

# **Regulations of the Research Foundation – Flanders governing the internal and external peer review**

**Approved by decision of the Board of Trustees of 25 April 2018**

## **Chapter I - Preliminary provisions and scope**

### **Art. 1.**

§1. These regulations lay down the conditions of the evaluation and award procedure for the research support programmes managed by the FWO, pursuant to Articles 17 and 18 of the Decree of 30 April 2009 on the organisation and financing of science and innovation policy, the decision of the Flemish Government of 10 November 2011 concerning funding by the Research Foundation - Flanders, the decision of the Flemish Government of 3 October 2003 establishing a financing channel for strategic basic research in Flanders, the decision of the Flemish Government of 15 September 2006 concerning the financing of applied biomedical research with a primary social finality, and the decision of 29 May 2009 governing the award of doctoral scholarships for the implementation of strategic basic research projects, the decision of the Flemish Government of 19 January 2018 governing the Flemish participation in and/or funding of international research infrastructures.

§2. These regulations are without prejudice to the general regulations of the Research Foundation - Flanders.

§3. For specific application channels, the Board of Trustees may seek assistance from an ‘ad hoc’ commission composed of experts who are competent in the matters concerned.

§4. Detailed information, full regulations, and forms are available online.

## **Chapter II – Internal Peer Review**

### **Bodies responsible for the internal peer review**

#### **Art. 2. - Support programmes for fundamental research: PhD fellowship, postdoctoral fellowship and project**

§1. The evaluation of both project applications and PhD/postdoctoral fellowship applications are the responsibility of 30 expert panels and 1 interdisciplinary expert panel, known as the Fundamental Fellowships (FM) expert panel for fellowships fundamental research, and the Fundamental Projects (FP) expert panel for projects fundamental research. For each discipline or discipline cluster, one FM expert panel is responsible for the evaluation of the fellowships and one FP expert panel for the evaluation of the projects.

The FP and FM expert panels linked to each discipline or discipline cluster are subdivided as follows:

### **In the domain of Biological Sciences**

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

### **In the domain of Humanities**

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

### **In the domain 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 domain 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 domain 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 Expert Panel](#)

§2. The FP and FM expert panels are each composed of maximum twelve members that are associated with a university, a scientific research institute and/or an entity conducting research at another institute or organisation. The Board of Trustees may, on the proposal of the FWO administration, exceptionally deviate from the specified maximum number of members.

An expert panel is chaired by a scientific chair, who is appointed by the Board of Trustees and is a panel member with a non-Flemish affiliation, and an administrative chair, who is designated from the FWO administration. In appointing the scientific chairs, the aim is to ensure that no more than two-thirds of all scientific chairs are of the same gender.

§3. Members are appointed by the Board of Trustees.

The Board of Trustees bases its decision on advice from the domain board for the respective scientific domains, which are composed of the scientific chairs of the relevant FP and FM expert panels.

The FWO administration submits proposals for the composition of the panels to the domain boards. It may propose candidate members based, among other things, on spontaneous applications from candidates, relevant databases or proposals from existing FP and FM expert panel members. The scientific chair of each panel shall, prior to consultation within the domain board, consult the relevant panel about the vacancies to be filled in that panel.

All candidate panel members are evaluated for their scientific expertise by the Expertise Centre for R&D Monitoring (ECOOM).

All candidate members shall be researchers of at least postdoctoral or equivalent level.

The first criterion for appointment as panel member is scientific excellence. As a rule, the candidate member should belong to the top 30 percent of experts, the reference group being all experts in Belgium that are active in the same discipline(s). Any deviation from this rule shall be duly justified. The second criterion for appointment as panel member is that no more than two-thirds of the appointed members across all panels of the same application programme, should be of the same gender.

In composing the panels, attention shall also be paid to the complementarity between the expertises related to the (sub)disciplines covered by the panel and to avoiding a concentration of institutions to which the panel members are affiliated.

§4. The majority of members of an FP and FM expert panel must not be or have been affiliated to an institution of the Flemish Community (by way of a professional appointment, guest professorship or as a voluntary collaborator) during or within a period of three years preceding their membership.

§5. Throughout the term of their membership, panel members must in principle be appointed for at least 50 percent at a university, scientific institution and/or entity involved in scientific research at another institution or organisation.

The Board of Trustees may allow deviations from this principle for reasons of scientific expertise.

§6. Membership of an FP and an FM expert panel is personal and non-transferable. The membership term of an FP and an FM expert panel is three years. This term may be renewed once. The Board of Trustees may temporarily replace a member, yet the membership term will not be extended by the duration of such replacement. A member may be replaced only once per appointment term and per application channel. Panel members cannot renew their seats until three years after the end of a first term that has not been renewed or three years after the end of a second term.

§7. Panel members who have submitted a project application as supervisor or co-supervisor or who are acting as (co-)supervisor or as department head for a fellowship application that will be handled by the panel of which they are a member, are not allowed to sit on that panel during the relevant application round.

§8. Each expert may only sit on one discipline-specific FP or FM expert panel, with the exception of the interdisciplinary panel, the membership of which may be combined with that of another expert panel.

§9. Panel members who fail to comply with the code of conduct, as stipulated in these regulations, may be dismissed or suspended from the FP or FM expert panel by the research policy working group. The Board of Trustees acts as the appeal body.

§10. Membership of an FP and FM expert panel is incompatible with the position of rector, vice rector, director or manager research policy at a host institution eligible at FWO or with membership of the Board of Trustees of the FWO.

§11. Emeriti can sit on an FP and FM expert panel if they are still actively involved in scientific research. This activity is established on the basis of their publications in the relevant scientific domain.

### **Art. 3- PhD fellowships strategic basic research (SB)**

§1. The evaluation of applications for a PhD fellowship strategic basic research is the responsibility of SB expert panels on the basis of different scientific themes. These scientific themes are defined by the Board of Trustees.

§2. Members of SB expert panels are affiliated with a university, a scientific research institute, an entity conducting research at another institution or organisation, or a company active in research and development.

