UNIVERSITEIT
GENT

INFORMATION SESSION FWO PHD FELLOWSHIP

- 09:00 **FWO PhD Fellowship** + Q&A
  - *dr. Alexandra Vandervelde (FWO)*
- 10:30 *(5 minute break)*

- 10:35 **FWO-application: Tips & Tricks** + Q&A
  - *prof. Stef Slembrouck (Ghent University)*
  - *prof. Elfride De Baere (Ghent University)*
  - (*excused: prof. Veronique Van Speybroeck)*

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INFORMATION

- **Website FWO**: https://www.fwo.be/en/fellowships-funding/phd-fellowships/
- **Website UGent**: https://www.ugent.be/en/research/funding/national/fwo/phdfellowships.htm
- Research Co-ordination Office
  - **Vlaams-Federaal@ugent.be**
  - Fien De Block
  - Patricia Vanbrabandt
  - Thijs De Jaeger
  - Sien Smits

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

Opening new horizons

Applying for an FWO PhD fellowship

Info session - call 2024

December 2023

PREFACE

- What you should learn today…
  - *to understand the evaluation & selection process*
  - *to prepare an application that meets the evaluation criteria*

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

- 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. Preparing your application
5. … further reading & contact

Research Foundation Flanders
Opening new horizons

WELCOME TO THE FWO

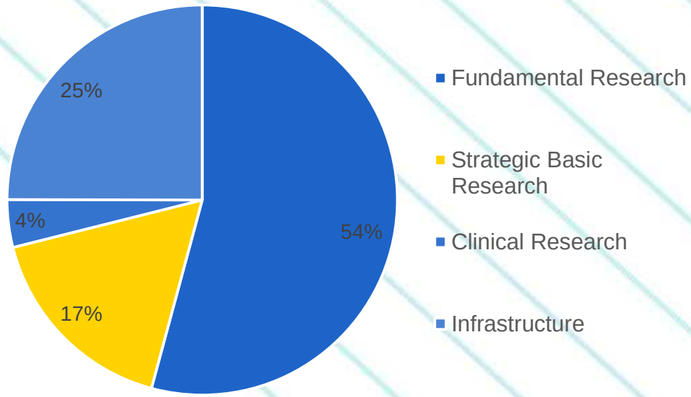
- Our mission
  - Funding of *fundamental* & *strategic* research
  - Funding programmes
    - *Individual researchers* (pre-, postdoc, mobility)
    - *Research teams* (projects - *fundamental/strategic*, *'brain gain' Odysseus,…)*
    - Research infrastructure
    - Scientific prizes

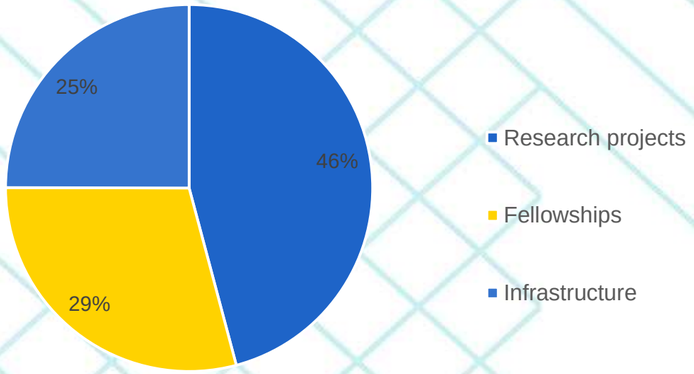
- Principles
  - Bottom-up in all disciplines
  - Scientific excellence and interuniversity (incl. research institutes) competition
  - Transparent and equal opportunities

Opening new horizons…

The FWO by numbers

Budget 2023: **406 MEUR**





Fellowships (1 Oct 23)

~1700 PhD fellows
~ 800 Postdocs

68% PhD fellows 32%
40% Postdocs 60%

55% PhD fellows 45%
45% Postdocs 55%

Call 2023

27.2% PhD fellows
26.0% Postdoc

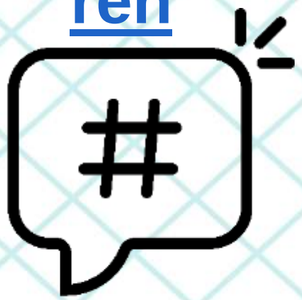
FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA: @FWOVLAANDEREN

Spotlight on FWO-reseachers

Researcher stories

“De Podkast”

#FWOVlaanderen



Stay tuned!

