Applying for a FWO doctoral fellowship ‘aspirant’
Info session – call 2022

December 2021
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: programme webpages incl. documents & regulations

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

December 2021
Covid-19

Crisis (still) impacts your life, your research and your career...

- restricted access to research facilities
- taking care of children during lockdown
- increased commitment to teaching or healthcare, ...
- standstill international mobility
- ...

... and your PhD fellowship application...

-> mention influence on quality of your application
-> FWO instructs expert panels to take this into account in assessment

Check measures taken by FWO:
maatregelen-coronavirus
measures-coronavirus

December 2021
Info session PhD fellowships 2022
Outline

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

• Mission
  • Funding of *fundamental* & *strategic* research
  • Funding programmes
    • *Individual researchers* (pre-, post-doc, mobility)
    • *Research teams* (projects, *SBO, Odysseus*,…)
    • Research infrastructure
    • Scientific prizes
  
• Bottom-up in all disciplines
  • *Scientific excellence* and interuniversity (incl research institutes) competition
  • Transparent and *equal opportunities*

*Opening new horizons*...
FWO Key numbers

Budget 2021: **480 MEUR** (incl. EOS and Odysseus)

- ±1000 PhD (fundamental)
- ± 800 PhD (strategic basic)
- ± 900 Postdocs
- ± 1500 Projects (incl. infra)

- 79% PhD
- 21% Postdocs

- 74% Fundamental Research
- 16% Strategic Basic Research
- 6% Clinical Research
- 4% Infrastructure

- 27% Research projects
- 6% Fellowships
- 67% Infrastructure

- 2021

- 50% PhD
- 50% Postdocs

- 2021

- 27.7% PhD (fundamental) - 295
- 30.1% PhD (strategic basic) - 201
- 22.6% Postdocs Junior
- 22.8% Postdoc Senior
- 20.5% Projects
Follow us on social media: @FWOVlaanderen

Spotlight on FWO-reseachers

Researcher stories  "De Podkast"  #FWOVlaanderen  Stay tuned!
Outline

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2. PhD fellowships at a glance
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FWO PhD fellowship ("aspirant") at a glance

• Target group & eligibility
  • Young researchers to complete a PhD
  • Parallel calls fundamental research (FR) / strategic basic research (SB)
  • Apply up to 2 times for PhD fellowship
  • All nationalities

• 4-year grants
  • 2 years + renewal (2 years)
  • Fellowship grant € 2,116.90 /’net’ amount per month (minimum)
  • Bench fee € 3,720 /year

• Key dates call 2022
  • Mar 1, 2022 Application deadline
  • Oct 7, 2022 Selection results
  • Nov 1, 2022 Start fellowship
PhD fellowship: fundamental vs strategic

Both fellowships: Challenging & original research (PhD level)

**Fundamental research**
- “curiosity driven”
- Applications *may follow*
  - societal & economic *benefits*
  - Long term

**Strategic basis research**:
- research with a *goal*
- Innovative *applications*
  - *Products, processes, services*
  - *Long term perspective*
- *Economic* added value

PhD -> strategically thinking and innovation oriented scientist

PhD -> independent scientists with a critical mindset

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Info session PhD fellowships 2022
Eligibility master diploma

- Master diploma ‘ManaBa’ / EEA+Switzerland
  - EEA: EU + Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein
  - Other countries (incl UK): NARIC attestation:
    - “level” Flemish master
    - Advanced Master (‘ManaMa’) not taken into account

- Eligibility window obtaining master

  ![](chart.png)

  

  \[
  \text{Mar 1, 2019} \quad \text{Mar 1, 2022 submission} \\
  \quad \text{3 years} \quad \text{Nov 1, 2022 start}
  \]

  

  Extensions eligibility window (+1Y): regulations Art 7 maternity-, parental-, sickness leave > 3m
  (+ x Y): phys./pharm.-specialist or resident veterinarian >1Y training
Eligibility: scientific seniority