§3. Members are appointed by the Board of Trustees.

The FWO administration presents panel composition proposals to the Board of Trustees. It may propose candidate members based, for example, on spontaneous applications from

candidates, use of relevant databases, or on the proposal of existing expert panel members or of the Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (VLAIO).

All candidate members have obtained a PhD or equivalent.

At least one-third of the total number of appointed members are directly involved in research and development in the business enterprise sector.

At least one-third of the appointed members are affiliated with a higher education institution or research centre. The first criterion for appointment as panel member is scientific excellence. The aim is to ensure that panel members affiliated to a university belong to the top 30 percent of experts, the reference group being the experts in Belgium that are active in the same discipline(s).

For the appointment of panel members, the aim is to ensure that no more than two-thirds of the appointed members across all panels are of the same gender.

In composing the panels, attention shall also be paid to the complementarity between the (sub)disciplines covered by the panel and to avoiding a concentration of institutions to which panel members are affiliated.

§4. The majority of members of the SB expert panels must not be or have been affiliated to an institution of the Flemish Community (by way of a professional appointment, guest professorship or as a voluntary collaborator) or to a Flemish business establishment of a company during or within a period of three years preceding their membership.

§5. The scientific themes, the membership and/or the number of members of the SB expert panels may be reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees in relation to trends in the number of applications and/or subjects of the project proposals.

Where necessary due to the number of applications per scientific theme, the Board of Trustees may split up a scientific theme over several panels or combine several themes into a single panel.

§6. Membership of the SB expert panels is personal and non-transferable. The membership term is three years. This term may be renewed once. Panel members cannot renew their seats until three years after the end of a first term that has not been renewed or three years after the end of a second term.

The Board of Trustees may temporarily replace a panel member. A panel may be supplemented ad hoc with additional members based on the correspondence between the submitted subjects and the expertise available within the SB expert panel.

§7. Panel members who are (co-)supervisors of a fellowship application that will be handled by the SB panel of which they are a member, are not allowed to sit on that panel during the relevant application round.

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

§9. Panel members who fail to comply with the code of conduct as set out in these regulations may be dismissed or suspended from the SB expert panel by the research policy working group. The Board of Trustees acts as the appeal body.

§10. Membership of an SB expert panel is incompatible with the position of rector, vice rector, director or manager research policy at a host institution eligible at FWO or with membership of the FWO Board of Trustees.

§11. Emeriti may sit on an SB expert panel if they are still actively involved in research. This activity is established on the basis of their publications in the relevant scientific domain.

§12. Each SB expert panel is overseen by a representative of the FWO, who acts as moderator.

## **Evaluation procedures - internal peer review**

### **Art. 4. - Evaluation procedure for PhD fellowship fundamental research and PhD fellowship strategic basic research**

§1. The evaluation of calls for PhD fellowship fundamental and PhD fellowship basic research is comprised of two steps.

In step one, the FM or SB expert panel makes a pre-selection of the candidates based on the application file, using three internal evaluation reports, to be drawn up by panel members acting as internal evaluators, as input for the discussions. If the scientific chair deems that additional evaluation is necessary, an extra internal evaluation report may exceptionally be requested.

In step two, the selected applicants give an oral presentation of their research proposal and the candidates are interviewed by the panel members. After all selected candidates have been heard and evaluated, the FM or SB expert panel draws up a ranking of the candidates to whom it wishes to offer a fellowship.

§2. The evaluation of PhD applications is based on the criteria set out below. These criteria are specified in the call and application documents and the score grids, and used during the evaluation process.

#### **§2.1. - fellowships fundamental research**

Applications are evaluated on the criteria 'candidate' and 'project'.

In step one, the candidate is evaluated based on the study results, motivation and relevant competencies.

In step two, the candidate is evaluated based on the potential ability to independently carry out doctoral research, including reasoning skills, critical thinking skills, scientific knowledge, and insight into the project.

In both steps, the project is evaluated based on the scientific quality and relevance of the research project, the innovative character of the project, the quality of the research approach, and the feasibility of the project.

## **§2.2. - fellowships strategic basic research**

Applications are evaluated on the criteria 'candidate', 'project' and 'application potential'.

In step one, the candidate is evaluated based on the study results, motivation and relevant competencies.

In step two, the candidate is evaluated based on the potential ability to independently carry out doctoral research as an innovation-oriented researcher, including reasoning skills and critical thinking skills, scientific knowledge, and insight into the project and into the application potential.

In both steps, the project is evaluated based on the scientific quality and relevance of the research project, the innovative character of the project, the quality of the research approach, and the feasibility of the project.

In both steps, the valorisation potential, or the strategic importance of the research project for the long-term potential of innovative applications with economic added value, is evaluated for the strategic importance of the research approach for the anticipated applications (relevance) and of the potential applications for potential users (impact).

§3. All files will be sent to all panel members, who are expected to read every application.

§4. In principle, each application will be thoroughly evaluated by three panel members. They will prepare a concise internal evaluation report that is based on a template with the evaluation criteria. The evaluation criteria are also calibrated and described in the score grid, which is an integral part of the template.

The internal evaluation reports are made available to the other panel members. The panel's attention is drawn to significant variations between final scores of internal evaluation reports. Internal evaluation reports are strictly confidential and only circulated within the FM or SB expert panel.

One of the three internal evaluators acts as rapporteur, who is responsible for the content of the feedback report to be sent to the applicant.

§5. An internal evaluator assigns scores to the criteria 'candidate' and 'project', and, for fellowships strategic basic research, also to the criterion 'valorisation potential'.

The final score of an internal evaluator is based on a weighting of the sub-scores. For fellowships fundamental research, the criterion 'candidate' has a weight of 60 per cent and the criterion 'project' a weight of 40 per cent. For fellowships strategic basic research, the criterion 'candidate' has a weight of 60 per cent, the criterion 'project' a weight of 20 per cent and the criterion 'valorisation potential' a weight of 20 per cent.

