UNIVERSITEIT
GENT

WELCOME!

INFORMATION SESSION FWO PHD FELLOWSHIP

- 10:00 **FWO PhD Fellowship** + Q&A
  - *dr. Gerrit Pierreux (FWO)*

- 11:15 **FWO-application: Tips & Tricks** + Q&A
  - *prof. Stef Slembrouck (Ghent University)*
  - *prof. Elfride De Baere (Ghent University)*

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

INFO SESSION

In English

Recorded & shared afterwards

Questions after the presentation

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

INFORMATION

- **Website FWO**: https://www.fwo.be/en/support-programmes/phd-fellowships/#
- **Website UGent**: https://www.ugent.be/en/research/funding/national/fwo/phdfellowships.htm
- University Department: Research
  - **Vlaams-Federaal@ugent.be**
  - Liesbeth Erauw
  - Thijs De Jaeger
  - Sien Smits

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

Applying for an FWO PhD fellowship

Dr. Ir. Gerrit Pierreux (gerrit.pierreux@fwo.be)

Info session

Call 2026 – classification 1

Preface

- **What you should learn today…**
  - → *to understand the evaluation & selection process*

- **This presentation**
  - → serves as applicant's quick starting guide (key topics only)
  - → more details: FWO PhD webpages incl. documents & regulations

- **Separate video**
  - → *to prepare an application that meets the evaluation criteria*

- ***DISCLAIMER***
  - → *official & binding documents: regulations in Dutch*
    - × *English regulations: no legal status*

Outline

1. **FWO mission & key numbers**
2. PhD fellowships at a glance
3. Evaluation & selection process
4. Tips & tricks
5. Further reading & contact

Welcome to the FWO

- **Our mission**
  - → Funding of *fundamental* & *strategic* research
  - → Funding programmes
    - × *Individual researchers* (pre-, postdoc, mobility)
    - × *Research teams* (projects - *fundamental/strategic, 'brain gain' Odysseus,...)*
    - × Research infrastructure
    - × Scientific prizes
- **Principles**
  - → Bottom-up in all disciplines
  - → Scientific excellence and interuniversity (incl. research institutes) competition
  - → Transparent and equal opportunities

The FWO by numbers

Budget:

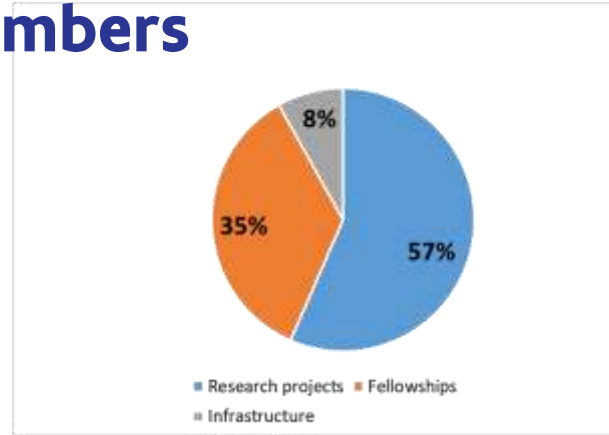
± 450 mio EUR

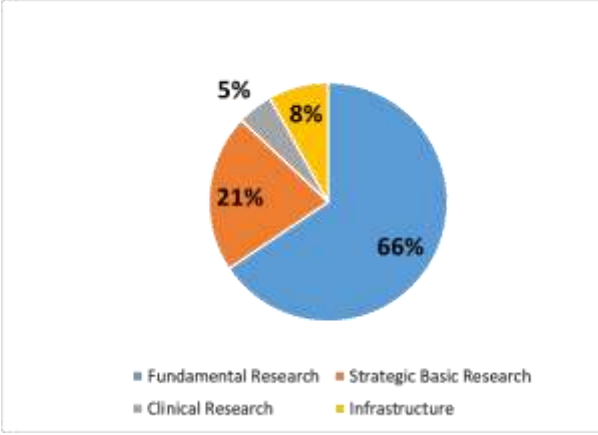
± 1150 Predocs (basic)
± 850 Predocs (strategic basic)
± 900 Postdocs
± 2400 Predoc & postdoc (projects)

73% Predocs 27%
56% Postdocs 44%

52% Predocs 48%
42% Postdocs 58%

± 25% Predocs (fundamental)
± 25% Predocs (strategic)
± 16% Postdocs
± 21% Projects





Follow us on social media: @FWOVlaanderen

Spotlight on FWO-research(ers)

Kennismakers

#FWOVlaanderen

Stay tuned!

Looking for SciComm opportunities? Let us know!

communicatie@fwo.be

Outline

1. FWO mission & key numbers
2. PhD fellowships at a glance
3. Evaluation & selection process
4. Tips & tricks
5. Further reading & contact

FWO PhD fellowship at a glance

- **Two PhD fellowship programs**
  - → Fundamental Research (FR) and Strategic Basic Research (SB)
- **Target group**
  - → Early-career researchers aspiring to pursue a PhD through independent research
  - → Open to applicants of all nationalities
- **Funding details**
  - → Duration: 4-year grants
  - → Monthly grant amount: € 2,600 (net, minimum)
  - → Annual bench fee: € 3,720

FWO PhD fellowship at a glance

- **Motivation**
  - → Transform your own research ideas into a well-defined 4-year PhD project
  - → Become an independent researcher
- **Approach**
  - → Explore and define your own research direction by reflecting on your academic interests, curiosities, and long-term career goals
  - → Find a promotor (and co-promotor) to guide and support your PhD trajectory
  - → Co-design and develop your own original research project
- **Other PhD opportunities**
  - → PhD positions on FWO or ERC projects (e.g., FR, SBO, TBM)
  - → PhD fellowships focusing on applied research (e.g., VLAIO - Baekeland)
  - → PhD funding available through universities (e.g., BOF and similar programs)

PhD fellowship: fundamental versus strategic

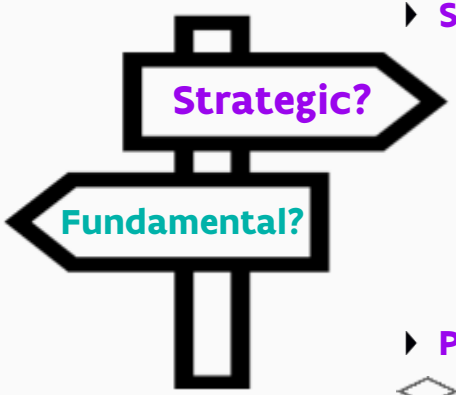
Both fellowships: challenging & original research (PhD level)

Fundamental research

→ Curiosity driven

PhD:

→ Independent researcher with a critical mindset



Strategic basic research

→ Use-inspired

→ Towards innovative applications with **economic or societal added value**

- × Products, processes, services, etc.
- × Policy, platforms, tools, etc.
- × Long-term perspective

PhD:

→ Independent researcher with a strategically-thinking and innovation-oriented critical mindset

Eligibility – Degree

- **Master diploma obtained at university from European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland**
  - → Master diploma 'ManaBa'

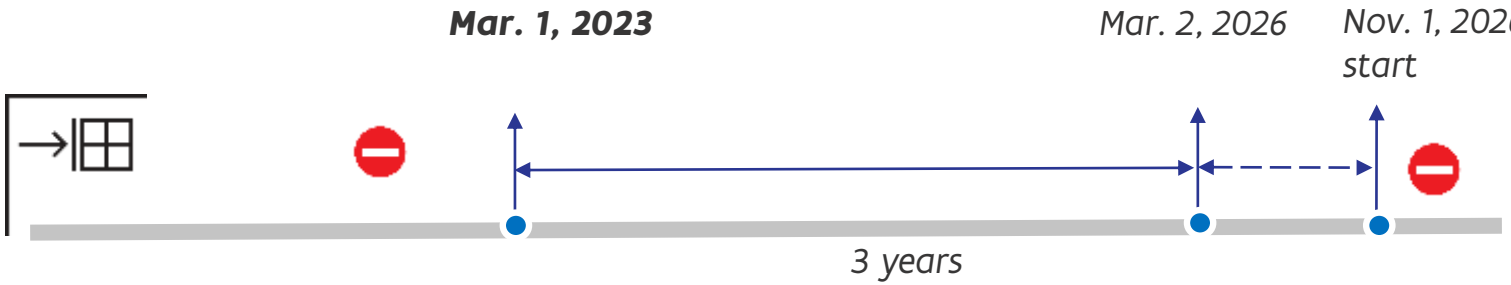
- **Other diploma or (master) diploma from another country (incl. UK):**
  - → NARIC attestation or **official permission from the host university** to start doctoral program