- **Scientific experience / seniority**
  - $\leq 18$ months since (1st) master
    - *Not accounted for during (advanced) master studies*
    - *Accounted for employment %*
    - *Counted as on March 1, 2022!*
  - Any kind of ‘scientific activity’ (not just PhD research)
  - *All university/university college appointments*
    - *Excl. ATP, practice/teaching assistant…*
  - *Business enterprise R&D experience*
  - $\rightarrow$ *prove by contracts, documents, statements*

Limit date in case of fulltime continuous research: **Sep 1, 2020**
Submission **Mar 1, 2022**
18 months
Eligible host organisations

- **Main host organisation**
  - 5 Flemish universities
  - *Evangelic Protestant Faculty Leuven* (not SB)
  - *Faculty for Protestant Theology in Brussels* (not SB)

- **Additional host institution**
  - *Flemish/federal research institutes* (research location)

- **Main promotor** @main host institution
  - *Regulations* Art.10
  - *FWO invites main promotor for recommendation letter*

- **Co-promotor(s) (postdoc level)**
  - *FWO notifies co-promotors – No recommendation letter!*

December 2021

Info session PhD fellowships 2022
Additional (integrated) fellowships

- Kom op tegen kanker

- “Meise Botanic Garden – FWO” fellowships

- “INBO – FWO” fellowships
  - 1-2 fellowships (Fund Res and/or SB) funded by Meise BG/INBO
  - Agreement on being additional host institute (before submitting)

- Frank De Winne FWO SB fellowships
Frank De Winne PhD fellowships SB

• ‘Talent’ for the Flemish space economy
  • Opportunities for young researchers
    – to take space research in Flanders to the next level
    – establishing a sustainable career in the Flemish space economy

• Frank De Winne PhD fellowship SB focus:
  • Bridging academia and industry: research stay(s) in (Flemish) space economy enterprise
  • Training component ‘transferable skills’ (innovation, valorization, …) e.g. internships, courses
  • Strategic research in line with impulse programme Flemish space economy

• 2022: 2nd call (6 fellowships)
  • 3 calls for 16 fellowships
Other PhD programmes

• **Special PhD fellowship:**
  • 1 year fellowship to complete PhD
  • 1 dedicated panel
  • Candidates currently not working in research

• **European University Institute (EUI) fellowship**
  • Social sciences – Florence
  • Deadline 31 January 2022

• **Baekeland PhD programme**
  • PhD project with (co-financing!) Flemish enterprise
  • PhD programme @ Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (VLAIO)
Obtaining your PhD in Firenze?

PhD in four domains:

- Economy
- History and civilisation
- Law
- Political and social science

Have a look at the [Doctoral programme](#) at the European University Institute in Firenze

Deadline: 31 January 2022

Submission of application at EUI

Evaluation partly by [FWO](#)
Outline

1. FWO mission & key numbers
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Submission to expert panels

**FR**  
- Panels fellowships fundamental research (FR)  
  - ‘Fellowships’ (PhD/postdoc) panels  
  - 31 panels: 30 in 5 scientific domains + interdisciplinary panel (cross-domain)  
  - Updated panel members list published Mar 2022  
    - ±12 members incl. scientific chair  
    - >50% members with non-Flemish affiliation

**SB**  
- Panels PhD fellowships strategic basic research (SB)  
  - 24 SB panels + Frank De Winne panel  
  - Updated panel members list published Mar 2022  
    - ±12 members, moderated by FWO representative  
    - >50% members with non-Flemish affiliation  
    - ≥ 1/3 involved in R&D business enterprise sector
Process: single submission 2-phase evaluation & selection

**Phase 1**
- **Remote assessment:** 3 panel members
- (online) panel meeting consensus scoring & ranking
- Rejected proposals
- Feedback by panel

**Phase 2**
- **Panel meeting:** interviews
  - consensus scoring & ranking
- Selected candidates
- Feedback by panel
- Retained proposals for phase 2 interviews
- Rejected proposals
- Feedback by panel
Evaluation by expert panels