§6. After all internal evaluation reports have been submitted, the applications are discussed by the full FM and SB expert panels and, based on the scores and subsequent ranking, selected or

not selected for step two. Selected candidates will be invited well in advance for the oral presentation and the interview. For the maximum of candidates to be invited see paragraph 11 of this article.

§7. In step two of the evaluation, the candidates take an oral examination. This examination consists of a short presentation and an interview in the form of a conversation between the panel members and the candidate on the application.

§8. After the interview, the panel members assign, by consensus, a score to the evaluation criteria 'candidate' and 'project', and for fellowships strategic basic research, also to the criterion 'valorisation potential'.

§9. After the interviews, the candidates per FM or SB expert panel are ranked on the basis of a weighted final score, based on the assigned scores for the evaluation criteria 'candidate' and 'project', and, for fellowships strategic basic research, also for 'valorisation potential'. To calculate the weighted final score, the criteria are weighted as set out in paragraph 5 of this article.

§10. Maximum 90 percent of the fellowships to be awarded are distributed over the panels in proportion to the number of eligible candidates per FM or SB expert panel. In each FM or SB expert panel, these fellowships constitute the 'panel quota', i.e. the maximum number of fellowships to be awarded directly.

§11. In each FM or SB expert panel, the maximum number of candidates to be invited for the interview, based on the pre-selection, is twice the panel quota.

§12. Fellowships from the panel quota are awarded directly to the highest ranked candidates, provided they have obtained at least a predetermined minimum score for each evaluation criterion. The FWO determines these minimum scores for each call and prior to the start of the interviews.

§13. Upon completion of all interviews, the remaining fellowships, i.e. minimum 10 percent of the total number, possibly supplemented with non-awarded fellowships from the panel quota, are awarded based on a ranking of the remaining interviewed candidates from all FM or SB expert panels. This ranking is based on the weighted final scores that were standardised per FM or SB expert panel. Each FM or SB expert panel decides, without disturbing the ranking, which candidates qualify for a fellowship.

§14. After step two, a general conclusion about the strengths and weaknesses of each application, as established by the full FM or SB expert panel, is formulated. For each application, one of the internal evaluators is responsible as rapporteur for the formulation of this feedback.

§15. The FM or SB expert panels shall endeavour to take all decisions by consensus, failing which the decision shall be taken by a simple majority.

## **Art. 5. - Evaluation procedure for junior and senior postdoctoral fellowships**

§1. The junior postdoctoral fellowship and the senior postdoctoral fellowship constitute two distinct application programmes with distinct evaluation and selection procedures.

§2. The internal evaluation of postdoctoral fellowship applications takes place in two steps, as set forth in paragraph 1 of article 4, unless otherwise set forth in this article, and based on the criteria set forth below. These criteria are specified in the call and application documents, and used during the evaluation process.

In step one, the candidate is evaluated on the basis of his/her scientific contribution, motivation and relevant competencies.

In step two, the candidate is evaluated on the basis of his/her competence as an independent researcher at postdoctoral level, consisting of motivation, vision of his/her own professional future, reasoning skills, critical thinking skills, scientific knowledge, and insight into the project.

In both steps, the project is evaluated based on the scientific quality and relevance of the research project, the innovative character of the project, the quality of the research approach, and the feasibility of the project.

§3. The evaluation procedure as described in paragraphs 3 through 15 of article 4 applies also to postdoctoral fellowships, where appropriate. To calculate the final score, the criteria 'candidate' and 'project' are weighted as set forth in paragraph 5 of article 4 for fellowships fundamental research.

§4. In derogation of paragraphs 1 and 4 of article 4, two panel members act as internal evaluator in addition to the two external reviewers.

In derogation of the provisions in paragraphs 3 and 6 of article 4, each postdoctoral fellowship application is evaluated by two external reviewers to be selected and appointed by the FWO. If the scientific chair deems that additional evaluation is necessary, an extra external evaluation report may exceptionally be requested.

§5. In derogation of paragraphs 4 and 14 of article 4, in addition to the two internal evaluators, a third panel member acts as rapporteur who prepares a synthesis of the two internal evaluation reports and the two external evaluation reports of the external reviewers for the subsequent pre-selection by the panel.

The rapporteur takes into account the scores of both the external reviewers and the internal evaluators for proposing the final scores in the pre-selection phase of an application. The full panel decides on the final scores of an application in both steps of the evaluation.

The rapporteur is also responsible for the content of the feedback report to be sent to the applicant.

## **Art. 6. – Projects fundamental research**

§1. The junior project fundamental research and the senior project fundamental research constitute two distinct application programmes with distinct evaluation and selection procedures.

§2. The evaluation of calls for projects fundamental research is carried out by the FP expert panel on the basis of the submitted applications.

§3. The evaluation criteria, as specified in the call and application documents and applied during the evaluation process, for projects fundamental research, consist of the scientific level of the supervisor and the co-supervisor, and the group of researchers involved in the proposed project as described in the application (hereinafter called 'research team'), the scientific quality and relevance of the research project, the innovative character of the project, the quality of the research approach, and the feasibility of the project.

The requested project budget is not a criterion, but a matter on which the panel provides advice for the subsequent allocation of financial resources to the selected projects by the Board of Trustees.

§4. All files will be made available to all panel members, who are expected to read every application.

§5. In principle, each application is thoroughly evaluated by two panel members. They will prepare a concise preliminary report to be based on a template with the evaluation criteria. The evaluation criteria are specified in the score grid that is provided to the panel members. If the scientific chair deems that additional evaluation is necessary, an extra internal evaluation report may exceptionally be requested.

The internal evaluation reports are made available to the other panel members. The panel's attention is drawn to significant variations between final scores of internal evaluation reports. Internal evaluation reports are strictly confidential and remain within the panel.

§6. In addition, each project application is evaluated by two external reviewers, to be selected and appointed by the FWO. If the scientific chair deems that additional evaluation is necessary, an extra external evaluation report may exceptionally be requested.

§7. Both the internal evaluation reports and the external evaluation reports are sent to the applicant, who can then provide a substantiated response relating to the elements in the evaluation which, in the applicant's opinion, are demonstrably incomplete or incorrect.