- Advanced Master ('ManaMa') is not considered

EEA countries: EU + Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein

Eligibility – time window

- **Master diploma must have been obtained no more than 3 years prior to the submission deadline**



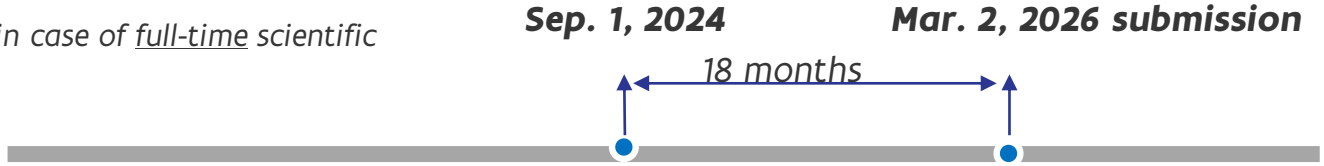
Extensions eligibility window (+1 Y):	Regulations Art 7 maternity-, parental-, sickness leave > 3m
(+x Y):	Phys./pharm.-specialist or resident veterinarian >1Y training

Eligibility – scientific seniority

- **Maximum 18 months of scientific activities between first master and submission deadline**
  - → All scientific activities: both academic and industrial
  - → Not considered: additional or advanced master studies, teaching, technician, manager, etc.
  - → Partial employment: adjusted by the percentage of employment

- **Questions?**
  - → Contact research coordination department at your university
  - → Contact FWO by mail and include contracts, function description and CV

***Example** in case of full-time scientific activities*



Eligibility - affiliation

- **Main host organization** ***(affiliation)***
  - → ***5 Flemish universities***
  - → ***Evangelic Protestant Faculty Leuven / Faculty for Protestant Theology in Brussels***

- **Additional host organizations**
  - → Flemish/federal research institutes *(collaboration / research location)*
  - → *Limited list: pick list in application form*

- **Main promotor** ***@main host organization***

(-> *recommendation letter on invitation by FWO*)

→ If applicable: co-promotor(s) @ main host and/or additional host organization(s)
co-promotor @ other organizations

-> notification by FWO (NO recommendation letter)

Additional PhD fellowships

- **Meise Botanic Garden – FWO PhD fellowships**
  - → *collection-based biodiversity and conservation research*
- **INBO – FWO PhD fellowships**
  - → *nature and its sustainable management and use*
- **VITO – FWO PhD fellowships**
  - → *(sustainable) energy, materials, chemistry, health and land use*
- **WL – FWO PhD fellowships**
  - → *the impact of human activity and nature on water systems and the consequences for navigation*

- → Extra PhD fellowships funded by Meise Botanic Garden, INBO, VITO or WL
- → Agreement on being *additional* host institution (before submitting application)
- → Seal-of-excellence principle (approved by FWO but on reserve list)
- → Fellowship under FWO regulations

Additional PhD fellowships

- **Kom op tegen kanker PhD fellowship**
  - → Additional PhD fellowship for the Med4 panel FR
  - → The best ranked candidate formally receives this fellowship

- **FWO - Demoucelle Parkinson Charity PhD fellowship (FR + SB)**
  - → To the best ranked candidate conducting biomedical research on Parkinson's disease
  - → Procedures for participation are outlined on the webpages
    - × Mail to prijzen@fwo.be is necessary to apply (before 3 March 2027)

Other PhD programs

- **FWO Special PhD fellowship**:
  - → 1 year fellowship to complete PhD
  - → 1 dedicated panel
  - → Candidates currently not working in research (*deadline 2 Mar. 2026)*

- **European University Institute (EUI) fellowship**
  - → Social sciences & Humanities – Florence
  - → Call currently open – Deadline **15 January 2026**

- **Baekeland PhD fellowships**
  - → PhD project with (co-financing!) Flemish enterprise
  - → PhD programme @ Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (VLAIO)

European University Institute

AGENTSCHAP INNOVEREN & ONDERNEMEN

EUI fellowship

- **Obtaining your PhD in Florence?**
  - → Have a look at the Doctoral programme of the EUI
  - → FWO will fund max. two EUI-fellowships for PhD students complying with eligibility criteria as set out by FWO (for academic year 2026-2027)

- **PhD in four domains (EUI departments):**
  - → Economics
  - → History and Civilisation
  - → Law
  - → Political and Social Sciences

- **Submission at EUI:**
  - → **Deadline: January 15, 2026**
  - → Evaluation: done partly by FWO (first evaluation step)

Want to learn more?

EUI Presentation

EUI Booklet

#WhyEUI

Outline

1. FWO mission & key numbers
2. PhD fellowships at a glance
3. Evaluation & selection process
4. Tips & tricks
5. Further reading & contact

Evaluation & selection process FWO expert panels

- **Fundamental Research (FR) program**
  - → 34 panels
  - → 10 to 16 experts with academic affiliation
  - → Majority has a non-Flemish affiliation

- **Strategic basic research (SB) program**
  - → 26 panels
  - → 10 to 16 experts experts from academia, industry, and societal organisations
  - → Majority has a non-Flemish affiliation

Evaluation & selection process FWO expert panels

- **Panel structure fundamental research**
  - → Fellowship panels (PhD/postdoc)
  - → **34** panels: 33 in 5 scientific domains + 1 Specific Interdisciplinary Panel (cross-domain)

- Biological Sciences
  - Bio1: Molecular and Cellular Biology
  - Bio2: Functional Biology
  - Bio3: Biodiversity, Ecology and Evolution
  - Bio4: Applied Biological Sciences
- Humanities
  - Cult1: Linguistics
  - Cult2a: Arts, History of Art, Architecture and Design
  - Cult2b: Literature, Film and Theatre
  - Cult3: History and Archaeology
  - Cult4: Theology and Religious Studies
  - Cult5: Philosophy and Ethics
- Social Sciences
  - G&M1: Sciences of Law and Criminology
  - G&M2: Economics, Business Administration and Management
  - G&M3: Psychology, Pedagogy and Educational Sciences
  - G&M4a: Communication Sciences and Political Science
  - G&M4b: Social Work, Social and Cultural Anthropology and Sociology
- Interdisciplinary research
  - Specific Interdisciplinary Panel
- Medical Sciences
  - Med1: Pharmaceutical Sciences and Medical Biochemistry
  - Med2: Bio-informatics, Genetics and Functional Genomics, Developmental and Stem Cell Biology
  - Med3: Immunology and Microbiology
  - Med4: Cancer Research
  - Med5: Neurology, Neuroscience, ENT medicine, Ophthalmology, Psychiatry
  - Med6: Respiratory System, Cardiovascular System, Hematology, Nephrology
  - Med7: Endocrinology, Gastroenterology, Hepatology, Metabolism and Nutrition, Reproduction, Urogenital System
  - Med8: Health Sciences
  - Med9: Movement & Sports Sciences, Dermatology, Physiotherapy & Rehabilitation Sciences, Dentistry and Maxillofacial Medicine, Orthopedics & Musculoskeletal Sciences, Rheumatology
- Science and Technology
  - W&T1: Mathematical Sciences
  - W&T2: Physics
  - W&T3: Condensed Matter
  - W&T4: Chemistry
  - W&T5: Computer Science & Information Technology
  - W&T6: Chemical and Materials Engineering
  - W&T7: Electronics, Energy, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering
  - W&T8: Sciences of the Earth and Space
  - W&T9: Science, Technology and Sociotechnical Analysis of the Built Environment

Evaluation & selection process FWO expert panels

Specific Interdisciplinary Panel

→ Submitted proposals should meet the **functional definition** of interdisciplinarity:

- × There is more than one discipline involved, and these **disciplines** are sufficiently distinct.
- × Every field is just as important, each playing a vital role in achieving the intended outcome.
- × The use of different, sufficiently integrated disciplines leads to **synergy**. Due to this synergy, the **state of the art is advanced** in all involved disciplines and/or in a shared area.

➔ Clearly **motivate** choice for Int-Dis panel using this definition

➔ **Interdisciplinarity** is assessed during the **evaluation**!

- × A **minimum score of 4 (good)** on interdisciplinarity is required to receive funding from this panel.