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FWO PHD FELLOWSHIP AT A GLANCE

- Target group
  - Early-career researchers who want to pursue a PhD by performing independent research
  - Both Fundamental Research *(FR)* and Strategic Basic research *(SB)*
  - Apply up to 2 times for PhD fellowship
  - All nationalities (EEA, nEEA)

- 4-year grants
  - Fellowship grant **€2,420**/net amount per month (minimum)
  - Bench fee **€3,720**/yearly

- Key dates call 2024
  - Mar 1, 2024 Application deadline
  - June, 2024 Preselection
  - Aug 28 – Sep 27, 2024 Interview
  - Oct 4, 2024 Communication results
  - Nov 1, 2024 Start date fellowship

PHD FELLOWSHIP PHILOSOPHY

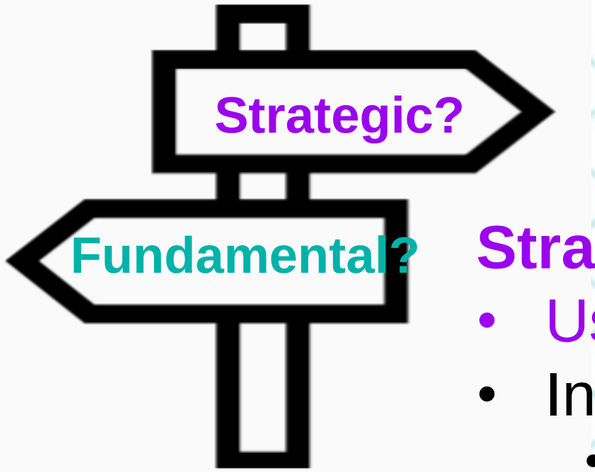
- Motivation – you want to develop…
  - … your own research ideas into a concrete 4-year PhD project
  - … yourself into an independent researcher

- Approach:
  - Shape your own original research project and find a supervisor (and co-supervisor) to support you in this endeavor

- Personal fellowship versus other PhD opportunities:
  - PhD position on FWO supported projects (FR, SBO, TBM)
  - PhD fellowship on applied research (VLAIO - Baekeland)

PHD FELLOWSHIP: FUNDAMENTAL VS STRATEGIC

Both fellowships: challenging & original research (*PhD level*)



Fundamental research

- Curiosity driven

- Applications may follow
  - Societal & economic benefits
  - Long term

Strategic basic research:

- Use inspired
- Innovative applications
  - Products, processes, services
  - Long term perspective
- Economic added value

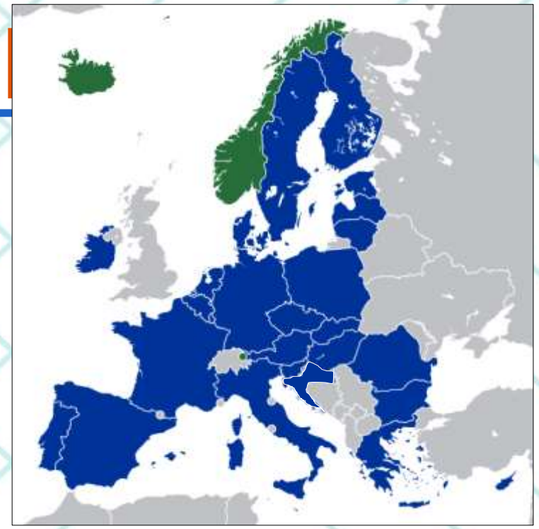
PhD -> strategically thinking and innovation oriented scientist

PhD -> independent scientists with a critical mindset

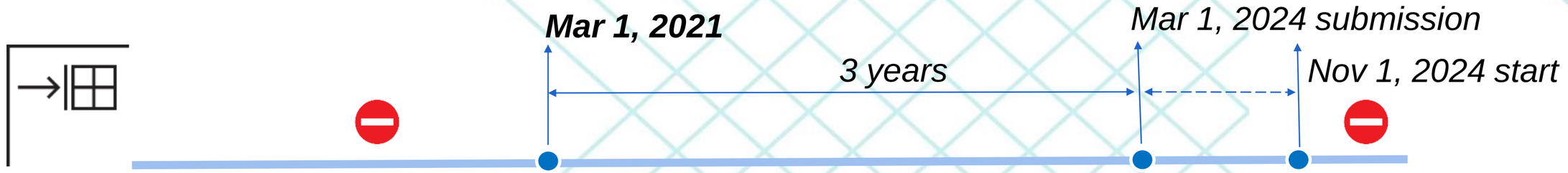
ELIGIBILITY: MASTER DIPLO

Master diploma obtained at Flemish university or equivalent

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



EEA landen



Extensions eligibility window (+1 Y):
(+x Y):