§8. An internal evaluator and an external reviewer assign a score to the following criteria: supervisor, co-supervisor, research team, scientific quality and relevance of the research project, innovative character of the project, and quality of the research approach and feasibility of the project. In the final score, the elements 'supervisor, co-supervisor and research team' together have a weight of 25 per cent and the elements 'scientific quality and relevance of the research project, innovative character of the project, and quality of the research approach and feasibility of the project' together count for 75 per cent of the score.

§9. For each application, a panel member acts as rapporteur, who, for subsequent evaluation by the full panel, prepares a summary of the two internal evaluation reports, the two external

evaluation reports and the responses by the applicant(s). The rapporteur also proposes scores based on this summary.

The rapporteur takes into account the scores of both the external reviewers and the internal evaluators for proposing the final scores of an application. The full panel decides on the final scores of an application.

The rapporteur is also responsible for the content of the feedback report to be sent to the applicant.

§10. The FP expert panels shall endeavour to take all decisions by consensus, failing which the decision shall be taken by a simple majority.

### **Art. 7. – Evaluation procedure SBO projects**

§1. Expert panels advise the Board of Trustees of the FWO on the funding decision relating to each project proposal. The expert panels may obtain the written advice of experts. In addition, the Board of Trustees may appoint steering committees 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, composition and operation of these panels.

Two FWO representatives/policy officers act as moderator at the meeting of the expert panels and steering committees.

§2. The internal peer review of the SBO project proposal proceeds via a two-stage process and is conducted by i) SBO expert panels and ii) steering committees, respectively.

§3. A single thematic SBO expert panel may handle project applications from both SBO programme finalities (economic and societal ) within broadly defined scientific domains.

§3.1. The SBO expert panels are composed of academic experts with a translational/applied background, supplemented with experts with an industrial/societal background. Expert panel members shall have a senior scientific/business-oriented and/or socio-economic background and a generalist profile. For panels addressing applications with both an economic and a societal 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 committees (§4), based on the project proposal, the external peer reviews and the rebuttal of the applicant. This advice consists of the consensus scores for the various evaluation criteria set forth 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 topics and the available expertise. The SBO expert panels shall not contain members who are active at Flemish research centres. This rule also applies to persons having fulfilled an active or advisory role at a Flemish research centre 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 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 scientific topics 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 of the panel composition must be submitted to the FWO Board of Trustees for approval.

§3.3. The SBO steering committees (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 application. The scientific theme will determine this choice. Where necessary due to the number of applications per scientific theme, the FWO reserves the right to split up themes over several panels or, if not enough applications are received around a particular theme, to merge expert panels. Where deemed appropriate for proper evaluation, the FWO may have the application assessed by another panel. The latter is subject to approval by the applicant of the project proposal concerned.

§4. Two steering committees (one committee 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 eligible for funding and those that are not, and the other being a ranking based on excellence across the two assessment dimensions (scientific and utilisation). Based on the advice of the steering committees and the available budget, the Board of Trustees shall subsequently decide on allocation of SBO support.

§4.1. The SBO steering committee is made up of experts with an academic or non-academic background, representing various scientific and socio-economic research domains. The committee members are selected in such a way that the respective committee as a whole possesses the necessary expertise in a broad range of societal 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 under the assumption of further research by economic, societal, 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 committees must also be ensured. This implies that members of Flemish research centres cannot sit on the committees. Similarly,

membership is not possible for persons having occupied an active or advisory role at Flemish research centres less than three years ago.

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

§4.4. Members of the steering committee are appointed for a 3-year term, which may be renewed once for a further 3 years.

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

## **Art. 8 – Evaluation procedure TBM**

### **Selection criteria**

§1.1 The TBM score grid is divided into two dimensions: a scientific dimension and a utilisation dimension. Both dimensions have an equal weight and each consists of 7 criteria:

W. Scientific value
W1. Focus on development of therapy/diagnosis/specific prevention
W2. Positioning of the project in the path from discovery to application
W3. Contribution to the state-of-the-art/scientific importance
W4. Relevance of the approach for achieving the scientific objectives
W5. Balance between risks and feasibility of the scientific project objectives
W6. Quality of project plan + management
W7. Competence and infrastructure

U. Utilisation value
U1. Relevance of the project in attaining the utilization objective
U2. Intrinsic feasibility of the utilization objective
U3. Anticipated impact for the individual patient
U4. Anticipated scope of the societal potential for Flanders
U5. Lack of industrial interest
U6. Quality and feasibility of the utilization approach
U7. Competence and track record in terms of transfer and utilisation

§1.2. The following scores are possible for the majority of criteria mentioned in §1.1:

- 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).

The score for the scientific value and the utilisation value is each time the sum of the scores of the 7 individual criteria. The total project score is the sum of the score for the scientific value and the score for the utilisation value.

### **Evaluation procedure**

§2.1. Eligible TBM project proposals are divided into (broad) thematic groups (6 to 10 proposals per group) based on their subject matter. For each thematic group a specific expert panel (4 to 8 experts) is formed from experts drawn from the TBM expert pool. For any missing expertises additional experts are invited ad hoc. The aim is to ensure that maximum two-thirds of the members are of the same gender.

§2.2. All project proposals are submitted to all panel members of the relevant TBM expert panel. All experts are asked to read each project proposal.

§2.3. For each project proposal at least two experts are designated as principal evaluator. Each principal evaluator submits a written preliminary advice for the panel meeting. This advice must be based on the TBM score grid, as referred to in §1. As soon as all preliminary advices for a given file have been submitted, all panel members are granted access to the advices. The preliminary advices (including preliminary scores) only serve to prepare the meeting and may therefore be adjusted during the panel meeting.

§2.4. The panels shall endeavour to take all decisions by consensus, failing which the decision shall be taken by a simple majority (i.e. half of the votes plus one).

## **Ranking**

§3.1. After the panel meetings, the projects are ranked across the various panels. A project is only supportable and will therefore only be ranked if it obtains at least a project score of -12 (overall better than 'reasonable') and no critical score for at least one criterion.