→ It is <u>not</u> a requirement to combine disciplines from different scientific domains (e.g., Bio & W&T)

Evaluation & selection process FWO expert panels

Panel structure strategic basic research

→ **26** panels

- **Biological Sciences**
  - → SBBio1 - Molecular & cellular biology of the Eukaryotes (except plants)
  - → SBBio4A - Applied biological sciences A -Environmental technologies, geology, ecotoxicology
  - → SBBio4B - Applied biological science B - Food technology and industrial biotechnology
  - → SBBio4C - Applied biological sciences C – Plant and crop sciences and technology
- **Social Sciences and Humanities**
  - → SB-SSH1 – Legal Sciences and Criminology; Economics, Business Economics and Management
  - → SB-SSH2 - Psychology, Pedagogy and Educational Sciences; Communication Sciences, Political Sciences, Social Work, Social and Cultural Anthropology and Sociology, Linguistics
  - → SB-SSH3 - Arts, Art History, Architecture, Design and Literature; History and Archaeology; Theology and Religious Studies; Philosophy and Ethics
- **Medical Sciences**
  - → SBMed1A - Pharmaceutical sciences
  - → SBMed1B - Medical biochemistry
  - → SBMed2 - Genetics and functional genome research; bio-informatics science
  - → SBMed3 - Human immunology and Infectious diseases
  - → SBMed4 - Cancer research
  - → SBMed5 - Organs and organ systems: neurology, psychiatry, rheumatology, orthopedics, physiotherapy, dentistry, maxillofacial, ENT medicine and dermatology
  - → SBMed6-7: Organs and organ systems: cardiovascular system, respiratory system, nephrology, urogenital system, hematology, gastroenterology, hepatology, endocrinology, metabolism and reproduction
  - → SBMed8 - Health sciences
  - → SBMed9 - Veterinary and animal production
- **Science and Technology**
  - → SBWT4A - Chemistry A: Organic synthesis, medicinal chemistry
  - → SBWT4B - Chemistry B: Material/polymer chemistry - analytical and inorganic chemistry
  - → SBWT5A - Data science
  - → SBWT5B - Informatics and data communication
  - → SBWT6A - Chemical engineering and catalysis
  - → SBWT6B - Material sciences
  - → SBWT7A - Mechanical engineering A: mechatronics, product design & development, manufacturing engineering, industrial engineering
  - → SBWT7B - Mechanical engineering B: energy generation, conversion and storage, fluid mechanics, biomechanical engineering
  - → SBWT7C - Electronics and telecommunications
  - → SBWT9 - Construction and architecture, spatial planning

Evaluation & selection process

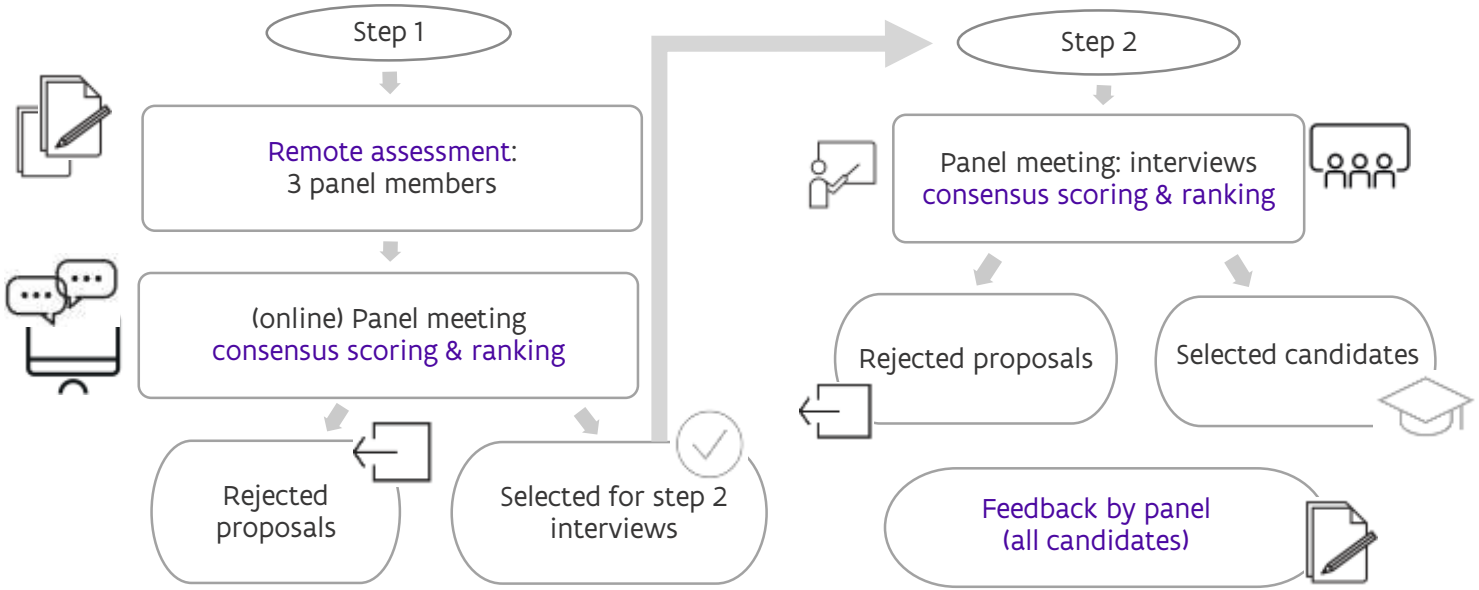
- **Choose panel that best fits your application!**
  - → Your responsibility to choose (& check)
  - → Motivate choice (based on contribution to scientific state of the art)
  - → Out-of-scope = application rejected

- **Updated panel members list published beginning of April 2026**

Evaluation process

Two step evaluation & selection process

→ (i) preselection and (ii) interview



Evaluation criteria - FR

- **Step 1: Preselection PhD fellowships** fundamental research

Candidate 50%

- **Study results (academic education)**
  - → Evidence of standing out
  - → Meaningful scientific output
  - → Output or impact beyond publications
- **Motivation & relevant competences**
  - → Motivation and research interests
  - → Activities, skills and experiences
  - → Scientific background and competences

Project 50%

- **Scientific quality, relevance and challenge, originality**
  - → Originality and contribution to the state of the art
  - → Scientific risks and challenges
- **Quality research approach, feasibility**
  - → Methodology
  - → Feasibility and risk mitigation

Evaluation criteria - FR

- **Step 2: Interview PhD fellowships** fundamental research

Candidate **50%**

- **Competence as PhD researcher**
  - → Knowledge of the research field
  - → Insight in project approach and positioning
  - → Reasoning skills and critical scientific mindset
  - → Motivation

Project **50%**

Criteria preselection

Evaluation criteria - FR

- **Evaluation criteria: Specific Interdisciplinary Panel**

Candidate **50%**

criteria FR

Project **30%**

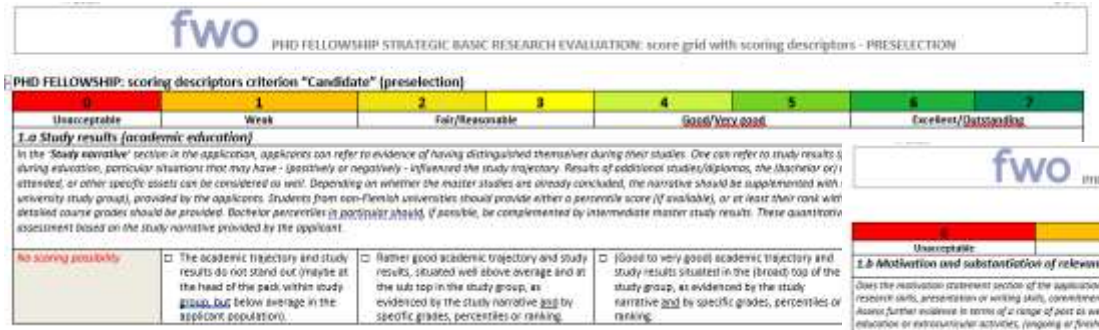
criteria FR

Interdisciplinarity **20%**

→ More than one discipline involved and these disciplines are sufficiently distinct
→ Disciplines at similar coordinated level and each discipline is essential to achieve expected outcome
→ Advance state of the art in all involved disciplines and/or in a shared area

Evaluation criteria - FR

- Scoring grids PhD fellowships **fundamental research** (preselection/interview)



fwo PHD FELLOWSHIP STRATEGIC BASIC RESEARCH EVALUATION: score grid with scoring descriptors - PRESELECTION

