

Regulations FWO - Internal and External Peer Review

Valid for calls that open until June 2018

Art. 1.

For the evaluation of research applications and applications for research infrastructure, the FWO relies on both internal and external peer reviews. As stipulated in article 17 of the FWO statutes, the Foundation's Board of Trustees may call upon the advice of scientific committees. The deliberations of these expert panels/commissions/juries are considered as internal peer reviews. With regard to applications for postdoctoral fellowships (including applications falling under the Pegasus program), senior clinical investigators, fundamental research projects, SBO projects, TBM projects (where appropriate), the Odysseus program, the Big Science program and various scientific awards, the advice of the reviewers is submitted to the scientific commissions for the purpose of further refining their evaluation. The evaluations of these reviewers are considered as external peer reviews.

Chapter I – Internal Peer Review

[Paragraph 1: Channels for Fundamental Research and Mobility](#)

Art. 2.

§ 1. There are 30 ordinary scientific committees, also called Expert panels, and 1 interdisciplinary panel. The ordinary Expertpanels are each composed of sixteen members that are associated with either a university or a scientific research institute, and who are appointed by the Board of Trustees. Amongst these sixteen members, seven belong to an institution operating within the Flemish Community or are entered into the Dutch-language register of a federal institute [\[1\]](#).

The other members may not have been affiliated during the last 3 years to an institution of the Flemish Community (by way of a professional appointment, guest professorship or as a voluntary collaborator). This rule only applies to newly appointed members, starting from the call of 2013.

§ 2. The mandates are assigned on a personal basis and are non-transferable. The mandates of the members appointed at an institution operating within the Flemish Community or entered into the Dutch-language register of a federal institute are for a 3 year term and are renewable once, with the exception of the provisions included in article 5. The mandates of the non-Flemish members are for a 3 year term and are renewable twice.

§3. For the entire duration of their mandates, the principle applies that the experts need to be engaged at a university or a scientific research institute for at least 50% of their time. The Board of Trustees may allow deviations from this condition for reasons of scientific expertise.

§ 4. No more than 2/3 of the members may be of the same gender.

§ 5. Any expert may only be a member of one single discipline-specific expert panel.

§ 6. Experts that have failed to attend two consecutive panel meetings without submitting their scientific advices, may be dismissed from the expert panel.

§7. In principle, the membership of an expert panel is incompatible with other activities that are assumed to be very time-consuming for a member of the academic staff and as stipulated in the Decree of the Flemish Government of May 5, 1993. Membership of a FWO Expert panel is also incompatible with the functions of rector, vice-rector or director/person responsible for research policy.

Emeriti can now sit in an expert panel. They still must be actively involved in the research.

[1] Exceptions are the expert panels Cult2, Cult3, G&M2, G&M3, G&M4, Med5, Med8, W&T7 and W&T8. These panels are composed of 18 members, 8 of them appointed of an institution belonging to the Flemish Community or to the Dutch-language register of a Federal institution.

Art. 3.

§1. The interdisciplinary Expert panel is composed of 11 permanent experts, appointed in accordance with the same procedure as used for the ordinary panels. All other stipulations in the present regulation shall likewise be applicable to these permanent members.

§2. The permanent experts of the interdisciplinary panel are supplemented by another 11 alternate experts which will be individually designated for each separate meeting by the permanent members in function of the dossiers that need to be evaluated. These alternate experts must be members of a discipline-specific Expert panel.

§3. An expert may at the same time be member of an ordinary Expert panel and a permanent member of the interdisciplinary panel.

Art. 4.

§1 At the end of a member's mandate, the Board of Trustees shall appoint his or her successor on proposal of the Member Committee.

§2. The Member Committee that provides advice to the Board of Trustees with regard to the appointment of members of the Expertpanels is composed of members who, at the time of their own appointment, were member of the university research councils. Their mandate is of a three-year duration. The Member Committee is composed as follows: one member representing the exact and applied sciences; one member for the bio-medical sciences, and one member for the language, cultural and behavioral sciences. This committee must also comply with the provisions as set forth in art. 2, § 4.

§3. To fill any vacancies in the expert panels, a public call for candidate experts shall be issued at least three months prior to the commencement of the mandate in the committee, both domestically and abroad. The Expertpanels involved shall be consulted with regard to the required expertise profile.

§4. The Member Committee and the Expertise Centre for R&D Monitoring (ECOOM) shall conduct scientific screening of the candidate experts. The Member Committee subsequently will formulate a proposal for the appointment of new panel members by the Board of Trustees. For this, the following selection procedures are followed:

1. The candidates must belong to at least the top 40% of their discipline in Belgium; the same level is required for experts coming from abroad.
2. A very important aspect of the appointment process of new members is the implementation of a gender rule, on the basis of which no more than 2/3^{rds} of the members of an expert panel may be of the same gender.
3. The Flemish members of the expert panels must adequately mirror the high-level expertise available in Flanders. As a rule, a panel should be made up of experts from all Flemish universities, to the extent that these universities are scientifically active within the scope of the panel concerned.
4. The composition of the panels must guarantee maximum coverage of the study area concerned, thanks to the expertise of all members. The expertise of any new members must be of a supplementary nature, rather than simply duplicating the expertise that is already present in any given expert panel.

§5. To fill the vacancies of members with a non-Flemish affiliation, the expert panels shall, in parallel, also submit three possible names in order to ensure that enough candidates are available. Foreign members need not be associated with a university and will be selected solely on the basis of their scientific competence.

§6. Persons that already have been a member of an Expert panel in the past cannot resubmit their candidacy until at least three years following the termination of their previously held mandate.

§7. A renewal cannot be assigned to a member who, during his/her previous mandate, has attended less than half of the meetings. The Board of Trustees shall consult the Expertpanel concerned with regard to any mandate extensions.

Art. 5.

The Flemish member with the longest service in an Expert panel will act as Chair of this panel. The Flemish member with the second longest service from another university than the Chair, will act as Vice Chair of the panel. If the mandates of both members were to end simultaneously, the Vice Chair will be invited to sit on the panel for one more year and to act as Chair. If the Vice Chair cannot accept this invitation, the Chair will be invited to continue to act as Chair for one more year.

Mandates can end simultaneously for maximum one-third of the Flemish members.

If, within one panel, more than one-third of the members with a Flemish affiliation were to leave simultaneously, the member with the shortest panel service of this group will be invited to extend their membership by one year, and so forth until again maximum one-third of the members have to be renewed.

Art. 6.

The Expert panels will give their advice according to the consensus principle. When no consensus can be reached, the panel will proceed to a vote; in the case of equality of votes, the Chair shall the deciding vote.

Art. 7.

The Chair of the Board of Trustees may attend the meetings of the panels.

Art. 8.

§ 1. The 30 + 1 Expertpanels are:

In the area of Biological Sciences

- [Bio1: Molecular and Cellular Biology](#)
- [Bio2: Functional Biology](#)
- [Bio3: Biodiversity and Ecology](#)
- [Bio4: Applied Biological Sciences](#)

In the area of Humanities

- [Cult1: Languages](#)
- [Cult2: Art, Art History and Literature](#)
- [Cult3: History and Archeology](#)
- [Cult4: Theology and Religion Sciences](#)
- [Cult5: Philosophy and Ethics](#)

In the area of Social Sciences

- [G&M1: Sciences of Law and Criminology](#)
- [G&M2: Economics, Business Economics and Management](#)
- [G&M3: Psychology, Pedagogy, Didactics and Social Work](#)
- [G&M4: Social, Political and Communication Sciences](#)

In the area of Medical Sciences

- [Med1: Pharmaceutical Sciences and Medical Biochemistry](#)
- [Med2: Genetics, Functional Genome Research, Bio-informatics Science, Developmental Biology](#)
- [Med3: Microbiology and Immunology](#)
- [Med4: Cancer Research](#)
- [Med5: Neuroscience, Clinical Neurology, Psychiatry, Musculoskeletal Research, Rheumatology, Orthopedics and Dermatology](#)
- [Med6: Cardiovascular System, Respiratory System, Nephrology, Hematology](#)
- [Med7: Gastroenterology, Hepatology, Endocrinology, Metabolism and Nutrition, Reproduction, Urogenital System](#)
- [Med8: Health Sciences](#)

In the area of Science and Technology

- [W&T1: Mathematical Sciences](#)
- [W&T2: Physics](#)
- [W&T3: Condensed Matter and Physical Chemistry](#)
- [W&T4: Chemistry](#)
- [W&T5: Informatics and Knowledge Technology](#)
- [W&T6: Chemical Engineering, Material Sciences](#)
- [W&T7: Energy, Electrical Engineering, Electronics and Mechanics](#)
- [W&T8: Sciences of the Earth and Space](#)
- [W&T9: Science and Technology of Construction and the Built Environment](#)

Interdisciplinary

- [Interdisciplinary Expertpanel](#)

Art.9.

