

HR Strategy FWO 2010-2014

Self-evaluation 2013

As explained in the original HR strategy document, approved by the Commission at the end of 2010, most actions revolving around the HR strategy are framed within the context of the Policy Plan 2012 – 2016 adopted by FWO. This self-evaluation will therefore essentially take the form of a progress report on some of the most important action points contained in this policy plan. For each point, we will sketch the main accomplishments, and point out in what way further progress can be made.

1. Internal selection procedures

Following the establishment of a new panel structure in 2010, a large survey among panel members and researchers was held in 2012. It was found that there is a high degree of satisfaction regarding the way FWO runs its peer review procedures. It turns out, however, that FWO should see to the high workload for panel members, the composition of several panels in terms of coverage of scientific sub-disciplines and subfields, potential conflict of interest concerning panel members and an improvement of the procedure on feedback to applicants.

To improve on the issue of conflicts of interest within FWO Expert panels the rules in the Regulations on Internal and External Peer Review have been further specified already. We are also working on a system with alternating panels, where only the members who have not submitted a proposal in the current call are actually reviewing. Members who did submit a proposal are left out during that round.

2. The external peer review system

As explained in the HR strategy, the most important recent change involved a more objective selection of remote referees. The list of ten potential names listed by the candidate is controlled against a set of rules to ensure absence of conflict of interest.

The rules and the check of their application have been further refined in order to maximally ensure a fair and unbiased evaluation process. If the FWO administration believes to have found a violation on the eligibility of referees proposed by the applicant, the latter is given the opportunity to clarify whether this presumption is correct or a misunderstanding. In doubtful cases, the chairs of the panels belonging to the scientific domain of the research proposal involved are consulted. The final decision on the eligibility of applications with violations is taken by the Board; notice of appeal can be given to the Board of Trustees.

3. Open recruitment

FWO has progressively opened its funding schemes to researchers from anywhere in the world. In 2012, almost 14% of the FWO PhD fellows and more than 18% of its postdoctoral fellows came from abroad. Compared to 2010, this is a substantial increase, for then the percentage for both types of fellowships was about 11%.

This policy to encourage foreign researchers to come to Flanders culminated in the Pegasus programme for incoming postdoctoral fellowships, launched in 2012. The formerly existing Visiting Postdoctoral Fellowships were integrated in the so-called 'Pegasus short' fellowships and are completely open to researchers of all nationalities.

The Pegasus programme, of which the last calls will be held in 2014, is currently being evaluated internally and might be extended by FWO in case of a positive outcome. Its complementarity with existing FWO funding schemes will be more clearly defined.

The Charter and Code for researchers is not only implemented by FWO for its own fellowships, but also declared mandatory for the recruitment of researchers by universities and other scientific institutions in the framework of FWO research projects.

4. Mobility

Mobility of researchers is considered to be an essential part of the internationalization strategy of FWO. A green paper is currently being adopted on how FWO can strengthen its international portfolio and create the best opportunities for its researchers to be internationally mobile and join international networks through initiatives such as ERA-NET and Joint Programming Initiatives.

5. Increasing Success rates

At the time when the HR strategy was written, there was an ever increasing application pressure on FWO funding schemes, not matched by an increase in budget. Modest measures have been taken since then to reduce pressure on the application side, and the budget was somewhat increased. While the success rates are not yet at the optimal level of 30%, there is now an average success rate across the main funding schemes of more than 20%.

6. Gender

FWO not only applies family friendly measures (such as extension of fellowships for pregnancies and parental leave), but also sees to it that Expert panels are not composed of more than 2/3 of members of the same sex.

FWO is also involved in various gender working groups and platforms (such as European Gender Summit, BeWise, Working Group on Gender and Diversity of Science Europe) to follow up this issue and other related issues at an international level.