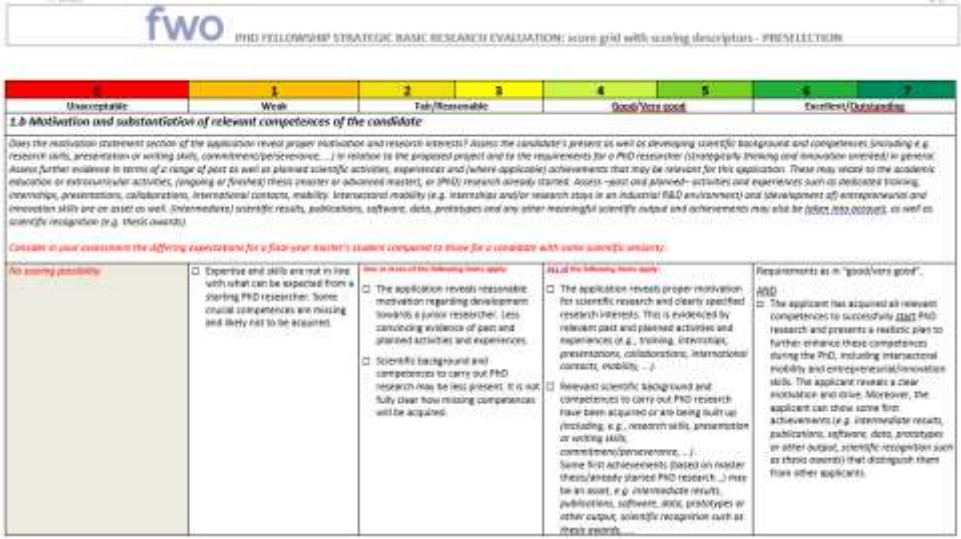
PHD FELLOWSHIP: scoring descriptors criterion "Candidate" (preselection)

0	1	2 3	4 5	6 7
Unacceptable	Weak	Fair/Reasonable	Good/Very good	Excellent/Outstanding

1.a Study results (academic education)

In the '**Study narrative**' section in the application, applicants can refer to evidence of having distinguished themselves during their studies. One can refer to study results s during education, particular situations that may have - (positively or negatively) - influenced the study trajectory. Results of additional studies/diplomas, the (bachelor or) attended, or other specific assets can be considered as well. Depending on whether the master studies are already concluded, the narrative should be supplemented with university study group), provided by the applicants. Students from non-Flemish universities should provide either a percentile score (if available), or at least their rank with detailed course grades should be provided. Bachelor percentiles in particular should, if possible, be complemented by intermediate master study results. These quantitativ assessment based on the study narrative provided by the applicant.

No scoring possibility	☐ The academic trajectory and study results do not stand out (maybe at the head of the pack within study group, but below average in the applicant population).	☐ Rather good academic trajectory and study results, situated well above average and at the sub top in the study group, as evidenced by the study narrative and by specific grades, percentiles or ranking.	☐ (Good to very good) academic trajectory and study results situated in the (broad) top of the study group, as evidenced by the study narrative and by specific grades, percentiles or ranking.



fwo PHD FELLOWSHIP STRATEGIC BASIC RESEARCH EVALUATION: score grid with scoring descriptors - PRESELECTION

0	1	2 3	4 5	6 7
Unacceptable	Weak	Fair/Reasonable	Good/Very good	Excellent/Outstanding

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

Does the motivation statement section of the application reveal proper motivation and research interests? Assess the candidate's present as well as developing scientific background and competences (including e.g. research skills, presentation or writing skills, commitment/perseverance, ...) in relation to the proposed project and to the requirements for a PhD researcher (strategically thinking and innovation oriented) in general. Assess further evidence in terms of a range of past as well as planned scientific activities, experiences and (where applicable) achievements that may be relevant for this application. These may relate to the academic education or extracurricular activities, (ongoing or finished) thesis (master or advanced master), or (PhD) research already started. Assess –past and planned– activities and experiences such as dedicated training, internships, presentations, collaborations, international contacts, mobility. Intersectoral mobility (e.g. internships and/or research stays in an industrial R&D environment) and (development of) entrepreneurial and innovation skills are an asset as well. Intermediate/ scientific results, publications, software, data, prototypes and any other meaningful scientific output and achievements may also be taken into account, as well as scientific recognition (e.g. thesis awards).

Consider in your assessment the differing expectations for a four-year master's student compared to those for a candidate with some scientific seniority.

No scoring possibility	☐ Expertise and skills are not in line with what can be expected from a starting PhD researcher. Some crucial competences are missing and likely not to be acquired.	One or more of the following items apply: ☐ The application reveals reasonable motivation regarding development towards a junior researcher. Less convincing evidence of past and planned activities and experiences. ☐ Scientific background and competences to carry out PhD research may be less present. It is not fully clear how missing competences will be acquired.	All of the following items apply: ☐ The application reveals proper motivation for scientific research and clearly specified research interests. This is evidenced by relevant past and planned activities and experiences (e.g., training, internships, presentations, collaborations, international contacts, mobility, ...). ☐ Relevant scientific background and competences to carry out PhD research have been acquired or are being built up (including, e.g., research skills, presentation or writing skills, commitment/perseverance, ...). Some first achievements (based on master thesis/already started PhD research, ...) may be an asset, e.g. intermediate results, publications, software, data, prototypes or other output, scientific recognition such as thesis awards.	Requirements as in "good/very good", AND ☐ The applicant has acquired all relevant competences to successfully start PhD research and presents a realistic plan to further enhance these competences during the PhD, including intersectoral mobility and entrepreneurial/innovation skills. The applicant reveals a clear motivation and drive. Moreover, the applicant can show some first achievements (e.g. intermediate results, publications, software, data, prototypes or other output, scientific recognition such as thesis awards) that distinguish them from other applicants.

Evaluation criteria - SB

- **Step 1: Preselection PhD fellowships** strategic basic research

Candidate 50%

- **Study results (academic education)**
  - → Evidence of standing out
  - → Meaningful scientific output
  - → Output or impact beyond publications
- **Motivation & relevant competences**
  - → Motivation and research interests
  - → Activities, skills and experiences
  - → Scientific background and competences

Project 30%

- **Scientific quality, relevance and challenge, originality**
  - → Originality and contribution to the state of the art
  - → Scientific risks and challenges
- **Quality research approach, feasibility**
  - → Methodology
  - → Feasibility and risk mitigation

Application potential 20%

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

Evaluation criteria - SB

- **Step 2: Interview PhD fellowships** strategic basic research

Candidate 50%

- **Competence as PhD researcher**
  - → *Knowledge of the research field*
  - → *Insight in project approach and positioning*
  - → *Reasoning skills and critical scientific mindset*
  - → *Motivation*
- **Potential competence as strategically thinking and innovation-oriented researcher**
  - → *Insight in strategic importance & positioning project*
  - → *Notions of economic/societal landscape (IPR, players, innovations)*

Project 30%

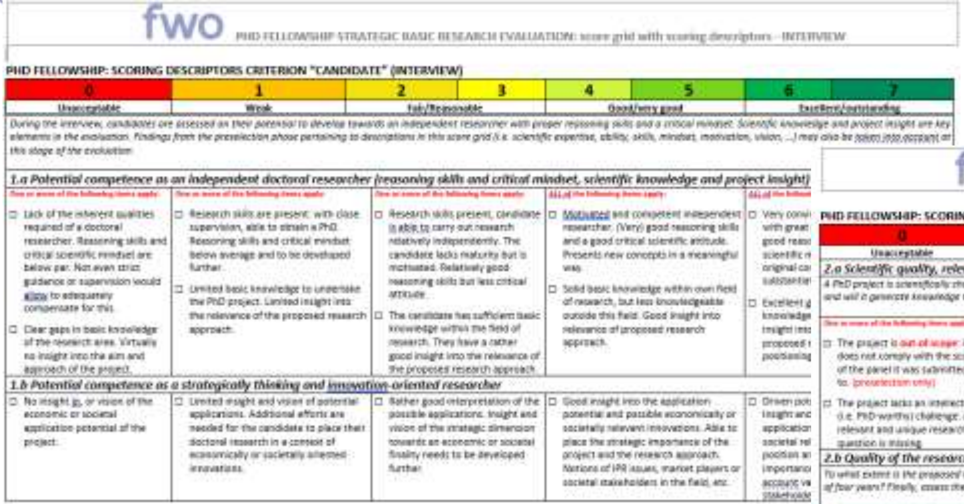
Criteria preselection

Application potential 20%

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

Evaluation criteria - SB

- Scoring grids PhD fellowships strategic basic research (preselection/interview)