§1. The Board of Trustees may call upon the International Collaboration Committee (CIWC) for advice on its evaluation of applications for the funding of scientific contacts and coordination.

§2. This commission is multidisciplinary and is composed of members who are, or have been, members of a scientific commission/Expert panel for at least three years.

§3. The term of the mandates shall be two years, with the possibility of two renewals extensions. In principle, every two years, one third of the members with the highest anciennity are replaced. Emeriti can now sit in the International Collaboration Committee (CIWC). They still must be actively involved in the research.

§4. Members who are absent more than three times in the course of a given year will be replaced in the next year.

Art.10.

For specific cases, the Board of Trustees may seek assistance from a 'ad hoc' commission composed of experts who are competent in the matters concerned.

Art.11.

§1. The Board of Trustees may call upon the Panel for International Cooperation ('CIS') for its evaluation of international cooperation projects. To this commission, applications for funding of international cooperation projects or consortia will be submitted which surpass the scope of individual exchange. This is, amongst others, the case for applications involving the following funding channels:

- Bilateral research cooperation
- International coordination action

- Pegasus Marie-Curie fellowships

The exchange agreements, the individual travel and stay allowances, and participation in ERA-NET fall under the competence of the International Collaboration Committee (CIWC).

§2 This commission is made up of sixteen members, 9 of which are not associated to a Flemish university or research institute; at the time of composition of this commission, the following indicative distribution key is applied:

5 members from the Biomedical Sciences

5 members from the area of Science & Technology

3 members from the Behavioral and Social Sciences

3 members from the Humanities

For the areas counting 5 members, the principle applies that a minimum of two members should, and a minimum of two members should not, be affiliated to a Flemish research institute or belong to the Dutch-language register of a federal research institute. For the areas that may supply 3 members, the principle applies that at least 1 member should, and at least 1 member should not, be affiliated to a Flemish research institute or belong to the Dutch-language register of a federal research institute.

§3 Membership of the CIS may be combined with the membership of a regular Expert panel.

§4 The procedure for submitting an application as a candidate (with the exception of scientific screening by ECOOM – cfr. supra art. 4 §4), as well as the provisions with regard to the term of appointment, the functioning of the commission and the code of conduct are identical to those applicable to the regular Expert panel.

[Paragraph 2: Channels for Strategic Basic Research and Applied Biomedical Research](#)

[Art. 12.](#)

§1. The Decision of the Flemish Government on doctoral (PhD) grants for strategic basic research (*) stipulates that expert panels shall advise the FWO Board of Trustees on deciding on any grant application. The Board of Trustees is authorised to determine the number, the composition and the operation of these panels. These panels (SB expert panels) will be formed ad hoc after each call in relation to the dossiers to be evaluated.

(*) 29 MAY 2009 - Decision of the Flemish Government regulating the award of doctoral (PhD) grants for the implementation of strategic basic research projects.

§2. At least one-third of the total number of members of the SB expert panels are directly involved in research and development in an industrial context, and at least one-third of the number of members are affiliated with a higher education institution or research centre.

§3. For the 2016 call, the goal is for at least one-third of the total number of members to be neither affiliated to a Flemish research institution, nor to belong to the Dutch-speaking staff of a federal research institution or to a Flemish establishment of a company.

§4. No more than two thirds of the total number of members may be of the same gender.

§5. Any expert may only be a member of one SB expert panel per call. For new calls, the Board of Trustees ensures the regular renewal of the panels.

§6. Each SB expert panel consists of 5 or 6 members. At least one expert is directly involved in research and development in an industrial context.

§7. Each SB Expert panel evaluates 12 to 16 candidates (reference values). During the session, the candidates take an oral examination. The examination is conducted in English.

§8. The Expertpanels will give their advice according to the consensus principle.

§9. Each SB Expert panel is overseen by a representative of the FWO, who, as moderator, also acts as session chair. He/she may be an FWO policy officer or an adviser of the Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (**).

(**) 25 January 2016 Protocol on cooperation between the FWO and the Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

Art. 13.

§1. The Decision of the Flemish Government on strategic basic research (Decree of the Flemish Government establishing a financing channel for strategic basic research in Flanders; 3 Oct. 2003; 12 Dec. 2008; 18 Dec. 2015.) stipulates that expert panels shall advise the FWO Board of Trustees on its support decisions on all project proposals. The expert panels may obtain the written advice of experts. In addition, the Board of Trustees may appoint steering commissions of external experts for both finality parts, which shall draw up a final ranking and selection proposal based on the results of the individual expert panels. The Board of Trustees is authorised to determine the number, the composition and the operation of these expert panels.

§2. The internal peer review of the SBO project proposal occurs via a two-stage process by i) SBO expert panels and ii) steering commissions respectively.

§3 A single thematic SBO expert panel may treat project applications from both SBO programme parts (economic and social) within broadly defined scientific disciplines.

§3.1. The SBO expert panels are made up of academic experts with a translational/applied background, supplemented with experts with an industrial/social background. Active experts shall have a senior scientific/business and/or socio-economic background and a mainly

generalist profile. For panels addressing dossiers with both an economic and a social finality, this dual finality shall be taken into account in the panel composition.

The SBO expert panels formulate a written advice to the SBO steering commissions (§4), based on the project proposal, the external peer reviews and the reply of the applicant. This advice consists of the consensus scores established for the various evaluation criteria in the SBO decree, and the qualitative substantiation of these scores.

§3.2. To achieve a sound balance between acquired expertise, continuity and innovation, semi-permanent panels are used: these panels are made up of a core panel, which is appointed for 3 years (renewable once for 3 years), supplemented with members that are selected ad hoc based on the correspondence between the submitted subjects and the available expertise. The SBO expert panels shall not contain members of staff from Flemish research centres. This also applies to persons having occupied an active or advisory role at Flemish research centres less than 3 years ago. No more than two-thirds of the members of an SBO expert panel may be of the same gender. The scientific topics, composition and/or number of members of these panels may be revised annually by the FWO on the basis of the number of submissions, trends in the subjects of the project proposals, evaluation of the panel meetings and/or necessary expertise for the proper operation of the SBO expert panels. Proposals for revision must be submitted to the FWO Board of Trustees for approval.

§3.3. The SBO steering commissions (see §4), assisted by the FWO administration, shall, where appropriate in joint consultation (cf. panels dealing with both finalities), formulate proposals for the composition of these thematic SBO expert panels. The panel members are appointed as members of a thematic SBO expert panel through ratification by the Board of Trustees.