§3.2. Fundable project proposals are ranked on the basis of the total project score. In case of an ex aequo, priority will be given to the project that scored best for their fit within the programme (sum of W1, W2, U4 and U5). If there is still an ex aequo, priority will be given to the project that scored best for the utilisation value.

§3.3. The highest ranked projects within the available resources are proposed for funding. The funding decision is made by the FWO Board of Trustees.

## **Art. 9 – Feedback to the applicant**

§1. Upon completion of the evaluation procedure and announcement of the results by the FWO Board of Trustees, the applicant is informed of the evaluation findings. In addition, where applicable, the applicant is informed of the relative ranking of the application within the group of jointly evaluated applications.

§2. The panel members are not allowed to provide candidates or supervisors with any information about the evaluation process. If the panel members receive questions about the meeting, they shall notify the FWO thereof. In no case shall any information about the meeting be disclosed to third parties.

## **Art. 10 - Reporting**

§1. The assessment of the intermediate and, where applicable, ex-post evaluation of the supported fellowships and projects are the responsibility of the respective expert panels that have awarded the fellowship and project.

§2. The assessment of the intermediate and, where applicable, ex-post evaluation of the SBO and TBM projects and the grants for research infrastructure are the responsibility of the FWO administration.

§3. The regulations of each funding channel stipulate the reporting requirements and the times when reports are to be made available to the FWO.

#### **Art. 11 - International Collaboration Committee (CIWC)**

§1. The Board of Trustees may call upon the International Collaboration Committee (CIWC) for the evaluation of applications for:

- international mobility, including participation in conferences and workshops, long/short stays abroad;
- organisation of conferences in Belgium;
- scientific assignments;
- international exchange and cooperation projects with focus on the exchange of researchers.

§2. This commission is multidisciplinary and is composed of 17 members who preferably 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 to renew this term twice. In principle, every two years, one third of the members with the highest anciennity are replaced. Emeriti can sit on 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 can be replaced the next year.

#### **Art. 12 – Cross-Domain Panel (CDP) – (as amended by decision of the Board of Trustees of 26.09.2018)**

§1. The Board of Trustees may call upon the Cross-Domain Panel (CDP) for the evaluation of applications across different domains either with or without an international dimension. These include, but are not limited to, applications involving the following funding channels:

- Bilateral research cooperation, in the absence of a joint evaluation panel;
- Lead Agency Procedures (LAP), where the partner organisation can also act as Lead Agency;
- International Coordination actions;
- Pegasus Marie Curie Fellowships;
- Scientific Research Networks (WOGs);
- Special PhD Fellowships.

For participation in ERA-NET, the Flemish members of this panel will be asked to provide prior advice.

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

- 5 members from Biomedical Sciences;
- 5 members from Science & Technology;
- 3 members from Social Sciences;
- 3 members from Humanities.

For the domains 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 domains 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 this panel can be combined with membership of an FWO Expert panel.

§4 The procedure for submitting an application as a candidate (with the exception of scientific screening by ECOOM – cfr. supra art. 2 §3), 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 FWO FM and FP expert panels.

## **Research Infrastructure**

### **Art. 13.**

§1. Research infrastructure comprises all facilities and sources that promote the performance of frontier and strategic basic research across all scientific disciplines. Besides scientific infrastructure, this includes collections, natural habitats, corpora and databases (including digital availability).

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

§3. International research infrastructure covers the Flemish participation in and/or funding of international investment initiatives that are carried out at large-scale international or supranational facilities to which the Flemish Government contributes and/or whose strategic importance for Flanders can be demonstrated.

### **Art. 14.**

§1. The Science Commission is composed of at least six effective and six substitute members who are an international authority in their respective research domains 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 evaluation of applications for international infrastructure shall be attended by a representative of the EWI department and a representative of the FWO, acting as observers.

The members of this commission shall be appointed by the Board of Trustees for a renewable term of six years. The Board of Trustees appoints a chair and a deputy chair from among the members.

### **Art. 15 - Evaluation of applications for large-scale research infrastructure by the Science Commission**

§1. The Science Commission evaluates the scientific quality of the applications and ranks 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: the 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 relevant research domain;

11° Accessibility of the research infrastructure for researchers external to the host institution, and quality of the access regime.

§2. 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 file, 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.

§3. 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 files for the purpose of proposing potential reviewers;
- Provide the members of the Science commission with the application files, reviewer reports, reactions from the applicants 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 applications;
- Prepare minutes of the meetings and hearings and draft advices under the supervision of the Chair;
- Perform any other ad-hoc tasks assigned by the Science commission.

#### **Art. 16 - Evaluation of applications for international research infrastructure by the Science commission**

§1. The Science commission evaluates the scientific quality of the applications on the basis of the following selection criteria:

1. The scientific quality of the research programmes to be implemented with the research infrastructure;
2. The scientific quality of the output realised by the Flemish applicants in relation to the state-of-the-art in the research domain and in relation to the infrastructure;
3. The importance of the international research infrastructure for research within the relevant scientific discipline;
4. The importance of the participation or investment in the international research infrastructure for strengthening the position of the Flemish researchers within the relevant scientific discipline;
5. The extent to which the proposal fits in with the strategic research policy of the relevant institution(s);
6. The extent to which the research infrastructure as a logistics hub is capable of generating a whole series of new projects at international level with regard to the Flemish participants;
7. If the research infrastructure needs to be constructed, the technical feasibility of the research infrastructure and the extent to which any infrastructure exists;
8. The quality of the approach of the Flemish project in relation to the requested grant (input-output balance) viewed from a scientific perspective;
9. The accessibility of the infrastructure for researchers external to the host institutions.

§2. The Science Commission classifies, with justification, the applications into four categories:

- Category A: projects from the submitted list that are evaluated as excellent from a scientific point of view;
- Category B: projects that are evaluated as very good from a scientific point of view, including projects that are not yet fully mature ('emerging projects');
- Category C: projects that have received funding in previous calls but which no longer fit into category A or B from a scientific point of view and for which an exit scenario is proposed;
- Category D: all other projects from a scientific point of view.