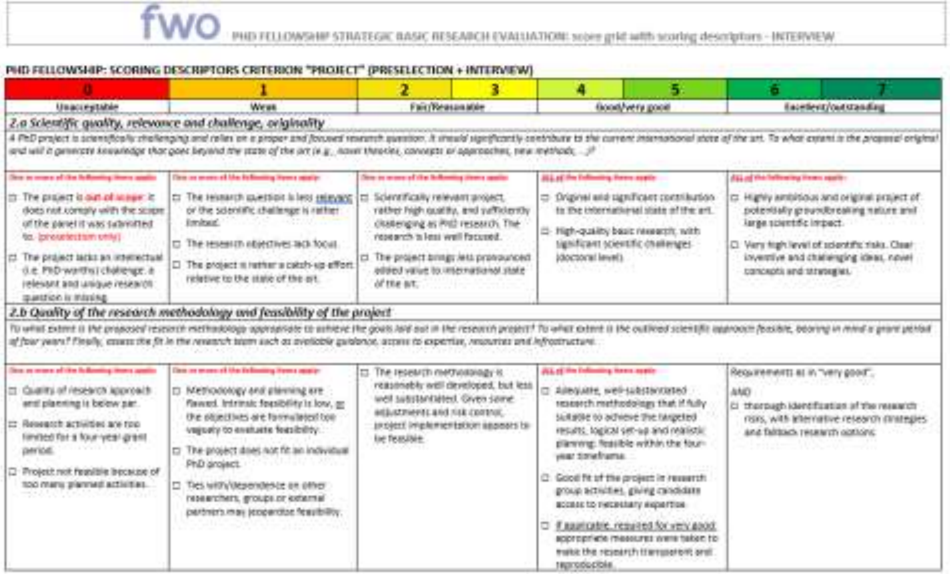

fwo PHD FELLOWSHIP STRATEGIC BASIC RESEARCH EVALUATION: score grid with scoring descriptors – INTERVIEW

PHD FELLOWSHIP: SCORING DESCRIPTORS CRITERION "CANDIDATE" (INTERVIEW)

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Unacceptable	Weak	Fair/Reasonable		Good/very good		Excellent/outstanding	

1.a Potential competence as an independent doctoral researcher (reasoning skills and critical mindset, scientific knowledge and project insight)

1.b Potential competence as a strategically thinking and innovation-oriented researcher


fwo PHD FELLOWSHIP STRATEGIC BASIC RESEARCH EVALUATION: score grid with scoring descriptors – INTERVIEW

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

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Unacceptable	Weak	Fair/Reasonable		Good/very good		Excellent/outstanding	

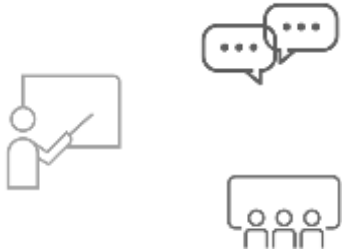
2.a Scientific quality, relevance and challenge, originality

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

Evaluation criteria – attention points

- **Evaluation of candidate** 
  - → Considers **various researcher profiles and scientific accomplishments**
    - × Range of scientifically relevant activities, skills, experiences and achievements
  - → Considers the **scientific seniority**
    - × Expectations differ between a last year master student and a candidate with scientific experience

Interview



- **Pitch (5') + interview (15')**
  - → Opportunity to mention achievements since submission
  - → Interview guidelines to be available on the webpage (updated April 2026)
- **Evaluation criteria: distinct from preselection**
  - → Focus on competence as PhD researcher
  - → Findings from preselection will only differentiate equally strong candidates
- **Practical details:**
  - → In-person (preferred) or remote (requires justification)
  - → Interview dates: between 31 Aug. and 30 Sep. 2026 at FWO, Brussels
  - → Invitations sent via email: 11 June 2026 (SB) and 30 June 2026 (FR)
  - → Interview data per panel will be published on the webpage in April 2026

Selection procedure

Distribution

- → **Available PhD fellowships (FR and SB)**: 488
- → **90% fellowships**: proportionally distributed to each panel based on the succes rate
- → **10% fellowships (wildcards)**: assigned to the best remaining candidates after all panel selections
- → **Additional PhD fellowships**: offered by co-hosting organizations (Plantentuin Meise, INBO, VITO, WL)
- → **Scores**: all criteria (candidate, project, interdisciplinarity and application potential) ≥4

Process

- → Interview invitations: 2 × quota candidates invited per panel
- → Direct assignments: (max.) quota fellowships directly allocated by panel
- → Wildcard & additional PhD fellowships: best ranked candidates selected from the reserve list
- → Reserve list: ungranted candidates sent to universities for other opportunities (e.g., BOF)

Feedback reports

- **Compiled by panel member responsible for feedback**
- **feedback includes:**
  - → Comments based on panel consensus decisions and scores
  - → Template addressing all criteria
  - → Feedback on both the written application and interview performance
- **Important:**
  - → Do NOT contact panel members
  - → No further correspondence regarding feedback

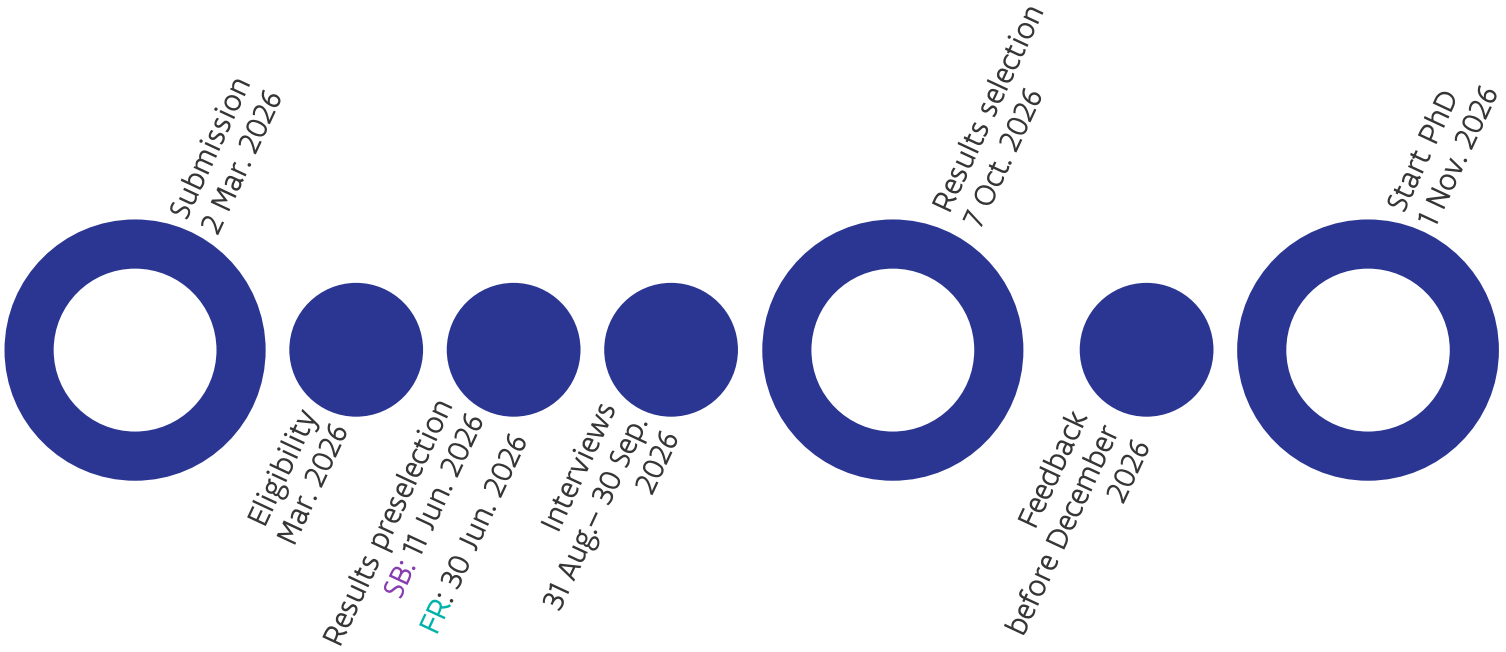
1 Out in preselection
- scores preselection
- panel comments

→ Feedback beginning of September 2026

2 Out in interview *or* grant
- scores interview
- synthesis panel comments preselection & interview

→ Feedback after decision board (before December 2026)

Timeline call 2026



Outline

1. FWO mission & key numbers
2. PhD fellowships at a glance
3. Evaluation & selection process
4. Tips & tricks
5. Further reading & contact

Highlight novelty

- What is potentially groundbreaking about your research?
- What will the most important contribution to the state of the art? Novel theories, new mechanistic insights, new concepts, new methodologies?
- How does your research approach distinguish itself from ongoing research?

High risk/high reward

- FWO wants to support projects that involve a fair scientific risk (contrary to practical risks).

- Clearly indicate which are the main scientific risks related to your project, e.g.,
  - → what are methodological challenges that need to be overcome?
  - → how large is the knowledge gap?