§3.4. The research themes of the various panels will be announced when the SBO call is launched. Based on the scientific field in which their project proposal is situated, applicants must specify the SBO expert panel that should handle their dossier. The scientific theme will determine this choice. Depending on the number of applications received per scientific theme, the FWO reserves the right to split up themes into several panels or to merge expertise panels if not enough applications for a particular theme have been submitted. Where deemed appropriate for proper assessment and subject to approval by the applicant of the relevant project proposal, the FWO may have the application handled by another panel.

§4 Two steering commissions (one commission for each finality part: SBO-E and SBO-M) are involved. With delegation of authority from the Board of Trustees, these commissions shall ensure 1) the appointment of (inter)national evaluators for the external peer review; 2) the formulation of advice on the composition of the thematic SBO expert panels (cf. §3.4.) and 3) the formulation of advice on the final ranking and selection based on the results of the individual thematic SBO expert panels. The activities of each of these commissions comprise the assessment, modification and/or ratification of the evaluation reports and scores of the individual SBO expert panels. The deliberation leads to a written advice to the Board of Trustees and feedback to the applicants.

This advice consists of two parts, one being an overview of the applications that are considered to be supportable and those that are not, the other being a ranking based on excellence across the two assessment dimensions (scientific and utilisation). Based on the

advice of the steering commissions and the available budget, the Board of Trustees shall subsequently decide on the SBO support.

§4.1. The SBO steering commission is made up of experts with an academic or non-academic background, representing different scientific and socio-economic research areas. The commission members are selected so that the relevant commission as a whole possesses the necessary expertise in a broad range of social and/or economic applications of innovative products, processes and services, scientific research and/or policy. To ensure maximum complementarity with the SBO expert panels, the members must in particular be skilled in the evaluation of the utility prospects of the project proposals: potential uses of the results in the longer term and subject to further research by economic, social, or governmental actors. Here, too, the aim is to ensure that maximum two-thirds of the members are of the same gender.

§4.2. The independent functioning of the steering commissions must also be ensured. This implies that members of Flemish research centres cannot sit on the commissions. Similarly, membership is not possible for persons having occupied an active or advisory role at Flemish research centres less than 3 years ago.

§4.3. For the SBO-M commission, for the purpose of evaluating the social context of the social valorisation/utilisation in Flanders, half of the commission members are recruited from Belgium and/or the Netherlands.

§4.4. The members of the steering commission are appointed for 3 years, which term may be extended once by 3 years.

§4.5. The FWO Board of Trustees shall decide on the composition of the steering commission for each of both finality parts.

Art. 14.

§1. The Decree of the Flemish Government on applied biomedical research with a primary social finality (*) stipulates that expert panels shall advise the FWO Board of Trustees on its decisions regarding all project applications. The Board of Trustees is authorised to determine the number, the composition and the operation of these expert panels. These panels (TBM expert panels) will be formed ad hoc after each call in relation to the dossiers to be evaluated.

(*) 15 SEPTEMBER 2006 - Decree of the Flemish Government for the funding of applied biomedical research with a primary social finality.

§2. TBM expert panels shall be called upon for the evaluation of TBM project proposals. The Board of Trustees shall compose the TBM expert panels. Based on the evaluation criteria defined in the TBM decree, the TBM expert panels shall formulate a substantiated advice.

§2.1. The TBM expert panels are formed ad hoc from a pool of experts for each call. To this end, the FWO shall maintain a sufficiently large pool of TBM experts (80 or so) including the following profiles: representatives of the major clinical expertises (several per expertise area), research methodologists and statisticians, health economists, experts capable of judging the potential industrial interest in the project outcomes. For any missing expertises, additional experts can be sought. The aim is to ensure that maximum two-thirds of the members are of the same gender.

§2.2. The TBM expert pool shall be renewed on a regular basis. Experts who have participated in a TBM expert panel for 3 to 4 years shall be replaced by new experts, so that experience with the program and the selection procedure is combined with new insights and expertise.

§2.3. The composition of the TBM expert pool may be reviewed annually on the basis of an evaluation of the panel meetings and the necessary expertise for the proper operation of the TBM expert panels. Proposals for review of the TBM expert pool shall be submitted for approval by the FWO Board of Trustees.

Paragraph 3: Research infrastructure

Art. 15.

§1. Research infrastructure comprises all facilities and sources that promote the performance of frontier and strategic basic research across all scientific disciplines. This includes, in addition to scientific infrastructure, collections, natural habitats, corpora and databases (including digital access to the data).

§2. Large-scale research infrastructure covers investment initiatives in excess of 1 million euros.

Art. 16.

§1. The Science commission is composed of at least six effective and six substitute members who are an international authority in their respective research areas and whose views extend beyond the (sub-)discipline(s) in which they are active. The composition of the commission covers all fields of science. At least one effective and one substitute member shall be recruited from the industrial sector. The commission shall also possess expertise in science and innovation policy and in the management of large research facilities. No more than one-third of the members shall be active in Belgium at the time of composition of the commission.

The members of this commission shall be appointed by the Board of Trustees for a renewable term of six years. The Board of Trustees shall appoint a Chair and a substitute Chair from amongst the members.

§2. The Science commission shall evaluate the scientific quality of the applications and rank the applications judged as excellent on the basis of the following selection criteria:

1° Scientific quality and relevance of the research programme to be implemented using the research infrastructure;

2° Importance of the research infrastructure for research within the relevant scientific discipline;

3° Innovative character of the research programme to be implemented using the research infrastructure;

4° Extent to which the research infrastructure as a logistics hub is capable of generating a wide range of new projects;

- 5° Technologically innovative character of the research infrastructure;
- 6° In case the research infrastructure has to be constructed: technical feasibility of the research infrastructure;
- 7° Quality and competence of the research group(s) involved, scientific position of the relevant research group(s) in an international context, and its/their involvement in the policy of international research infrastructures;
- 8° Extent to which the proposal fits in with the strategic research policy of the institution(s) concerned;
- 9° Extent to which the investment in the research infrastructure contributes to the strengthening of the Flemish or regional position in the research field in question;
- 10° Extent to which the proposal is aligned with both domestic and foreign initiatives and infrastructures within the research field in question;
- 11° Accessibility of the research infrastructure for researchers external to the host institution, and quality of the access procedure.

§3. The activities of the Science commission result in a written advice to the Board of Trustees. This advice consists of two parts, one being an overview of the applications that are considered to be excellent and those that are not, and the other being a ranking of the excellent applications.

The Science commission shall justify its advice to the Board of Trustees. This justification shall at least include the reasons why a given application is or is not considered to be excellent and why it ranked the excellent applications the way it did. The justification must be factual and adequate. This means that it must substantiate its advice by, amongst others, citing material elements from the application dossier, by taking into account the review reports from reviewers, the written reactions from the applicants to the anonymised review reports, any additional information provided by the applicants, and the progress and outcome of the hearings, by referring to specialised and relevant information of which it is aware, or by using generally known facts. It shall link these justification elements to the specified selection criteria.

§4. The Chair has the following tasks:

- Chair the meetings of the Science commission;
- Set the date and agenda of the meetings, in consultation with the secretary;
- Delegate preparatory and administrative tasks to the secretary.

The secretariat is staffed by one of the FWO staff members, called the secretary.

The secretary has the following tasks:

- Provide the members of the Science commission, the members of the Board of Trustees and any third-party organisations with which the FWO has concluded an agreement, with the electronic version of the application dossiers for the purpose of proposing potential reviewers;
- Provide the members of the Science commission with the application dossiers, reference reports, reactions from the applications to the anonymised evaluation reports and any additional information to be provided by the applicants to the Science commission prior to the hearing;
- Send out invitations for the meetings, on behalf of the Chair, and all other documents to both the effective and the substitute members;
- Practical organisation of the hearings, in consultation with the Chair;
- Send out invitations for the hearings to the supervisors-spokespersons of the applicants;
- Prepare minutes of the meetings and hearings and draft advices under the supervision of the Chair;
- Perform the tasks assigned ad hoc to him/her by the Science commission.

