mismatch between the research goals and research methodology.
- The realization of the scientific goals is not feasible with the proposed research methodology and/or project planning.

**One or more of the following items apply:**
- The research methodology and project planning are flawed in terms of matching with project objectives. The intrinsic feasibility is low.
- The objectives are formulated in insufficiently concrete terms, making it difficult to evaluate their feasibility.

**One or more of the following items apply:**
- The research methodology is reasonable but with some shortcomings or a lesser fit to the scientific goals.
- The feasibility is less realistic, but it is likely that part of the scientific goals will be reached.

**All of the following items apply:**
- The research methodology and planning are well elaborated and justified, and suitable to reach the targeted scientific objectives. The intrinsic feasibility is good and risks are identified and dealt with.
- The project fits well in the research activities of the research group and in the personal development plan of the candidate, enhancing the feasibility.

Requirements as in “very good”, **AND**
- thorough identification of the research risks, with alternative research strategies and “fall back” research options.