Specify your own contribution

- What is your own contribution to the research project
- How did others contribute to it?
- For SB: which non-academic stakeholders impacted the proposal (e.g., in terms of research questions or research design)

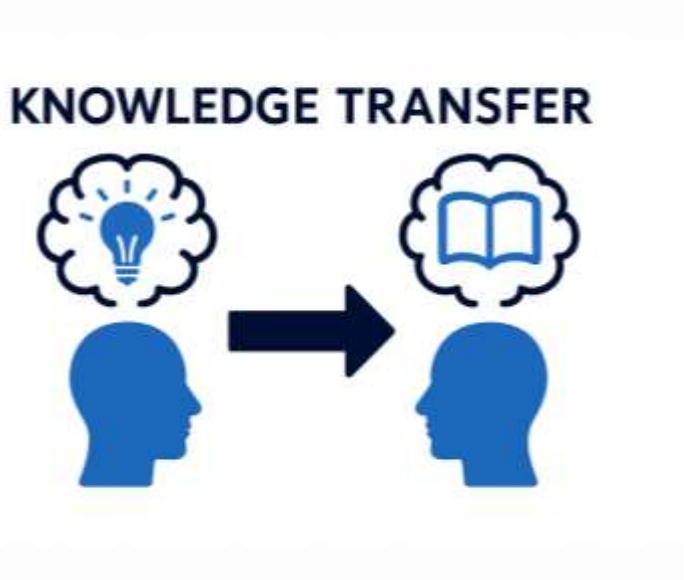
- Make sure you are sufficiently involved in writing up the proposal and all the choices to be made for the project

- Please note that this is a personal fellowship and not a research project!

The interview

- Your presentation is not a sales pitch
- Keep in mind the majority of panel members is non-Belgian, e.g. when contextualizing your research and giving examples
- Approach the panel's questions with an open mind – don't feel offended or criticized
- The interview is short, and panel members often have many questions; be thorough but succinct

Strategic basic research



- Thoroughly prepare the valorisation part
  - → for whom is the research relevant and why (societal and/or economic players)?
  - → what makes your approach different or better than current alternatives?
  - → how do you envisage knowledge transfer?
    - × Consider Intellectual Property and the exploitation route
    - × Think about scalability and adaptability

Parallel applications

- Be transparent about parallel applications
- If your promotor is working on related projects, make sure you are aware of this; specify the overlap and complementarity
- No double funding!

Outline

1. FWO mission & key numbers
2. PhD fellowships at a glance
3. Evaluation & selection process
4. Tips & tricks
5. Further reading & contact

Further reading & contact

- **Submitting your application: FWO e-portal @ www.fwo.be**

- **Programme webpages FR / SB**
  - → Regulations (legal version: Dutch)
    - General / PhD programme / bench fee / peer review
  - → Supporting documents
    - This presentation / Screenshots e-application
    - Video on how to prepare an application
    - Scoring grids (on website)
    - Instructions and guidelines interview – v. 2026 to be published later

- **Help! Who to contact**
  - → Your host organization's research coordination office
  - → FWO additional info & specific questions
    - X *FWO account administrators per domain*
  - → FWOhelpdesk@fwo.be
    - X (e-portal/IT problems only)

Stef SLEMBROUCK

Social Sciences and Humanities

- G&M1: Sciences of Law and Criminology
- G&M2: Economics, Business Administration and Management
- G&M3: Psychology, Pedagogy and Educational Sciences
- G&M4: Media and Communication Studies, Political Science, Social Work, Social and Cultural Anthropology and Sociology
- G&M4a: Communication Sciences and Political Science (From call 2026 onwards)
- G&M4b: Social Work, Social and Cultural Anthropology and Sociology (From call 2026 onwards)

Stef SLEMBROUCK

Social Sciences and Humanities

- Cult1: Linguistics
- Cult2: Art, Art History, Architecture, Design and Literature
- Cult2a: Arts, History of Art, Architecture and Design (From call 2026 onwards)
- Cult2b: Literature, Film and Theatre (From call 2026 onwards)
- Cult3: History and Archaeology
- Cult4: Theology and Religious Studies
- Cult5: Philosophy and Ethics

SB-SSH1 – Legal Sciences and Criminology; Economics, Business Economics and Management

SB-SSH2 - Psychology, Pedagogy and Educational Sciences; Communication Sciences, Political Sciences, Social Work, Social and Cultural Anthropology and Sociology, Linguistics

SB-SSH3 - Arts, Art History, Architecture, Design and Literature; History and Archaeology; Theology and Religious Studies; Philosophy and Ethics

d panel

s and
anels

y come
under e.g. "informatics and data communication", "health sciences", etc.

4. **Talk to your advisor**
   - Make a list & tick the boxes for the various dimensions to be covered & talked about
   - Your advisor should be aware of discipline-specific and field-specific expectations

TIPS AND TRICKS (PROJECT)

Outline of STATE OF THE ART entails a motivation and justification of your selected topic and focus

”socio-economic”

”problem driven”

“scientifically salient”

1. Key issues in the field/discipline
2. Recent developments, incl. key publications
3. “Burning” issues, incl. the “why”, “what” and ”how”

WHAT YOU PROPOSE

TIPS AND TRICKS (PROJECT)

- DESIGN
  - Workload and workplan: be sufficiently **ambitious** but also present something which is **feasible** for a four-year period of research; your work plan is aligned carefully with the sequence of RQ-focused tasks
  - A research question can often be broken down into a set of **sub-questions** which correspond to a series of work packages
  - **Data collection, processing and analysis for each sub-RQ** (and the RQ more generally) **must be explicit** in terms of what kind of data, how much data, which (sub)RQ is being answered, which protocols of analysis and interpretation are being applied

TIPS AND TRICKS (PROJECT)

- RISKS AND CHALLENGES: **show that you are aware** of them and make sure you are equipped with alternative/remedial courses of action
- RESEARCH STAY(S) ABROAD
  - Plan at least 1? Plan 2?
  - With different units?
  - Choice must be motivated
  - Obtain approval/an invitation beforehand
- ETHICS
  - Informed consent
  - GDPR
  - Data sharing
  - Organise access ahead of panel decision
  - Clear permission/collaboration with any external partners beforehand
  - N/S-dynamics

TIPS AND TRICKS (PROJECT)

- OUTCOMES & DELIVERABLES
  - **Be explicit**
  - **Scientific output** (articles, etc.), but not limited to it: e.g. cash in on **socio-economic relevance**
  - **Active strategies** for dissemination

TIPS AND TRICKS (RESEARCHER) (RESEARCH UNIT)

- **A strategic biography** …
- Questions which invite attention
  - Why do research? Why embark on a PhD?
  - Why are you well-positioned and well-equipped to do this kind of research?
    - Skills
    - Training
    - Particular (scientific) experiences
    - …
- Embedded in unit
  - Provide a motivation for any reference
  - Promotor(s), other projects and doctoral research
- Show that you are aware of relevant (ongoing) research conducted in Flanders + beyond

GRANT WRITING FWO PHD FELLOWSHIPS:

TIPS AND TRICKS

ELFRIDE DE BAERE - LIFE SCIENCES

Info session FWO PhD fellowships 2026

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

OUTLINE

- Questions before you start
  - why me (candidate), why this research (project), with whom (project positioning)
- FO or SB?
- Application
  - General parts for the portal
  - Project outline
- Scoring grid
- Cases
- Take home messages

WHY ME? (CANDIDATE)

- Submit now or next time?
- Study results: percentile, narrative
- Motivation and competences:
  - motivation statement
  - scientific activities
  - experiences and achievements
  - master dissertation

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

WHY ME? (CANDIDATE)

- Motivation and competences:
  - research achievements & output
  - other skills
  - mobility (previous, planned)
  - awards
- Conclusion: SWOT-analysis of the candidate
- Subscore candidate

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

WHY THIS RESEARCH? (PROJECT)

- Originality
  - Brilliant idea, innovative, knowledge gap, important problem
  - Hypothesis-driven, avoid descriptive project (‘fishing expedition’)
- Feasibility
  - Don’t duplicate an existing research project: you apply for an individual mandate, not for a project of a whole team
  - Provide a realistic work plan
  - In-house expertise, collaborations
  - Equipment, team, matching funds

WHY THIS RESEARCH? (PROJECT)

- Focus
- Methodology
  - Proof-of-concept
  - Feasibility
  - Risk assessment and contingency plan
- Conclusion: SWOT-analysis of the project proposal
- Subscore project