Art. 17.

§1. The Invest commission consists of one effective member and one substitute member nominated by the Department of Economy, Science & Innovation, the Flanders Participation Company and the FWO respectively. Neither members of the FWO Board of Trustees nor FWO staff can sit on the Invest commission.

The members of this commission shall be appointed by the Board of Trustees for a renewable term of six years. The Board of Trustees shall appoint a Chair and a substitute Chair from amongst the members.

§2. The Invest commission must verify whether the investment plans being part of the applications judged to be excellent by the Science commission, are sufficiently realistic and objective. In addition, it shall examine whether any needs or opportunities can be identified in the area of cross-institutional or cross-association cooperation or cooperation with research centres, scientific institutions, or companies.

To this end, the investment plans shall include at least the following elements:

- Description of the targeted investment;
- Description of the way in which the infrastructure is to be achieved;
- Detailed utilisation plan;
- Description of the quality of the infrastructure in which the research infrastructure will be housed, if applicable;
- Estimate of financial, human and material costs;

- Conclusive budget.

If deemed necessary as part of its tasks, the Invest commission may request the applicants to provide additional information either in writing or via an interview.

§3. The activities of the Invest commission result in a written advice to the Board of Trustees. This advice consists of a sub-advice per application dossier of which the investment dossier has been evaluated by the Invest commission. This sub-advice shall contain on the one hand any comments made by the commission with regard to the realistic and objective character of the relevant investment plan, and on the other hand any suggestions it has made with regard to the needs or opportunities in the area of cooperation.

The Invest commission shall justify its advice to the Board of Trustees. This justification shall at least include the reasons why, in relation to specific investment plans, it has formulated comments regarding the realistic and objective character, and why, in relation to specific application dossiers, it has made suggestions regarding the needs and opportunities in the area of cooperation. The justification must be factual and adequate. This means that it shall substantiate its advice by, amongst others, citing material elements from the application dossier, by referring to specialised and relevant information of which it is aware, or by using generally known facts.

§4. The Chair has the following tasks:

- Chair the meetings of the Invest commission;
- Set the date and agenda of the meetings, in consultation with the secretary;
- Delegate preparatory and administrative tasks to the secretary.

The secretariat is staffed by one of the FWO staff members, called the secretary.

The secretary has the following tasks:

- Provide the members of the Invest commission with the application dossiers judged as excellent by the Invest commission;
- Send out invitations for the meetings, on behalf of the Chair, and all other documents to both the effective and the substitute members;
- Prepare minutes of the meetings and draft advices under the supervision of the Chair;
- Perform the tasks assigned ad hoc to him/her by the Invest commission.

Chapter II – External Peer Review

Paragraph 1: Channels for fundamental research and mobility

Art. 18

§1. For postdoctoral fellowships, Pegasus Marie Curie Fellowships, senior clinical investigators and fundamental research projects, the applicant will need to attach a list to the application, containing the names of ten experts who possibly might act as external reviewers. In case the response by the invited reviewers does not allow to meet the requirements as stipulated in §2 of the present article, the applicant will be asked to provide another five extra names. In no case shall the applicant be asked to submit more than a total of 15 names of candidate reviewers.

§2. From the aforementioned reviewer list, the FWO-administration will select the reviewers who will be invited to submit an evaluation in writing of the research proposal and the candidate concerned. The aim is to collect at least two evaluations per application.

§3. 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.

§4. Not eligible as referee are:

- members of the Board of Trustees of the FWO;
- members of an FWO-Expertpanel;
- persons appointed to a Belgian university, research institute or any other organization; or, in the case of calls for proposals in the framework of bilateral or lead agency agreements, persons appointed to similar institutions or organizations in the country where the foreign project partner is professionally active;
- persons with a professional appointment to a foreign institute where the applicant(s) had been enrolled as a student or professional after January 1st of the year n-3 (n=year of application);
- any co-authors with the applicants of a publication that was submitted or published after January 1st of the year n-3 (n=year of application);

'Co-authorship' is to be understood as follows:

- co-authorship of a monography of which the applicant is co-author as well;
- co-authorship of an article or another type of contribution to a collection (book, journal issue, report, congress proceedings, abstract,...) of which the applicant is co-author as well;

Editors are not regarded as co-authors insofar as they have not also acted as what is understood under 'co-author' as described above. Co-editors of the applicant are not accepted as an external referee.

- partners of the applicant(s) in a research cooperation, whether formalised in a research project or not, that has been applied for or has been running after January 1st of the year n-3 (n=year of application). In this context, the following shall in any case qualify as research cooperation (non-exhaustive list):

- Cooperation under a research fellowship, granted by the FWO;
- Cooperation under a research project, whether relating to a specific subject or not or under an international cooperation project, granted by the FWO;
- Cooperation under the Odysseus programme or the Big Science programme, granted by the FWO;
- Cooperation under a Scientific Research Network, granted by the FWO;
- Cooperation under programmes similar to those mentioned above, granted by organisations other than the FWO;
- Joint research work not formalised in a cooperation structure as defined above;
- Research carried out in the research areas and/or with research facilities provided by the applicant to the referee or vice versa;
- ...

§5.

1. The applicants are responsible for the eligibility of the proposed referees.
2. In the case of one or two violations of the rules on conflicts of interest between an applicant (being the candidate fellow or, in case of projects, the supervisor and/or co-supervisor) and a proposed referee within the same round for applications, a negative remark will be made.

This negative remark will be included in the file of the applicant involved in the conflict of interest, i.e. it will not apply to applicants of the same file that are found not to be involved in a conflict of interest.

3. The applicant will then be given the opportunity to remedy the violation by proposing another referee.
4. If a new violation is discovered as part of a subsequent application, it will render the file ineligible upon discovery:
 - for fellowship applications: during the round for fellowship applications following the one during which the violation was discovered;
 - for project applications: during three rounds for project applications following the one during which the violation was discovered.
5. If the rules are violated more than twice, the application is to be declared ineligible.
6. In case the applicant doubts the eligibility of the proposed referee, he or she can contact the FWO through his/her e-portal account before submitting the application. Questions about eligibility that reach the FWO before submission of the application will be presented to the FWO referee commission of the appropriate scientific domain, consisting of all expert panels' chairs of that domain. There are five referee commissions, one for each domain: biological

sciences; humanities; social sciences; medical sciences; science&technology; for applications submitted to the Interdisciplinary Panel the referee commissions of the respective scientific domains will be consulted. In case of co-authorship publications involving ten or more authors, the FWO administration will always consult the referee commission. In all the above cases, the referee commission will decide on the alleged eligibility of the proposed referees.

When the referee commission answers negatively to a question concerning the eligibility of a proposed referee that reached the FWO before submission of the application, the applicant will be asked to propose a new referee that meets the eligibility criteria.

When the referee commission decides negatively on the eligibility of a proposed referee in an application that has already been submitted, this submission will be considered a violation, taking into account the provisions of points 2 to 5 of this paragraph.

7. After the administrative check, the FWO will inform the applicant about the violations that were found. In case the alleged violations result from a **factual** error of the FWO administration.

§6. 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.

§7. The applicants and the reviewers may not in any way communicate with each other about any aspect of the application and of the evaluation.

§8. 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.

§9. Primarily, the FWO Executive Committee will see to it that applicants strictly observe the eligibility regulations and other guidelines.

§10. The FWO Working Group on Research Policy will make the final decision on such violations.

[Paragraph 2: Channels for Strategic Basic Research and Applied Biomedical Research](#)

Art. 19.

§1. For each SBO project proposal, the FWO administration will invite at least 4 international experts to commit in writing to evaluating the project (external peer review). The FWO administration will take appropriate action to obtain these four external reviews. The experts will evaluate the SBO project proposals based on the evaluation criteria set forth in the SBO decree. These evaluation criteria are included in a score grid that is also made available to the project proposal applicants.