The Science Commission does not prioritise the applications but classifies them into one of the four above mentioned categories.

**Art. 17. - Evaluation of applications for large-scale research infrastructure by the Invest commission**

§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 (PMV) 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 appoints a chair and a deputy chair from among 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:

- a description of the planned investment;
- a description of the way in which the infrastructure is to be obtained;
- a detailed user plan;
- a description of the quality of the infrastructure in which the research infrastructure may be accommodated;
- an estimate of the financial, personnel and material costs;
- a balanced 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 file of which the investment file 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 files, 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 file, 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 files evaluated 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.

**Art. 18 – Final decision by the Board of Trustees on applications for large-scale research infrastructure**

The FWO Board of Trustees takes a final decision, taking into account the following principles:

§1. The list of applications deemed excellent by the Science Commission can only be endorsed or rejected. In case of rejection, the Science and Invest Commissions are questioned again, where appropriate, explicitly stating the elements which, according to the Board of Trustees, should be investigated further.

If the Commission has formulated a recommendation regarding an application file, the FWO Board of Trustees takes the following action:

- 1° either the recommendation is rejected, and the application is approved;
- 2° or the recommendation is accepted in whole or in part, and the application is approved, it being understood that the financing or cooperation conditions imposed by the Board of Trustees will serve as conditions for the funding;
- 3° or the recommendation is accepted in whole or in part, and the application is approved only if the necessary remedial action is presented to the Board of Trustees within a period set by the Board of Trustees, which may not be less than ten calendar days and may not exceed sixty calendar days.

If the total amount of grants to be awarded to proposals assessed as excellent exceeds the available amount, the proposals will receive grants in the order of excellence down to and including the last proposal that can be fully funded. Proposals deemed excellent but receiving no funding cannot derive any rights from this under the next call.

After the Board of Trustees has made a final decision, all the documents that have been drawn up in the course of the procedure become public for the parties involved under the freedom of

information legislation. This implies, inter alia, that the contents of the reviewer reports, the reasoned opinions of the Science and Invest commissions and the reasoned final decisions of the Board of Trustees can be consulted for inspection by all applicants.

### **Art. 19 - Evaluation of applications for research infrastructure by the Strategy commission**

§1. The Board of Trustees sets up a Strategy commission. Commission members are appointed by the Board of Trustees upon nomination by the policy advisory body of the Economy, Science and Innovation policy area.

§2. Members of the Strategy commission jointly possess international or Flemish expertise in the management of investment files, international or Flemish science and innovation policy, and management or policy making with regard to international research infrastructures.

§3. The Strategy commission is composed of a maximum of ten members, including at least:

1. one representative of the minister;
2. one representative from the Flanders Participation Company (PMV);
3. one representative from the EWI Department;
4. one member of the Science commission;
5. one representative nominated by the VLIR

§4. The Strategy Commission may be supplemented with experts when additional expertise is required on a temporary basis. A representative of the EWI Department and a representative of the FWO shall attend the Strategy Commission meetings as observers.

§5. Members of the Strategy Commission are appointed for a renewable five-year term. The policy advisory board appoints a chair and a deputy chair. Members of the first Strategy Commission are appointed for two years.

§6. For the applications classified by the Science Commissions into category A or B as referred to in article 16 (2), the Strategy Commission reviews the structure, quality and feasibility of the operational and financial plans and the strategic importance for Flanders of participating, based on the following criteria:

1. The strategic importance for the Flemish Region or the Flemish Community of participating or investing in the infrastructure;
2. The quality of the four-year operational plan, including an evaluation of the following elements:
  - a) clarity and approach of the plan;
  - b) the management team;

- c) where appropriate, the quality of the investment plan, including the anticipated investment and how it is to be obtained, and the quality of the accommodation of the infrastructure;
- d) estimate of the financial, personnel and material costs and how they will be allocated;
- e) the user plan with, where appropriate, the estimated revenues;
- f) the operational plan, including a timetable with objectives and milestones;
- g) the financing plan, including co-financing;
- h) the risk assessment and the lifetime;
- i) the timeline;

3. The evaluation of the ESFRI forum or other international infrastructure, if available.

§7. The commission may be assisted by external parties, for example for the evaluation of individual and financial plans. If deemed necessary, the Commission may require applicants to present their application orally and/or in writing.

§8. Based on these assessments, the Strategy Commission draws up a ranking and formulates a proposal for participation and/or funding per application and its duration. Any recommendations shall be expressly and adequately justified in writing. For category C applications as defined in article 16(6), the Strategy Commission shall decide how the exit scenario is to be implemented. For previously funded projects that are neither excellent nor very good from a scientific point of view, but where international commitments prevent the projects from being discontinued immediately, a feasible scenario shall be developed in consultation with the applicants. In doing so, allowance shall be made for the fact that no new investments can be funded and that funding is to be discontinued as quickly as possible in compliance with the provisions in the statutes of the international infrastructure and with the commitments entered into in relation to the international infrastructure.

#### **Art. 20 - Final decision by the Board of Trustees on applications for international research infrastructure**

§1. For applications for international research infrastructure, the Board of Trustees has the final decision on:

- the selection of projects in which Flemish researchers will participate;
- whether membership fees are to be paid by Flanders, if not borne by the Federal Government, and, if so, the amount of fees;
- the grants to be awarded for the selected projects;
- the selection of projects for which a phase-out scenario will be developed, which must subsequently also be submitted for decision by the Board of Trustees.

The Board of Trustees will make its final decision taking into account the advice of the Strategy commission. The nomination of the applications can only be endorsed or rejected. In case of rejection, the Science and Strategy Commissions are questioned again, where appropriate explicitly stating the elements which, according to the Board of Trustees, should be investigated further.