Evaluation of your proposal:

- **Consensus** panel decisions (scoring & ranking) in both phases (preselection / interviews)
- **Roles** (per application):
  - 3 panel members as *internal evaluators (report) of your proposal* in phase 1
  - Internal reviewers take the lead in interview
    - but all panel members involved in Q&A
  - 1 of the internal evaluators compiles feedback to the applicant

- **Attention to various researcher profiles and research results**
  - Away from one-sided focus on ‘classical output’ (*publications*)
  - Towards broader view on scientific accomplishments
  - Research career: range of scientifically relevant activities, skills, experiences and achievements
  - Adapted application form and evaluation criteria

- **Assessment takes into account what might be expected from a last year master student vs. a candidate with scientific seniority.**
Selected to phase 2: interviews

- **Invitations** and instructions June 13 (SB) and July 1 (FR) 2022 (end preselection)
- **Interviews** 1 - 30 Sep 2022
- @FWO in Brussels, or online?  
  - FWO will decide timely
- **Interview format:** pitch + Q&A  
  - Interview instructions and guidelines will be available  
  - Opportunity to mention realizations since submission date
- **Evaluation criteria different from preselection** (criterion ‘candidate’)  
  - Score grid ‘interview’  
  - Focus on assessing your ‘potential’ capacity as PhD researcher (‘total picture’)  
  - Not the ‘performance’ but contents of what you say…

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Uniform evaluation: scoring descriptors
Scoring grids (see programme webpages) – example:

PHD FELLOWSHIP: SCORING DESCRIPTORS CRITERION “PROJECT” (PRESELECTION + INTERVIEW)

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

A PhD project is scientifically challenging and relies on a sound and focused research question. It should significantly contribute to the current international state-of-the-art. To what extent is the proposal original and will it generate knowledge that goes beyond the state-of-the-art (e.g., novel theories, concepts or approaches, new methods, ...)?

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).
- Project lacks an intellectual (PhD-worthy) challenge: an in-depth research question is missing.

One or more of the following items apply:
- Research question and challenge limited or less relevant;
- The research objectives lack focus. The PhD worthiness is on the low side;
- the project is rather a catch-up effort relative to the state-of-the-art.

One or more of the following items apply:
- Scientifically relevant project, rather high quality, and sufficiently challenging as PhD research. The research is less well focused;
- the project brings less pronounced added value to international state-of-the-art.

All of the following items apply:
- Original and significant contribution to the international state of the art;
- High-quality basic research, with significant scientific challenges (doctoral level).

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**

To what extent is the proposed research methodology appropriate to achieve the goals laid down in the research project? To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible, bearing in mind a personal grant with a duration of four years? Finally, the fit in the research team may be of importance (guidance and access to expertise).

One or more of the following items apply:
- Quality of research approach and planning is below par;
- Research activities are too limited for a four-year grant period;
- Project not feasible because of too many planned activities.

One or more of the following items apply:
- Methodology and planning are flawed. Intrinsic feasibility is low, or the objectives are formulated too vaguely to evaluate feasibility.
- Project does not fit to an individual PhD project.
- Ties with dependence of other researchers, groups or external partners may jeopardize feasibility.

One or more of the following items apply:
- Research methodology reasonably well elaborated, but less well substantiated. Given some adjustments and risk control, project implementation appears to be feasible.

All of the following items apply:
- Adequate, substantially substantiated research methodology to achieve targeted results, logical set-up and realistic planning: feasible within the four-year time frame.
- Good fit of project in research group activities, giving candidate access to necessary expertise.