§2. The experts will provide written feedback on both the scientific part and the valorisation part of the project proposal.

§3. For each SBO project proposal, the FWO administration will, on a best-effort basis, arrange for at least one expert from the economic and/or social field of application in which the valorisation will be carried out.

§4. No more than two-thirds of the experts invited for the external peer review may be of the same gender.

§5. The provisions of article 18 §4, §7 and §8 concerning the eligibility of reviewers and the confidentiality agreement also apply to the external peer review of SBO project proposals.

Art. 20.

Within the TBM financing channel, the submitted proposals are evaluated by ad hoc expert panels. For any missing expertises, additional experts can be sought.

[Paragraph 3: Channels for Research Infrastructure](#)

Art. 21.

§1. The rules and procedure for external reviewers with regard to applications for large-scale research infrastructure by the Science commission are set forth in articles 29 and 30.

§2. The search, nomination and invitation of external reviewers is the responsibility of the secretariat, the aim being to receive at least three reviewer reports. The applicants may themselves put forward up to five names of potential reviewers and three names of experts who they do not wish to be selected as reviewer.

§3. The provisions of article 18 §4, §7 and §8 concerning the eligibility of reviewers and the confidentiality agreement also apply to the external peer review of the Science and Invest commissions.

Chapter III – Code of Conduct of FWO Expert Panels

[Established Line of Conduct](#)

1. The panel chair and the panel members must always strictly adhere to the line of conduct. Upon assuming office as a panel expert, they commit themselves to this by signing the present Code of Conduct. The same rules shall apply to all panels.

2. All deliberations of the expert panels are strictly confidential. Panel members who fail to observe this rule will be called to account by the Board of Trustees.

3. The chair and the members of the panel are independent experts who will not be influenced.

4.a. An expert panel member cannot review a certain application when:

- the panel member is associated to the institution of the application;
- the panel member is involved in the application, either as applicant or researcher
- during the evaluation process or in the course of the three years running up to the application deadline, the panel member has been affiliated to an institute where one or more of the applicants are professionally appointed or enrolled as students
- during the evaluation process or in the course of the three years running up to the application deadline, the panel member has been affiliated to the same research unit as one or more of the applicants. A research unit is to be understood as a structural research cooperation team within the same department or spanning multiple departments of one or more faculties or institutes
- the panel member is the promoter of a research fellowship, an individual research grant and/or a research project in which one or more applicants are involved as (co)-promoters or researchers
- the panel member is a research partner of one or more applicants 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, or in a research project that has been applied for or has been running during the evaluation process
- the panel member is related with the applicant by family, marital or any other comparable ties
- the panel member is co-author with one or more of the applicants of a publication that was submitted or published in the three years preceding the final submission date for the applications or during the evaluation process. Co-authorship is to be understood as defined in article 18, §4 of these regulations.

b. b. An expert panel member cannot participate in the discussion and final evaluation of a certain application when:

- the panel member is involved in the application, either as applicant or researcher
- the panel member is affiliated to the same research unit as one or more of the applicants. A research unit is to be understood as a structural research cooperation team within the same department or spanning multiple departments of one or more faculties or institutes.
- the panel member is the promoter of a research fellowship, an individual research grant and/or a research project in which one or more applicants are involved as (co)-promoters or researchers
- the panel member is a research partner of one or more applicants 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, or in a research project that has been applied for or has been running during the evaluation process

- the panel member is related with the applicant by family, marital or any other comparable ties

Each panel member is expected to inform the chair of each conflict of interest as defined by the above criteria and of all other elements that might compromise the panel member's objectivity. The chair will not appoint this panel member as reviewer and sees to it that this panel member does not participate in the discussion on and final evaluation of the specific application. If a panel member does not indicate a (possible) conflict of interest, he/she can be suspended by the Working Group on Research Policy. The Board of Trustees will judge the appeals made by panel members and will take a final decision on it.

5. During deliberations with regard to the ranking or assigning of budgets, the panel members having a conflict of interest will also need to leave the meeting.

6. Any decisions made are irrevocable, unless all persons present at the time the original decision was taken are attending again.

[Paragraph 1: Decision-making process for the Fundamental Research channels](#)

The Decision Making Process

All panels need to adhere to the following working procedure with regard to fellowships, grants and projects.

The fixed working procedure for the decision making process is made up of the following steps:

1. All dossiers will be submitted to all panel members, who are considered to read every application. The panel chair and the panel vice-chair (a Flemish member ranking in seniority next to the panel chair) will jointly distribute the dossiers to be evaluated among the panel members. To the extent possible, each of the 16 experts^[1] will receive a limited number of dossiers.
2. Each application must be thoroughly evaluated by at least two, and preferably by three, panel members. To this end, they will draw up a 'pre-report', thereby making use of the evaluation template which contains a series of criteria. On the basis of this, they assess the dossiers that were assigned to them.
3. The chair must not be a pre-reporter.
4. The pre-reports are distributed, filled in and consulted through a dedicated digital platform of FWO. By means of this platform chair and vice-chair distribute the applications among the panel members who have been selected as pre-reporters for an application. The panel members fill in their pre-reports at least one week before the meeting. After its finalisation the report can be consulted by the other panel members. During the panel session the pre-reporters comment on their report or the (vice-)chair can read out or summarize the report if its pre-reporter is absent.
5. On the basis of these preliminary reports, the full panel will deliberate on each separate dossier. As such, the preliminary reports only constitute a starting point for the deliberation and should not be considered as a final assessment. Preliminary reports should be as concise as possible. These reports are strictly confidential and will remain within the panel.
6. For each project and, in the case of an inter-university project, for each host institution, an amount between € 45,000 and € 130,000 per annum must be applied for, in order to cover the personnel and consumables. If one of the partners only submits an application for

operating resources, the bottom limit for said partner may be lowered to € 20,000. Additionally, a maximum of € 150,000 worth of equipment can also be applied for, and it is possible to request matching funding up to a maximum amount of € 150,000.

7. If it so desires, the FWO Expert Panel may be informed of the current and submitted projects during the meeting; the result of the evaluation by another FWO Expert Panel will not be communicated.
8. The FWO representative sees to it that adequate feedback can be formulated for each dossier. The panel members themselves are not allowed to give any feedback to any candidates or promoters. If the panel members receive any questions with regard to the meeting, they can always refer these questions to the FWO. In no case shall any information about the meeting be communicated to third parties.
9. The number of candidates for a pre-doctoral or postdoctoral fellowship that may be ranked is equal to the number of candidates to be funded. In addition of that ranking, a number of reserve candidates can be ranked up to half the number of effective candidates.
10. a. The general success rate established for postdoctoral fellowship renewals is applied to the volume of applications per discipline. The exact distribution of the number of resulting fellowships is carried out by discipline-specific panels made up of the chairs and vice chairs of the panels of the respective disciplines. The interdisciplinary panel allocates its own fellowships, their number being equal to the general success rate applied to the volume of applications within that panel, with upward rounding.
b. The discipline-specific panels perform the selection based on a comparison between the rankings within the relevant panels, with the rating of a given position in the ranking becoming higher as the total number of ranked candidates increases. The pre-reports of the discipline-specific panels on the candidates act as a substantively supporting element in the discussion. In no case can the ranking of a discipline-specific panel be reversed.

Evaluation Criteria

§1. In annex to these regulations, an overview is provided of all criteria for each category, as well as for the selection of the application dossiers and for the evaluation of the activity reports. These criteria are also included in the evaluation templates.

§2. The panels must adhere to these criteria and must not implement any secondary, unwritten rules which might exclude certain dossiers beforehand or may be contrary to the general rules.