§2. If the Strategy Commission has formulated an additional condition regarding an application file, the FWO Board of Trustees shall act as follows:

1. either the additional condition is rejected, and the file is approved;
2. or the additional condition is accepted in whole or in part, and the file is approved, it being understood that the financing or cooperation conditions imposed by the Board of Trustees will serve as conditions for the funding;
3. or the additional condition is accepted in whole or in part, and the file is approved only if the necessary remedial action is presented to the Board of Trustees within a period set by the Board of Trustees, which may not be less than ten calendar days and may not exceed sixty calendar days.

§3. If the total amount of grants to be awarded to the proposals nominated for funding exceeds the available amount, the proposals will receive the funding amount proposed by the Strategy Commission, in the order of their ranking. Proposals deemed excellent but receiving no or only partial funding cannot derive any rights from this under the next call.

## **Chapter III – External Peer Review**

### **Art. 21 – Postdoctoral fellowships and projects fundamental research**

§1. For the evaluation of any application under the programmes for postdoctoral fellowships and projects fundamental research, if submitted to an FM or FP expert panel respectively, two external evaluation reports will be requested and added to the application file to be provided to the expert panels. If the scientific chair deems that additional evaluation is necessary, an extra external evaluation report may exceptionally be requested.

§2. The FWO shall search and contact experts on the subject matter of the application, who will act as external reviewers.

§3. External reviewers must meet the following criteria:

- They must be affiliated to a university, research institute or research department of another organisational type and must be active at least at a postdoctoral level;
- They must have expertise that matches as much as possible the content of the application.

§4. The aim is to ensure that no more than two-thirds of all external reviewers submitting one or more evaluations in the same application round are of the same gender.

§5. The following are not eligible as reviewer:

- members of the FWO Board of Trustees;

- members of an FWO expert panel;
- 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 (or as specified in the call documents) where the foreign project partner is professionally active;
- co-authors with the applicant(s) and/or their (co-)supervisor(s) of a publication that was submitted or published after January 1st of the year n-3 (n=year of application) unless the total number of authors exceeds 10. 'Co-authorship' is to be understood as follows:
  - o co-authorship of a monography of which the applicant is also the co-author;
  - o 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 also the co-author.

Editors are not regarded as co-authors insofar as they have not also acted as 'co-author' as described above. Co-editors of the applicant are not accepted as external reviewers.

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

§6. Before the external reviewers are granted access to the application to be evaluated, they must certify that they comply with the eligibility requirements for reviewers and that they will treat the 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, in accordance with article 24 §4.

§7. External evaluation reports shall meet the following requirements:

- completeness;
- adequate justification of scores;
- adequate coherence between scores and comments;
- adequate coherence between scores and criteria of the score grid provided by the FWO;
- use of respectful and comprehensible language.

§8. Applicants are allowed to specify in the application form a maximum of three names of experts to be excluded as external reviewer because there is a demonstrable conflict of interest

that could compromise an objective evaluation of the application or a demonstrable risk of misuse of the information in the application by the named expert. Applicants shall justify any request for exclusion. Only persons can be nominated for exclusion; organisations and institutions or parts thereof cannot be nominated for exclusion.

## **Art. 22 – SBO projects**

§1. For each SBO project proposal, the FWO administration shall invite at least four international experts who commit in writing to evaluate the project. The FWO administration will take appropriate action to obtain these four external reviews. These 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 21 §4 through §7 concerning the eligibility of reviewers and the confidentiality agreement also apply to the external peer review of SBO project proposals.

§6. Applicants are allowed to specify in the application form a maximum of three names of experts to be excluded as external reviewer because of a demonstrable conflict of interest that could compromise an objective evaluation of the application or a demonstrable risk of misuse of the information in the application by the named expert. Applicants shall justify any request for exclusion. Only persons can be challenged; organisations and institutions or parts thereof cannot be challenged.

## **Art. 23 - Research infrastructure**

§1. For each application for large-scale and international infrastructure, the FWO administration shall invite at least three international experts who commit in writing to evaluate the project.

§2. The search, nomination and invitation of external reviewers is the responsibility of the FWO administration, the purpose being to receive at least three reviewer reports. Applicants may themselves propose up to five names of potential reviewers and three names of experts they do not wish to be selected as reviewers.

§3. The provisions of article 21, §§ 5 and 6 concerning the eligibility of reviewers and the confidentiality agreement also apply to the external peer review of the Science, Invest and Strategy Commissions.

# **Chapter IV - General code of conduct for panel members and FWO representatives**

## **Art. 24 - Panel members and scientific chairs**

Members of the expert panels and, where applicable, other evaluation bodies referred to in these regulations, must comply with the provisions of the code of conduct as set forth in this article, without prejudice to other generally accepted principles and rules of scientific integrity. A breach of the code of conduct by a panel member may be cause for suspension or dismissal, to be decided on by the research policy working group. The Board of Trustees acts as the appeal body.

### **§1. Procedure**

The purpose of the expert panels is to

- correctly and objectively assess fellowships and projects submitted in response to a call, using predetermined evaluation criteria; the possible scores for each of the evaluation criteria are clearly defined and included as such in the score grid;
- arrive, by consensus, at a final score for each of the submitted project proposals or fellowships;
- propose, by consensus, a ranking of the submitted project proposals to the Board of Trustees.

The panel member shall respect and carefully apply the selection procedure and evaluation criteria as laid down in these regulations.

Upon completion of the procedure for each application round, all panel members are invited to evaluate the proceedings. These evaluations are bundled and presented to the Board of Trustees.

### **§2. Independence**

- Panel members act in their own name and not as representatives of an organisation, country or any entity to which they are affiliated. In the evaluation, they shall not be influenced by any considerations other than the interest of science and the scientific merits of the application.