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

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Info session PhD fellowship 2022
Evaluation criteria “candidate” & “project”

Phase 1 preselection

Study results (academic education record)
- Position in study group (percentile)
- Other equivalent evidence of ‘standing out’

Motivation & relevant competences
- Motivation / research interest
- Activities, skills, experiences
- Scientific background / competences

Phase 2 interviews

Potential competence as independent researcher
- Knowledge about own research field
- Insight in project approach and positioning
- Reasoning skills and critical scientific mindset
- Motivation

Phase 1 + 2

Scientific quality, relevance and challenge, originality
- Originality / contribution state-of-the-art
- Risks and challenges

Quality research approach, feasibility
- Methodology
- Feasibility, risk mitigation

Weighted total score (both phases)

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50% 50%
### Evaluation criteria: “candidate” “project” ”application potential”

#### Phase 1 preselection

**Study results (academic education record)**
- Position in study group (percentile)
- Other equivalent evidence of ‘standing out’

**Motivation & relevant competences**
- Motivation / research interest
- Activities, skills, experiences
- Scientific background / competences

#### Phase 2 interviews

**Potential competence as independent researcher**
- Knowledge about own research field
- Insight in project approach and positioning
- Reasoning skills and critical scientific mindset
- Motivation

**Potential competence as strategically thinking and innovation oriented researcher**
- Insight in strategic importance & positioning project
- Notions of economic landscape (IPR, players, innovations)

#### Phase 1 + 2

**Scientific quality, relevance and challenge, originality**
- Originality / contribution state-of-the-art
- Risks and challenges

**Quality research approach, feasibility**
- Methodology
- Feasibility, risk mitigation

#### Weighted total score (both phases)

- Strategic importance research approach (relevance)
- Strategic importance for possible users (impact)

- **50%**
- **30%**
- **20%**
PhD fellowships distribution per panel

Available fellowships -> panels
90% -> proportional distribution over panels (~ #candidates in panel)
    (quota per panel)
10% -> assigned to ‘best remaining candidates’
    (‘wild cards’ ranked over all panels)

Phase 1 – preselection
• (quota x 2) best ranked candidates invited to interview
  • ‘Invited’ means ≥50% grant probability

Phase 2 – interviews
• (quota) best ranked candidates in panel with score ≥4 for Candidate and Project
  (SB: also ≥2 for Appl. Potential)
• ‘best remaining candidates’: ranked over all panels
  -> assignment of remaining 10% fellowships
  -> INBO / Meise Botanic Garden fellowship
  -> reserve list: in case of withdrawal appointed fellowship
    • bridging fellowships university (BOF, ...)

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Feedback to candidates

- Feedback AFTER preselection/selection decision (≥ July 2022)
  - Compiled by panel member
  - Including comments based on panel consensus decision and scores
  - Template per criterion (Candidate, Project, Application potential)
    - “Strengths”
    - “Weaknesses”
    - “Comments and suggestions for improvement”
    - (“Interview”)
- No further correspondence on feedback
- Do NOT contact panel members!

Out in step 1
- ≥ July 2022
- Scores preselection
- Panel comments

Out in step 2
- ≥ October 2022
- Scores interview
- Synthesis panel comments step 1 & 2

Grant
- ≥ October 2022
- Scores interview
- Synthesis panel comments step 1 & 2
Timing PhD Fellowships Call 2022

Submission
Mar 1, 2022

Eligibility
Mar 2022

Preselection
June 13, 2022

Feedback in-preselection
July 1, 2022

Decision Board
Oct 7, 2022

Feedback & contract

Start fellowship
Nov 1, 2022

Dates interviews published early 2022
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Preparing your application – e-portal

E-portal/E-loket ([www.fwo.be](http://www.fwo.be)) *(register in time!)* -> FWO Validation /48hrs

Direct access: [https://fwoweb.fwo.be](https://fwoweb.fwo.be)

**your application:**
- personalia
- actual PhD fellowship application
Preparing your application – personal details
Some hints in filling in form

- General:
  - National registration number
  - Also non-Belgian applicants with Belgian ID card

- Diplomas
  - Correct, complete & up to date!
  - **Upload** academic diplomas + ‘supplement’ (scores)
  - (Acad.) bachelor & master (+adv. master)
    - *Master future date (<1 Nov 2022): “Stud. Master” + provisional date*
      - **Upload 1st master year results**

- Posts / Career (functies)
  - Correct, complete & up to date
  - E.g. PhD student, teaching assistant, project manager, ...