The following criteria are not acceptable:

1. Distinguishing between last year students and graduates in the selection of candidates for a PhD fellowship grant. The a priori exclusion of last year students is therefore not acceptable;
2. The a priori exclusion of foreign candidates for PhD fellowships because their study results are difficult to evaluate;
3. The a priori exclusion of candidates who already receive another grant;
4. The non-systematic allocation of a research grant when no fellowship grant is awarded;
5. The a priori rejection of a research grant because the applicant is a fellow with a bench fee;
6. The a priori rejection of a research grant because the applicant is a supervisor or co-supervisor of a research project;
7. The a priori rejection of research projects of an applicant who is already a supervisor or co-supervisor of one or more research projects.

§3. For the evaluation of the application for a PhD fellowship grant, the panel members can consult the study results provided by the applicant and the histograms provided by the educational services of the universities.

Budget Reduction of Projects

§1. Research projects: We try not to reduce any full-time scientific staff to a half-time position. This may only be done in exceptional cases.

§2. Reduction of the budget by the panels:

1. Projects with a 1st tier ranking: the proposed budget should enable full completion of the project.
2. Projects with a 2nd tier ranking: budget cuts are possible.

§3. Selection key: To be determined on the basis of the available resources and the total budgets applied for.

Paragraph 2: Decision-making process for the Strategic Basic Research and Applied Biomedical Research channels

Decision-making process for doctoral (PhD) SB grants

The decision-making procedure established for calls for doctoral (PhD) grants for strategic basic research comprises the following steps:

1. All panel members receive all dossiers by mail and all panel members are expected to read all applications. Each application must be thoroughly evaluated by at least two panel members. They write a concise preliminary report to be based on a template with the evaluation criteria. The preliminary reports focus on the criteria 'project' and 'potential applications'. Together with the oral examination, they provide a major input for the (consensus-based) assignment of the final scores.
2. The panel members must submit their preliminary reports to the FWO at least one week before the session. The preliminary reports are made available to the other panel members prior to the session. Preliminary reports are strictly confidential and remain within the panel.
3. During the session, the candidates take an oral examination. This exam consists of a short presentation and an interrogation of the candidate by the panel members.
4. Based on the reading of the dossiers, the preliminary reports and the oral examination, each dossier is assigned consensual scores in relation to the evaluation criteria (candidate, project, potential applications). For the three criteria, letter code scores are assigned based on scores for the sub-criteria. The scores reflect 'top x%' percentiles within an assumed normal distribution of the quality of the proposals. A+ stands for the top 5% ("top"), A for the top 10% ("excellent") and A- for the top 20% ("very good"). Scores B+, B and B- represent the top 50% ("good", "moderate", "average"), and C is "below average". A score of D ("unacceptable", "critical") for one of the three criteria entails exclusion from the ranking.
5. As moderator, the representative of the FWO sees to it that all elements necessary for the evaluation are addressed during the interrogation and that the scores are assigned in a uniform and objective manner.
6. The representative of the FWO also ensures that sufficient feedback can be formulated for each dossier. The panel members are not allowed to provide any feedback to candidates or supervisors. If the panel members receive any questions with regard to the meeting, they can

always refer these questions to the FWO. In no case shall any information about the meeting be communicated to third parties.

7. The candidates are ranked according to a weighted total score based on the assigned scores for the three evaluation criteria, with the weight of the score 'candidate' exceeding each of the other two criteria by a factor of 3. The conversion from letter codes to numerical values is performed as follows:

A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C	D
7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

In the case of ties, a weighted total score is calculated without taking into account the score for applicability. If there is still a tie, the 'candidate' score will be decisive. Finally, the sub-criteria per main criterion are examined in succession (in the following order: candidate, project, applications).

8. A number of fellowships per panel, the 'panel quota', can be awarded directly to the best ranked candidates who have also obtained a predefined minimum score for the three criteria.

The panel quorum or maximum number of fellowships to be awarded directly is obtained by multiplying the number of candidates within a panel by the overall probability of selection, and then rounding down the result.

The minimum scores (e.g. B+, B, B-) are aligned with the percentage of candidates that obtained at least this score combination during previous calls, and that also approaches the overall selection probability.

For each call, the FWO establishes the minimum score prior to the panel sessions.

9. The remaining fellowships are awarded on the basis of a ranking of remaining candidates from all panels. This ranking is based on the weighted total scores, normalized (z-scores) in each panel. Each expert panel decides (without breaking the ranking and including the candidates with at least the minimum scores) which candidates qualify for this overall ranking.

Decision-making process for SBO projects

The procedure established for the decision-making process concerning SBO project proposals comprises the following steps:

1. Each project proposal is presented to at least four international experts. For a highly multidisciplinary project proposal, the number of experts may be increased. The evaluation by the international experts is based on the evaluation criteria set out in the annex and covers both the scientific aspects and the valorisation aspects.
2. To avoid any conflicts of interest, the applicants may submit to FWO a short list of maximum 5 experts to be avoided. This holds especially for the exclusion of industrial experts or possibly experts from research organisations that have a significant affiliation with a competitive company or spin-off development. Such a list must be submitted no later than at the time of submission of the project. The list must be specific with the name of the expert and/or organisation to be challenged.
3. The written expert recommendations are sent anonymously and unabridged to the applicants of the project proposal. The applicants can formulate their written responses on maximum three A4 pages. The deadline for submission of the responses will be communicated at the time of launching the call. This written response is attached as an addendum to the project proposal.

4. The project proposal, the expert opinions and the written replies of the applicants are submitted to the thematic SBO expert panels.
5. Based on the project proposal, the external peer reviews and the replies of the applicants, the SBO expert panels formulate a written advice to the steering commissions after a consensus has been reached on the scientific and utilisation quality of the various project proposals. This consensus is reflected in a specific score per evaluation criterion for each project proposal. All panel members are expected to actively contribute to the meeting. Furthermore, they are expected to familiarise themselves with each dossier to be discussed within the panel. Within the panel, each dossier will be specifically assigned to at least two (pre-)rapporteurs.
6. After the internal peer review by the SBO expert panels, the dossiers are handled within a steering meta-review panel, the so-called steering commissions (one per finality part). The main task of the steering commissions is to critically examine the evaluations of the various thematic panels and to place them in a broader perspective. To ensure equal treatment and uniformity across the various SBO expert panels, the commissions may proceed with the substantiated modification of the evaluation of the individual SBO expert panels. Within the finality (SBO-E or SBO-M), the outcome of the deliberation of the steering commission is the formulation of an advice on the overall ranking and final selection across the individual thematic SBO expert panels.
7. Possible scores that can be awarded per (sub)criterion are: Virtually no information (if the information in the project proposal is inadequate to assess the criterion), Unacceptable, Poor, Reasonable, Positive, and Excellent.
8. The following project proposals are ineligible for support and will not be ranked:
 - Project proposals scoring "unacceptable" or "virtually no information" on at least 1 sub-criterion. Projects having an overall delta score < -2 on at least one of both assessment dimensions (scientific quality or utilisation). This score is calculated as follows:
 - the scores "excellent", "positive", "reasonable" and "poor" on a sub criterion are translated into +1, 0, -1, -2 points respectively;
 - a double weight is assigned to two criteria, notably S1.1. (contribution to the state-of-the-art) and S1.2. (challenging, high-risk and inventive character of the research) because of the importance of both aspects for an SBO project.
 - The overall delta score is the sum of the scores on the criteria.
 - Project proposals scoring overall less than "reasonably good" on at least one of the main criteria (S1-S4, U1-U4).
9. Project proposals that meet the minimum support requirements are ranked based on the following rules:
 - Project proposals are ranked based on an equal weight assigned to the scores on scientific quality and utilisation prospects and on the necessary diversity as regards fields of application in case of equivalent scores;
 - Project proposals with an economic finality aimed at a contribution to sustainable development receive selection priority by assigning a double weight to the U4 criterion (contribution to sustainable development);
 - A bonus (+1 on the total score) is assigned to project proposals with a social finality which, through relevant cooperation with relevant social stakeholders for application-oriented activities, bridge the gap between the SBO results and their applications in the field.
10. The highest ranked project proposals will be funded within the limits of the available budget.