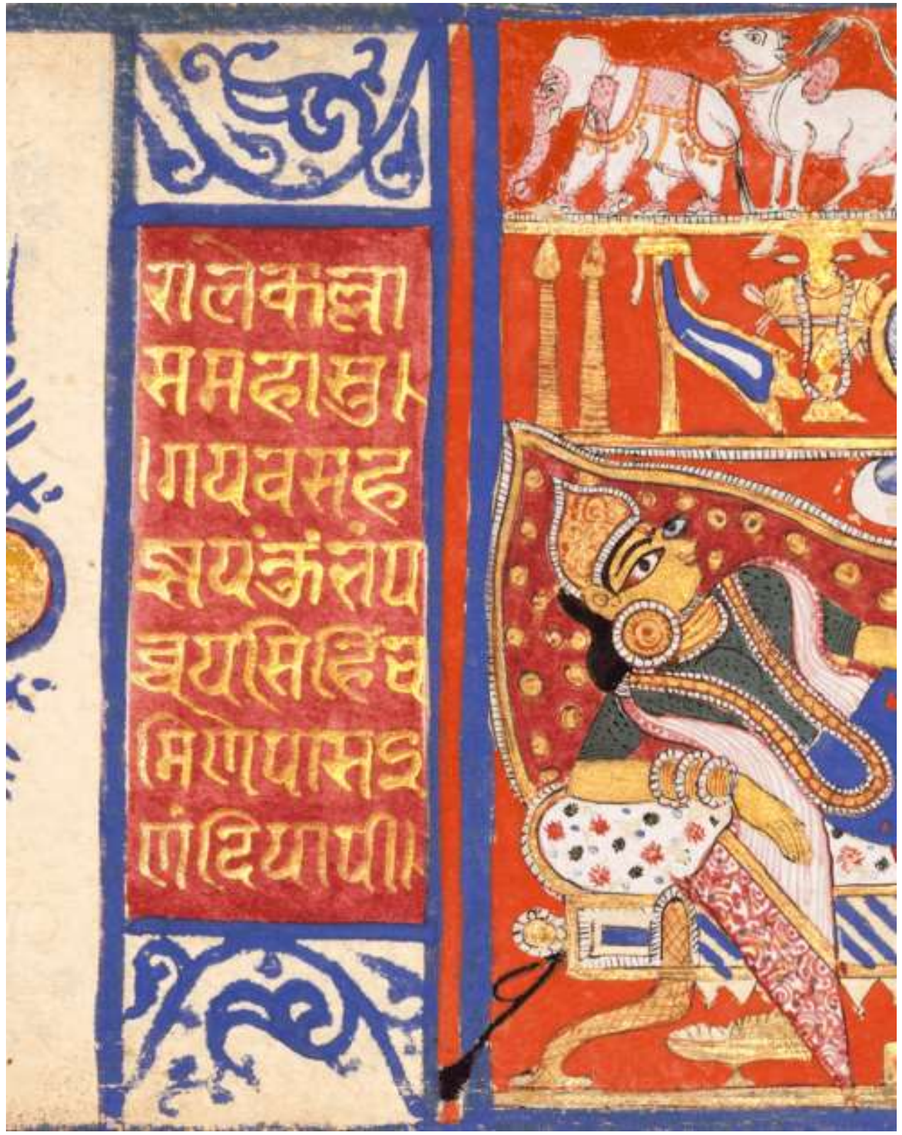
UNIVERSITEIT GENT

WITH WHOM? (RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT)

- How does this research fit with research environment
- In-house expertise: methodology, equipment, research topic, team
- Scientific leadership and excellence
  - Output, team, funding
  - International reputation and network
- Recommendation by supervisors!

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

PROJECT PROPOSAL: GENERAL



- Summary
  - English and Dutch
  - Make it accessible
- Disciplines and keywords
  - Can help to find appropriate referees and panel
- Motivation statement
  - Try to be inspiring
  - Emphasize new elements: motivation, research interests, competences, but also career development!

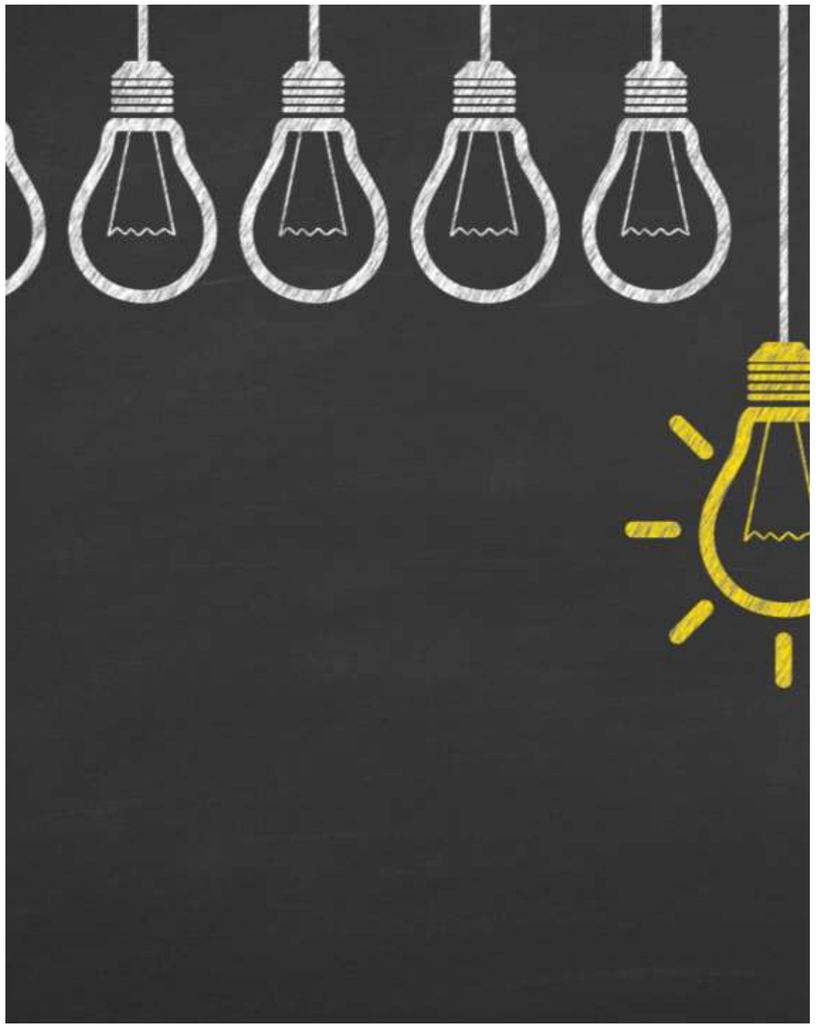
PROJECT PROPOSAL: GENERAL (2)

- Host institutions
  - Main Flemish supervisor
  - Co-supervisor (optional)
  - Collaborations
- Project description
  - Separate pdf file to be uploaded (size!)
  - Max. 10 pages

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

PROJECT OUTLINE

- Follow the FWO guidelines
- Choose the right panel: motivation!
- Start well in advance, ask advice from peers and experts
- Take into account feedback from previous applications
- Make your proposal accessible to generalists (panel members) who do speed reading
- Pay attention to style, format, avoid too many abbreviations or too much bold text



PROJECT OUTLINE (2)

- Rationale and positioning (state-of-the-art)
  - Position of your project in international context
- Scientific research objectives
  - Objectives
  - Hypotheses
  - Challenge, innovation
  - Envisaged fundamental and mechanistic insights

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

PROJECT OUTLINE (3)

- Methodology and work plan
  - Rationale of methodology chosen
  - Preliminary data, expertise, collaborations
  - Provide figures, power analysis if relevant
  - Risk assessment and contingency
  - Focus and feasibility
  - Interconnection of work packages, avoid interdependency
  - Novelty
  - Work plan for 4 years: graph, timeline, milestones, collaborations

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

PROJECT OUTLINE (4)

- References
- Other funding
  - Specify matching funds but avoid duplicate funding
- Science communication
  - Mention your social media

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

PROJECT OUTLINE (5)

- Peer review
  - Motivation of expert panel
  - Carefully choose the panel that fits best
    - Check the scopes
  - Multidisciplinary panel
    - Strong motivation needed

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

PROJECT OUTLINE (6)

- Ethics
  - Extensive section
  - Start well in time!
- Statement about research integrity
  - Carefully read it
- DMP

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

FINAL SCORE

- Based on
  - Subscores for candidate and project
  - Preselection and interview
  - The proposal as a whole (holistic)
- Scoring is ‘comparative’
  - Within the set of proposals during the ongoing application round
  - Scores reflect a comparison between the different applications

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

FINAL SCORE

- Range of scores: scoring grid
- Fundable
  - top 5% of the proposals
  - top 10% of the proposals
- Fundable if the budget allows it
  - top 20% of the proposals
- Below fundable range
  - top 50% of the proposals
  - lower half of the proposals
- Mostly 3 pre-reporters from panel: they advise on final score
- Scoring grids pre-selection and interview available on FWO website

UNIVERSITEIT
GENT

CASE 1

- PhD fellowship FO (MED7ASP)
- First application
- Not invited to interview
- Feedback 02/09/22
- **Candidate: 4**
- **Project: 5.75**

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

CASE 1

– Assessment criterion “candidate” (score 4) MEDASP7

Strengths

Top 12% in Master studies. One poster presented in Ghent and a paper being written from Master thesis. The candidate is involved in scientific events occurring in 2022, where she will present posters and participate to student competitions. She has also served as the student representative, witnessing to her initiative taking, her communication and interaction skills. She has mentioned only MSc lab training which should have included also the international mobility, yet it was cancelled due to covid travel restriction. The later is now part of the PhD proposal (WP3).