- Disciplines
  - **Use level 4**

- Publications
  - Complete list as on Mar 1, 2022 (Published or *accepted for publication*)
  - **Published or accepted for publication**
  - *Categories A.1.1 & A.1.2 merged to A.1*
Preparing your application – personal details
Checklist before starting new application

General
- Gender
- Place of birth
- Nationality
- ORCID iD (Open Researcher and Contributor ID) - https://orcid.org/

Diplomas

Addresses
- Legal domicile address (in Belgium or abroad)
  - Non-Belgian domicile in EU: add TIN code (tax identification number)
- (Future) ‘Belgian’ service address

no access to new application before these 7 items are completed…

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Info session PhD fellowships 2022
Application form: general

- **Title of your research proposal** *(EN - NL)*
- **Abstract** *(EN - NL)*
- **≤ 5 scientific disciplines fitting proposed research. -> Personalia**
- **≤ 3 free-text keywords or concepts**
- **SB: Position your proposal in terms of economic finality**
  - **Companies**
  - **Sectors**
  - **Transition areas**
    - **Socio-economic benefits** In line with 2025 Flemish transition priorities NL – EN
    - Picklist Transition Areas -> Priorities
    - E.g. “Health and Wellbeing” -> “Disorders of the brain”
    - E.g. “New Energy Demand and Delivery” -> “Technologies for energy grids”
Application form: personal data

- Explain any career breaks

- STUDY RESULTS (ACADEMIC EDUCATION)
  - Study results positioning by percentile
  - Study results narrative

- MOTIVATION AND COMPETENCES
  - Motivation statement
  - Scientific activities, experiences and achievements
  - Past mobility (research stays)
  - Mobility plans: research stays in another organization
    Concrete invitations may be uploaded (tab PROJECT)
  - Scientific awards
**Study results (academic education)**

- **Percentile** (or rank in study group)
  - More info on webpage [NL - EN](#)
  - e-Application form + *signed (cand.+prom.) form*
  - Relevant master study result (global percentage)
    - In final master year: refer to *bachelor* diploma
    - NOT an ‘advanced master’ (ManaMa)
  - Find percentile score tables Flemish university (*in e-portal application form*)
  - Non-Flemish diploma — contact the institute

- **Positioning your results**: ‘*study results narrative*’
  - Clarify study result /percentile
  - Other evidence of *distinguishing yourself / standing out* during studies
    - Master thesis, dedicated courses’ marks and grades,
    - Other studies (advanced master (manama), specific courses, ...)
    - If in last master year: 1st master year results
## How to... percentiles

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### Karel: MSc 2021 with 72.08%
- - - > P60 (89 students)  - - > top 40% of study group

### Tess: MSc 2020 with 74.93%
- - - > P85 (92 students)  - - > top 15% of study group

### Shari: MSc 2022
- - > BSc 2020 with 78.65%
- - - > P95 (158 students)  - - > top 5% of study group

A/ Your study result ≠ percentile value -> Look for the highest percentile value that is < your study result.

B/ Your study result = one or more percentile values  -> Look for the lowest percentile value that = your study result.

(e.g. 69.00% -> P75)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P70</th>
<th>P75</th>
<th>P80</th>
<th>P85</th>
<th>P90</th>
<th>P95</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>67.00</td>
<td>69.00</td>
<td>69.00</td>
<td>70.00</td>
<td>72.00</td>
<td>78.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beware of percentiles in small (<25-30) study groups!! (use aggregated academic years or other info)
Motivation and competences

- **Motivation statement**
  - Personal motivation, research interests
  - Scientific background and competences to start PhD research
    - Master thesis, start as (PhD) researcher, ...
  - Skills built up & to be (further) acquired
    - e.g. experimental skills, presentation or writing skills, commitment/perseverance, ...