### **§3. Conflicts of interest**

- If, during an application round, a panel member submits his/her own application or supports an application as (co-)supervisor/department head, that member will not be allowed to sit on the panel that evaluates the application.
- The panel member shall notify the FWO of any conflict of interest, even if there is any doubt on the subject. Failure of a panel member to notify a (potential) conflict of interest may be cause for the Board of Trustees to suspend the member after a contradictory procedure.
- The panel member shall not act as internal evaluator of an application file in the following cases:

- The panel member is involved as researcher in the application file;
  - The panel member stands to gain direct or indirect benefit from the approval or rejection of the application;
  - The panel member is associated with the institution acting as host institution for one or more applicants;
  - In the course of the last three years preceding the application submission deadline or during the evaluation process of the application, the panel member was or is planning to become affiliated to the same research unit as that to which one or more of the applicants are affiliated; in this context, a research unit is to be understood as a structural research cooperation team operating within a single department or across multiple departments of one or more faculties or institutes;
  - In the course of the last three years (preceding the submission deadline for the applications to be evaluated), the panel member is or was involved in an application or an ongoing investigation of the applicant or his/her (co-)supervisor;
  - 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 within the last three years preceding the submission deadline for the application or during the evaluation process of the application, or that is planned to be published in the future.
- The panel member cannot participate in the discussions and decision making relating to an application file in the following cases:
- The panel member is involved as researcher in the application file;
  - The panel member is affiliated to the same research unit as that to which one or more of the applicants are affiliated; in this context, a research unit is to be understood as structural research cooperation within a single department or across multiple departments of one or more faculties or institutes;
  - In the course of the last three years (preceding the submission deadline for the applications to be evaluated), the panel member is or was involved in an application or an ongoing investigation of the applicant or his/her (co)supervisor;
  - The panel member is related with the applicant by family, marital or any other comparable ties.

#### **§4. Confidentiality - Privacy**

The panel member shall not communicate externally about the deliberations of the panel or about information provided in connection with the evaluation procedure, and shall not use this information for personal or third party purposes. This applies only to information that was not known to the panel member before he/she assumed this role, that is not publicly available at the time the panel member receives or communicates the information, that was subsequently made public unlawfully, or that was obtained unlawfully from a third party on a non-confidential basis.

The panel shall observe this duty of confidentiality for a reasonable period of time. The period of time that can be accepted as reasonable shall, in practice, be evaluated on a case-by-case

basis, with a period of 5 years to be used as a guideline. Any breach of the duty of confidentiality shall, however, be evaluated in practice and on an individual basis by the FWO.

In addition, the panel members shall, in accordance with the principles and provisions of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation or "GDPR"), ensure the proper handling of personal information of which he/she may become aware in connection with their role as panel member.

This obligation includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that the personal data relating to the applications and deliberations as well as any data carriers containing such information are not intentionally or unintentionally made available or transferred to third parties.

If such events nevertheless occur, in any way whatsoever, they constitute a data breach within the meaning of the above-mentioned Regulation, and the panel member must immediately notify the FWO thereof via email to the following email addresses: [expert@fwo.be](mailto:expert@fwo.be) – [it@fwo.be](mailto:it@fwo.be) & [dpo@fwo.be](mailto:dpo@fwo.be), after which the expert concerned may be required to provide further assistance.

#### **§5. Duty of notification**

Panel members may not be approached to influence the evaluation. Similarly, any request for confidential information or any contact for any other reasons regarding the evaluation, is unacceptable. Any such attempt to approach a panel member must be reported by the panel member to the FWO, which shall then take the appropriate measures.

#### **§6. Role assignment within the expert panels**

**Individual panel members** have the following responsibilities:

- Contribute to the objective of the expert panel from their own specific expertise and background;
- Prepare an internal evaluation report for specific files assigned to them, using an evaluation template, based on the evaluation criteria. The internal evaluation reports are made available to the expert panel and serve as input for the joint panel meeting;
- In preparation of the joint panel meeting, acquaint themselves with the content of all applications assigned to the expert panel as well as the internal evaluation reports, external evaluation reports and the responses, if any;
- Participate in the pre-selection of fellowships, where applicable;
- Actively participate in the joint panel meeting;
- Update the internal evaluation reports, after the panel meeting, which also serve as input for the feedback to the applicants, in accordance with the discussions during the panel meeting (not applicable for the TBM channel);
- For part of the applications, make, as rapporteur, a synthesis report of the findings of the internal evaluators, the external reviewers (where applicable), the responses from the applicants (where applicable) and the full panel for subsequent feedback to the applicant (not applicable for the TBM channel).

In the panels with a **scientific chair**, the latter has the following responsibilities in addition to the above-mentioned responsibilities:

- Efficiently conduct the meeting in accordance with the code of conduct laid down in these regulations;
- Organise the distribution of the applications across internal evaluators;
- Monitor the quality of the evaluation process;
- Monitor the quality of the feedback reports;
- Sit on the domain board of the expert panel.

§7. Derogations from the provisions in this article are possible if duly justified by the FWO.

#### **Art. 25 - FWO representative (administrative chair or moderator)**

The FWO representative (administrative chair) has the following responsibilities:

- Monitor compliance with the code of conduct set forth in these regulations;
- Identify known conflicts of interest and notify the panel members thereof;
- Propose external independent experts for the applications assigned to the panel;
- Monitor the quality of the evaluation process: in particular, the FWO representative shall verify whether the evaluation of the applications and the assignment of the scores are done in compliance with the predetermined score grid. The FWO representative monitors the calibration line and adjusts the panel if necessary. The scores of equivalent files across different panels must lie within the same scope;
- Prepare the pre-selection of candidates for the fellowship programmes and of the panel meetings;
- Draw up the draft report of the panel meeting, including the ranking proposal and the selection of project proposals and/or fellowships eligible for funding, to be submitted to the Board of Trustees;
- Provide applicants with information about the evaluation of their files;
- Monitor the quality of the feedback reports;
- For the TBM channel: prepare a summary report, for some of the applications, based on the findings of the internal evaluators, the response of the applicants and the findings of the panel for subsequent feedback to the applicant.

**In panels with no scientific chair, the moderator has the following additional responsibilities:**

- Conduct the meeting from a procedural perspective, in accordance with the code of conduct laid down in these regulations;
- Organise the distribution of the applications across internal evaluators;
- Monitor the quality of the evaluation process;
- Monitor the quality of the feedback reports.