The candidate has started her PhD already. She has obtained a diploma for performing animal experimentation, attended a course on good clinical practice and and is currently following a recognised post-graduate as to be able to carry out the project. She is registered for a course to learn how to use R. She is involved in writing a paper in She is particularly motivated by her subject.

Weaknesses

In spite of an upward trajectory during the master studies, the results do not stand out.

It is not clear from motivation statement what are the long-term career plans of the candidate and how she is planning to develop her non-research skills along the doctoral training.

Conclusions

Although there is a strong motivation, the academic results of the candidate are not as excellent as could be expected. Long term career plans should be clearer as well as strategy to develop non-research skills.

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

CASE 1

– Assessment criterion “project” (score **5.75**) MEDASP7

Weaknesses

The project seems as a real tour de force and presents high risk. For example, generation of GC model in WP1 and validation studies employing dCas9 system in WP2. The project is ambitious and risky as it requires high quality data from multi-omics analyses that must be integrated in a meaningful picture. Clearly and convincingly identified risks are presented, but the contingency plan does to address likely difficulties in interpreting the data, especially when dealing with domestic animals where genome annotation is not as good as in mice or humans, such as goats. The functional experiments on characterisation of non-coding variants could represent a real challenge and on its own could have been a solid PhD project.

Indeed, the general aim and proposed workflow of this project shows the (over)ambition of the applicant. In addition, the timeline of the project is linear with all WPs starting practically at the same time, thus, it is not clear how the candidate is going to manage it.

Information on additional training that the applicant would require to conduct this research project (research skills and transferable skills), mobility, dissemination (public, conferences), the publishing strategy are lacking.

Conclusions

A scientifically exciting projects that appears over-ambitious for a PhD.

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

CASE 1

- Re-application 2023: action plan
  - Candidate (higher score needed):
    - Ranking study cohort cannot be changed
    - CV building: A1 paper first author, active participation meetings
    - Research skills, foreign stay, career development
  - Project:
    - First WP conducted: preliminary data
    - Improvement of focus, fine tuning of ambition

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

CASE 1

- Re-application 2023:
  - Candidate:
    - CV building: A1 paper first author (pending), active participation meetings
    - Research skills
    - Foreign stay planned, collaboration with foreign team (stem cell model)
  - Project:
    - First WP conducted: preliminary data (stem cell model, multiomics)
    - Improvement of focus, fine tuning of ambition
  - Same panel (MED7ASP)
  - Invited to interview
    - Intensive prep, motivation, passion, hard work
    - Second and last chance
  - Granted! 06/10/23
  - **Candidate: 7 (!). Project: 5.75.**

CASE 2

- PhD fellowship FO (MED5ASP)
- First application
- Invited to interview
- Not granted
- Feedback 17/11/22
- **Candidate: 5.5**
- **Project: 4.75**

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

CASE 2

– Assessment criterion “candidate” (score **5.5**) MED5ASP

Feedback

She has a study result of 87.20 at Ghent University for a bachelor degree and a ranking in the P95 percentile is an excellent qualification.The applicant seems to be a highly motivated student with broad interests, but a clear idea how to develop an academic research career does not get through. A description of wet lab skills is missing and thus, hard to be judged. Should have expertise on

manuscript on her findings from her master studies in the field of , is in preparation. There is no broader background that goes beyond general training in the areas of

Score: 5,5

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

CASE 2

- Assessment criterion “project” (score **4.75**) MED5ASP
  - Project killed by the panel (member), non-believer of key hypothesis, 4 pages feedback on the project…

Conclusion:

This is a nice and well prepared hypothesis-driven project that however comes with some flaws. The applicant will study

sessment of potential cross-species differences is totally missing. Also, a discussion why the *ore affected by dysfunctional* *than* *much higher levels is lagging - this question was however quite convincingly discussed during the interview. In this line of thinking – the applicant does not present evidence that* *s comparable in* *and human only presenting data from human samples. As one can deduce from the project plan, it seems as if the* *are not yet available which poses some extra risk to WP2/3/4. Given this and the specific concerns listed above, the feasibility of the project and the chance of collecting data relevant for human disease is assumed as moderate.*

Feedback based on the interview

- *To consider working with a KO mouse model and/or alternatively better justify the use of the* *model.*
- *Include studies on* *is very relevant for photoreceoptor function as well, so why not include studies on those e.g. in human retinal organoids? The collaborating lab also has extensive expertise in generating*

- *Consider which cell biological readouts are the most essential one’s and focus on them ideally providing some preliminary data to demonstrate feasibility and hands on experience of the applicant.*
- *This is an exciting and in principal very important project. However, it needs to be more focussed in terms of functional readouts and the use of the chosen model systems needs better justification.*

Score: 4,75

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

CASE 2

- Re-application 2023: action plan
  - Candidate (higher score would be plus):
    - Ranking study cohort: top
    - CV building: A1 paper first author, active participation meetings
    - Research skills, foreign stay
    - Higher score to be expected
  - Project (higher score needed):
    - Fundamental concerns raised by panel member(s): non-believer of key hypothesis, did not like the proposed animal model
    - Consider change of topic, change of panel

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

CASE 2

- Re-application 2023:
  - Candidate:
    - Ranking study cohort: top
    - CV building: A1 paper first author, active participation meetings
    - Research skills (+++), foreign stay (UCL/Crick)
    - Higher score to be expected
  - Project:
    - Change of topic
    - Change of panel (MED2ASP)
  - Invited to interview
    - Intensive prep
    - Second and last chance
  - Granted! 06/10/23
  - Feedback report 16/10/23
  - **Candidate: 6. Project: 5.25**

CASE 3

- PhD fellowship SB (SBMED5)
- First application
- Invited to interview
- PhD fellowship granted
- Feedback 20/10/22
- **Candidate: 5**
- **Project: 4.5**
- **Application potential: 5.75**

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

CASE 3

– Assessment criterion “candidate” (score **5**) SBMED5

Feedback

Overall the candidate had a suitable academic background: she obtained a BSc in with a reasonable pass but then went on to complete a masters in with a cum Laude grade with strong grades in most courses especially in genetics which is where her passion seems to be. The candidate has developed laboratory skills working in academic and not-academic laboratories before the start of the PhD. A research stay abroad is planned for the end of the current year to develop technical skills with iPSC-derived RPE. During the interview the scientific maturity of the candidate and her passion for the project was clearly shown in her answer to the technical and more strategic questions.

Score: 5

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

CASE 3

– Assessment criterion “project” (score **4,5**) SBMED5

Feedback

This is an extremely practical project which has a very clear goal with well defined outcomes. The project aims at using a CRISPR/iPSC-based approach to elucidate uncertain variation in , with the goal to provide a better molecular diagnosis for patients eligible for gene therapy. The proposal combines a series of aims with an increase level of risk and novelty. In particular Aim1 although feasible seems a bit trivial for a PhD proposal, as it is based on a published assay to test in vitro function. Although important for patients' diagnoses it seems scientifically less challenging than other parts of the proposal. WP4 is in contrast the more innovative part of the proposal aiming at testing the regulatory landscape of in RPE.

Score: 4,5

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

CASE 3

- Assessment criterion “application potential” (score **5,75**) SBMED5

Feedback

This is a totally patient focused project and the immediate applications are both tangible and far reaching. Identifying patients who could benefit from an existing therapy which aims to prevent them from losing their sight could not be more worthwhile. The determination of new previously unstudied and unknown genetic variants in patients could make them eligible for ground breaking treatment and the close relationship between the ophthalmology and genetics departments should facilitate the inclusion of patients for an approved treatment. The impact of this project could be huge to the lives of patients suffering from rare and incurable form of blindness, there is an approved treatment and this project aims to characterize patients at the molecular level to determine if they could benefit from a groundbreaking treatment.

Score: 5,75

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- Check your eligibility
- Carefully weigh your chances before you start
- Consult the FWO website, follow the guidelines
- Start well in advance and allocate sufficient time
- Ask advice to PIs, peers and evaluators
- Originality, innovation, focus and feasibility are key
- Every detail matters
- Follow your gut feeling, and be passionate

UNIVERSITEIT
GENT

GOOD LUCK!

Contact:

Prof. Elfride De Baere
Center for Medical Genetics Ghent (CMGG)
Campus Ghent University Hospital, MRB1,
entrance 34, room 110.029
Corneel Heymanslaan 10
9000 Ghent, Belgium
Elfride.DeBaere@UGent.be

UNIVERSITEIT
GENT