- **Scientific activities, experiences and achievements**
  - ‘first steps’ as (potential) scientist (past / planned)
    - Master thesis, start as (PhD) researcher, ... -> describe goal, activities, (intermediate) results, ...
  - (If applicable) publications/other output (data, software, prototypes, ...) , awards, ...
  - Past/planned experiences, e.g. training, internships, presentations, collaborations, mobility, ...
  - **SB:** contacts, internships/research stays in industrial R&D, (development of) entrepreneurial and innovation skills, ...

December 2021

Info session PhD fellowships 2022
Application form: host institution - promotor

- **Main Flemish host institution**
  - Main promotor
  - *Optional co-promotor(s)*

- **Additional host institution: Flemish or Federal scientific institution(s)**
  - = collaboration/research location
  - *Pick list*
  - *Co-promotor(s)*

- **Other organization(s) / co-promotor(s)**

- **Do not add recommendation letters!**
  - *FWO will invite main promotor only to provide recommendation*
  - *Co-promotors will be notified by FWO*
Application form: project

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project description – \textit{WORD template} \(\leq 10\) \textit{pages} (\textit{SB}: 12 pages)

- \textit{Improvements w.r.t. 1st application}
- Rationale and positioning w.r.t. the state-of-the-art
- Scientific research objective(s)
- Research methodology and work plan
- \textit{SB: strategic dimension and application potential}
- \textit{references}

OTHER FUNDING

PROJECT POSITIONING AND EMBEDDING

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

OTHER FUNDING
• proposal content submitted before AND funded or funding decision still pending?
  potential overlap, complementarity, added value...
  Update FWO on pending evaluations!
• Be open and transparent!

PROJECT POSITIONING AND EMBEDDING
• Fit into the research activities of the host institution(s)
  • Position your previous/current research
• Position the project in a national and international context
• Gender and diversity issues
• Work with societal actors

RRI: responsible research and innovation

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION
• Communication of results to a non-expert audience
INTERNAL PEER REVIEW

Scientific field -> dedicated panel (fund. research)
- Interdisciplinary panel (NOT SB): specify at least 2 scientific fields
  - Only if combination of domains (e.g. Med and WT)
  - follow acceptance criteria decision tree

Specify the expert panel (SB)
- scope on research methodology (not application field)
  - Exc.: SB Frank De Winne (SBFDW): scope on applications space economy
  - Finetuned scope SBWT5A (data science)

Motivate your choice of expert panel
- Avoid out of scope (= project score 0)
Application form: ethics / DMP / Consent

**ETHICS**
- Research Foundation - Flanders - Research ethics (fwo.be)
- fwo-manual-ethics-checklist.pdf
- ! Non-human primates -> ethical approval by March 1, 2022

**DATA MANAGEMENT P...**
- Research Foundation - Flanders - Data Management Plan (fwo.be)

**CONSENT**
- DECLARATION BY THE APPLICANT
- General (including GDPR)
  Declaration that all personal data info is accurate and up-to-date.
- Research Integrity
  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

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Application form: submit

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Info session PhD fellowships 2022

≤ March 1 2022 – 5:00 pm CET

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

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

• Programme webpages
  • Fundamental Research  NL - EN
  • Strategic Basic Research  NL - EN

• Regulations (legal version: Dutch)
  • General / PhD programme / bench fee / peer review

• Supporting documents
  • This presentation / Screenshots e-application
  • Percentiles info
  • Scoring grids (preselection – interview )
  • Guidelines interview (updated later – depending on ‘physical’ vs. online format)

• Help! Who to contact
  • Additional info & specific questions
    • FWO file administrators per scientific domain (or SB)
    • Dirk Otte, programme manager fellowships
  • FWOhelpdesk@fwo.be
    • (e-portal/IT problems only)
Thank you for your attention

...keep safe and good luck!