Decision-making process for TBM

The decision-making procedure established for calls for TBM projects comprises the following steps:

1. For the assessment, a representative of the FWO subdivides the project proposals into different expert panels as a function of the research topic.
2. Depending on the research topics, a representative of the FWO forms an expert panel for each group of project proposals.
3. All panel members receive all project proposals belonging to the relevant panel and are expected to read all applications.
4. Each application must be thoroughly evaluated by at least two panel members. They write a concise preliminary report to be based on a template with the evaluation criteria. The panel members must submit their pre-reports to the FWO at least one week before the meeting. The pre-reports are made available to the other panel members prior to the meeting. Pre-reports are strictly confidential and shall remain within the panel.
5. In each expert panel, the projects are ranked by an external expert panel, which is preferably composed of 5 experts. This will be done at a meeting held in the FWO offices in Brussels.
6. Experts who have a conflict of interest with a dossier or who are associated to the same department as one of the applicants of a dossier, will not be allowed to participate in the assessment of that dossier.
7. At the expert panel meeting, the applicants of the TBM project proposals are given the opportunity to answer a number of specific questions of the expert panel during a short interaction of max. 10 minutes.
8. As moderator, the representative of the FWO ensures that the questioning and the discussion within the expert panel are conducted in accordance with the applicable regulations and guidelines.
9. The representative of the FWO also ensures that sufficient feedback can be formulated for each dossier. The panel members are not allowed to provide any feedback to the applicants. If the panel members receive questions about the meeting, they can always refer them to the FWO. In no case shall any information about the meeting be communicated to third parties.
10. For each project, the complete score grid with 14 criteria is completed by consensus. The following scores are possible for the majority of criteria:

excellent (= a numeric score of +1),

positive or good (= a numeric score of 0),

reasonable (= a numeric score of -1)

poor (= a numeric score of -2)

critical (= immediate exclusion, even on the basis of a single criterion!)

11. The total project score is the sum of the individual scores on the 14 criteria. The score provides an indication of the extent to which the project differs from the expectations for a good TBM project: a project that meets all the criteria has a numeric score of 0. The total numeric score may vary between -28 and +11.

12. After the panel meetings, the projects are ranked based on their total score. Project proposals that received at least one 'critical' score on one of the 14 criteria, will not be ranked. The Board of Trustees can also establish a minimum project score to be obtained.
1. The highest ranked project proposals are nominated for support within the limits of the available budget. In the case of ties, project proposals with the highest scores on the programme fit (= sum of criteria W1, W2, U4 and U5) are ranked higher. The FWO Board of Trustees subsequently decides on the support for these projects.

Paragraph 3: Decision-making process for the Research Infrastructure channels

Decision-making process for Science (large-scale research infrastructure)

§1. The procedure established for the decision-making process by the Science commission comprises the following steps:

1. For the assessment of the application dossiers, the Science commission is assisted for each dossier by at least three external reviewers recognised as authorities in the relevant disciplines and not active in Belgium. These reviewers only submit a written report and are not members of the commission.
2. After the call is closed, the submitted application dossiers are provided as soon as possible by the FWO secretariat to the effective and substitute members of the Science commission and any third-party organisations with which the FWO has signed an agreement on support with the selection of reviewers, for the purpose of proposing potential reviewers.
3. The effective and substitute members of the Science commission and any third-party organisations with which the FWO has signed an agreement on support with the selection of reviewers, submit their reviewer proposals for each application to the FWO secretariat. For each proposed reviewer, they also provide a succinct justification why that person is considered an authority in the relevant discipline(s).
4. The FWO secretariat collects all proposed reviewers for each application, including those proposed by the applicants. It analyses for each proposed reviewer whether he/she is recognised as an authority in the relevant discipline(s) and whether he/she is to be considered as unbiased and independent with regard to the application to be assessed by him/her.
5. The secretary shall invite the reviewers to assess the application for which they were designated.

§2. The assessment of the scientific quality of the submitted applications by the Science commission takes place during at least two meetings.

§2.1. During a first meeting, it is determined which applications will preliminarily be assessed as excellent and whose applicants will therefore be invited for a hearing. This preliminary assessment is based on the application dossiers, the assessment reports received from the reviewers, and the written reactions from the applicants following the receipt of the anonymised assessment reports from the reviewers.

Also during the first meeting, the hearings with the applicants of the applications preliminarily assessed as excellent are prepared. This means at least that:

- For each application, it is determined which additional information has to be provided by the applicants to the Science commission prior to the hearing, as well as how and by when this information is to be provided;
- For each application, it is determined which key questions will be asked to the applicant during the hearing;
- For each hearing, it is determined who will chair the hearing and who will ask which key question, it being understood that the Science commission may decide that the chairman will chair one or more hearings and/or ask several or all key questions, or that another member will chair one or more hearings and/or ask several or all key questions; and
- it is also determined how much time the introductory presentation and the last word, to which the applicants are entitled, may take.

§2.2. During a second meeting, the hearings with the applicants whose applications were preliminarily assessed as excellent, take place. The practical organisation of these hearings is the responsibility of the secretary, in consultation with the Chairman of the Science commission. The invitation contains the place, date, start time and expected end time of the hearing. It also contains any additional information to be provided by the applicants to the Science commission prior to the hearing, and also specifies how and by which date said information is to be provided, and the key questions that will be asked during the interview. It further specifies that the applicants are entitled to an introductory presentation at the start of the hearing and to a last word at the conclusion of the hearing, and the maximum time that this introductory presentation and this last word may take.

A hearing is chaired and the key questions are asked by the designated member of the Science commission. Each member of the Science commission present at the hearing has the right to ask additional questions to the applicants.

The applicants have the right to give an introductory presentation at the start of the hearing. In this presentation, they present their investment initiative for large-scale research infrastructure and outline the reasons why they believe it is eligible for funding on the basis of the specified selection criteria. The member of the Science commission who chairs the hearing explicitly asks them at the start of the interview whether they wish to avail themselves of this right. The applicants also have a right to the last word. The member of the Science commission who chairs the hearing explicitly asks them at the end of the interview whether they wish to avail themselves of this right.

In case of urgent necessity, the chair may deviate from the above provisions.

§2.3. Based on any additional information provided by the applicants, and the progress and outcome of the hearings, it is determined which applications are definitively assessed as excellent.

A ranking is made of these applications. This ranking is based on the specified selection criteria and the application dossiers, the evaluation reports received from the reviewers, the written reactions submitted by the applicants to the FWO following the receipt of anonymised evaluation reports from the reviewers, any additional information provided by the applicants, and the progress and outcome of the hearings.

Finally, an advice to the Board of Trustees is formulated.

§3.1. The Board of Trustees can only ratify or reject an advice of the Science commission. In case of rejection, the Science commission is questioned again, where appropriate with explicit statement of the elements which according to the Board of Trustees should be investigated further.

§3.2. If the Science commission is questioned again, it has two options: either it maintains its original advice, or it formulates a new advice.

If the Science commission maintains its original advice, the original justification of the advice is also maintained.

If the Science commission formulates a new advice, it also formulates a new suitable justification.

§3.3. If the rejection by the Board of Trustees explicitly refers to elements which it believes should be investigated further, the Science commission shall, when justifying its advice, regardless of whether it maintains its original advice or formulates a new advice, pay explicit attention to these elements and specify the results of the further investigation and their impact on its decision.

§4.1. Both effective and substitute members of the Science commission shall be invited to the meetings.

§4.2. The Science commission can only validly deliberate and decide when a total of at least six of the effective and substitute members are present. If this quorum is not achieved, the deliberation and the decision process are postponed to the next meeting.

§4.3. All effective and substitute members of the Science commission that are present during a meeting, can fully participate in the deliberation and the decision-making process.

§4.4. The deliberation of the Science commission is secret. The opinions and positions of the individual members shall not be disclosed.

§4.5. The Science commission can only decide by consensus.

Decision-making process for Invest (large-scale research infrastructure)

The procedure established for the decision-making process by the Invest commission comprises the following steps:

1. Both effective and substitute members of the Invest commission shall be invited to the meetings.
 1. The Invest commission can only validly deliberate and decide when a total of at least two of the effective or substitute members are present. If this quorum is not achieved, the deliberation and the decision process are postponed to the next meeting.

2. All effective and substitute members of the Invest commission that are present during a meeting, can fully participate in the deliberation and the decision-making process.
3. The deliberation of the Invest commission is secret. The opinions and positions of the individual members shall not be disclosed.
4. The Invest commission must submit an advice to the Board of Trustees, preferably by consensus among the members present. If no consensus can be reached, the advice shall specify the points on which no consensus was reached and the different opinions points of view shall be presented.

Annex to the 'Code of Conduct for Expert Panels'

Predoctoral fellowships:

PhD Fellowships - Special PhD Fellowships - Clinical PhD Fellowships

Selection

- Research competence and potential (a.o. study results)
- Research skills and methodological skills
- Scientific autonomy
- Originality and innovative nature of the project
- Feasibility of the project
- Purposefulness of the project
- The quality of support and assistance

Evaluation

- Research competence and skills of the university graduates
- Progress status of the doctoral thesis
- Quality of the doctoral thesis
- Quality of the published results
- Clinical experience and autonomy of the postulant

Doctoral (PhD) grant strategic basic research

Selection

- Potential ability to independently undertake doctoral research as an innovation-oriented researcher;
 - Potential ability as a doctoral researcher: reasoning abilities and critical mind, scientific knowledge and project insight.
 - Potential ability as a strategically thinking and innovation-oriented researcher.
- Scientific quality and relevance of the research project, and its feasibility within a period of four years;
 - Scientific quality, relevance and challenge, inventiveness and innovativeness.
 - Quality of the research approach and feasibility of the project.
- Strategic importance of the research project with regard to the long-term potential for innovative applications with economic added value;
 - Strategic importance of the research approach for the intended applications (relevance).

- Strategic importance of the potential applications for possible users (impact).

Postdoctoral fellowships:

Postdoctoral fellowship:

Selection

- Research competence and potential (a.o. publications by the candidate)
- Research skills and methodological skills
- Scientific background of the candidate
- Scientific autonomy
- Originality and innovative nature of the project
- Mobility of the applicant
- Feasibility of the project
- Purposefulness of the project

Evaluation

- Research competence and skills
- National and international level of the publications
- Involvement in a research team

Senior Clinical Investigator:

Selection

- Research competence and potential (a.o. publications by the candidate)
- Research skills and methodological skills
- Scientific background of the candidate
- Scientific autonomy
- Originality and innovative nature of the project
- Mobility of the applicant
- Feasibility of the project
- Purposefulness of the project
- Clinical experience and autonomy of the postulant

Evaluation

- National and international level of the publications
- Involvement in a research team
- Promoting of the relationship between research and clinical practice

Research Grants:

Selection

- Scientific production of the postulant
- Scientific excellence of the research unit
- Research methodology
- Originality and innovative nature of the project

- Feasibility of the project
- Purposefulness of the project
- Necessity of the budgeted resources

Evaluation

- To what extent were the set objectives attained?
- results and publications

Research Projects:

Selection

- 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
- Cooperation and coordination among research units
- Necessity of the budgeted resources

Evaluation

- To what extent were the set objectives attained?
- High-quality publications in international journals with peer review.

Strategic Basic Research (SBO) projects:

Selection

- Scientific quality
 - Strategic character of the research and its contribution to the development of a broad knowledge base with broad possibilities for further research activities
 - Efficiency and quality of the research approach, the project planning (including the way in which coordination is ensured for project proposals that are carried out within a consortium), the work programme and the planned project management
 - "Value for money" and practicability or feasibility of the proposed research with the planned manpower and resources
 - Existing competence, infrastructure and potential available to the project applicant(s) to conduct the proposed research
- Social or economic utilisation prospects
 - Importance, scope and feasibility of the expected economic or social valorisation potential and its significance for Flanders
 - Quality of the proposed strategy and the approach for the support of the further social exploitation of the research results
 - Available competence as regards the management of research results and their transfer to economic or social stakeholders
 - Added value of the project in the field of sustainable development, where appropriate

Applied Biomedical Research with a primary Social finality (TBM) projects:

Selection

- Scientific quality
 - Focus of the project on the development of a new therapy, diagnosis and/or specific prevention of a specific disease or a comparison of existing procedures that allows a conclusion to be drawn about its relative effectiveness and cost efficiency
 - Positioning of the project in the path from discovery to application
 - Contribution to the state-of-the-art/scientific importance
 - Relevance of the scientific approach to achieving the scientific objectives
 - Balance between risks and feasibility of the scientific project objectives
 - Quality of project plan + management
 - Competence and infrastructure
 - Social utilisation prospects
 - Relevance of the project in attaining the utilisation objective
 - Intrinsic feasibility of the utilisation objective
 - Anticipated impact for the individual patient
 - Anticipated scope of the societal potential for Flanders
 - Lack of industrial interest
 - Quality and feasibility of the utilisation approach
 - Competence and track record in terms of transfer and utilisation

Large-scale research infrastructure:

Selection by the Science commission

- Scientific quality and relevance of the research programme to be implemented using the research infrastructure
- Importance of the research infrastructure for research within the scientific discipline concerned
- Innovative character of the research programme to be implemented using the research infrastructure
- Extent to which the research infrastructure as a logistics hub is capable of generating a wide range of new projects
- Technologically innovative character of the research infrastructure
- In case the research infrastructure has to be constructed: technical feasibility of the research infrastructure
- Quality and competence of the research group(s) involved, scientific position of the relevant research group(s) in an international context, and its/their involvement in the policy of international research infrastructures
- Extent to which the proposal fits in with the strategic research policy of the institution(s) concerned

- Extent to which the investment in the research infrastructure contributes to the strengthening of the Flemish or regional position in the research field in question
- Extent to which the proposal is aligned with both domestic and foreign initiatives and infrastructures within the research field in question
- Accessibility of the research infrastructure for researchers external to the host institution, and quality of the access procedure

Selection by the Invest commission

- Description of the targeted investment
- Description of the way in which the infrastructure is obtained
- Utilisation plan
- Description of the quality of the infrastructure in which the research infrastructure will be housed, if applicable
- Estimate of financial, human and material costs
- Balanced budget

Assessment

- Scientific return on the investment, measured by the number of publications and utilisations
- Effectiveness of the investment, measured by the number of hours that the infrastructure is available and the number of hours that it is effectively used
- Accessibility of the research infrastructure to the researchers, measured by the number of hours that the infrastructure is available for and is used by researchers from the host institution, the partner members of the consortium and external users
- International significance of the investment in the approved research infrastructure, measured by the number of ongoing and new projects financed by entities other than the Flemish government, in which the infrastructure is used
- Extent to which the availability of the research infrastructure has contributed to attracting public research funding and contracts in collaboration with third parties, and companies in particular, with a detailed overview of the contracts, the funding bodies, the duration and the scope of the contracts

[1] Exceptions are the Exper panels Cult2, Cult3, G&M2, G&M3, G&M4, Med5, Med8, W&T7 and W&T8. These panels are composed of 18 members, 8 of them appointed of an institution belonging to the Flemish Community or to the Dutch-language register of a Federal institution.

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