Regulations Art 26 maternity-, parental-, sickness leave > 3m

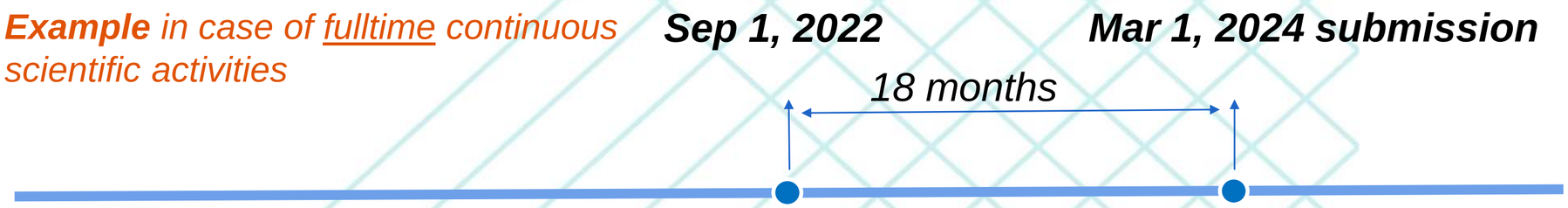
Phys./pharm.-specialist or resident veterinarian >1Y traini

ELIGIBILITY: SCIENTIFIC SENIORITY

Maximum 18 months of continuous scientific activities since first master

- All scientific activities considered, both at academia and industry
  - Accounted for employment %
  - Counted as on **March 1, 2024!**
  - Not during additional or advanced master studies
  - Teaching, labwork, technician, manager, etc. are no scientific activities
- Proof by contracts, function description and CV
- Question?
  - Contact research coordination department at your university
  - Contact FWO by mail, **including contracts, function description, CV**

***Example** in case of fulltime continuous scientific activities*



ELIGIBILITY: HOST ORGANISATION

A promotor at one of the main host institutions

- Main host institutions:
  - VUB, KU Leuven, UGent, UHasselt, UAntwerpen
  - Evangelic Protestant Faculty Leuven
  - Faculty for Protestant Theology in Brussels
- Main promotor:
  - Regulations Art.10
  - FWO invites main promotor for recommendation letter

(Optional) Co-promotor at an additional host institution:

- Additional host institutions:
  - Flemish/federal research institutes (research location)
  - Industry
  - Limited list: pick list in application form
- Co-promotor(s):
  - Minimum postdoc level
  - FWO notifies co-promotors – No recommendation letter!

ADDITIONAL FELLOWSHIPS / BENCH FEES

FWO fellowships

- Meise Botanic Garden – FWO fellowships (FR / SB, 1-2 fellowships)
  - *Collection-based biodiversity and conservation research*
- INBO – FWO fellowships (FR / SB, 1-2 fellowships)
  - *Flemish research and knowledge centre for nature and its sustainable management and use*
- VITO – FWO fellowships (FR / SB, 1-2 fellowships)
  - *(Sustainable) energy, materials, chemistry, health and land use*
- WL – FWO fellowships (FR / SB, 1-2 fellowships)
  - *Investigates the impact of human activity and nature on water systems and the consequences for navigation*

Principle

- Agreement on being *additional* host institute (before submitting application)
- “Seal-of-excellence” principle (approved by FWO but on reserve list)
- Fellowship under FWO regulations

Concurrently

- Kom op tegen kanker → Best ranked candidate in Med4 panel FR

No Frank De Winne call

OTHER PHD PROGRAMMES

- FWO Special PhD fellowship:
  - 1 year fellowship to complete PhD
  - 1 dedicated panel
  - Candidates currently not working in research *(deadline 1 Mar 2024)*

- European University Institute (EUI) fellowship
  - Social sciences & Humanities – Florence
  - Call currently open – Deadline **31 January 2024**

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

EUI fellowship

Obtaining your PhD in Florence?

- Have a look at Doctoral programme of the EUI
- Academic year 2024-2025: FWO will finance max. two EUI-fellowships for PhD students complying with eligibility criteria as set out by FWO

Have a look at the blogpost of two EUI alumni

PhD in four domains (EUI departments):

- Economics
- History and Civilisation
- Law
- Political and Social Sciences

Submission at EUI:

- **Submission deadline: January 31, 2024**
- Evaluation partly by FWO (first evaluation round)

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SUBMISSION TO EXPERT PANELS

FR.

Panels fellowships fundamental research (FR)

- Fellowships (PhD/postdoc) panels
- **Expert panel reform!** (next slides)
- 32 panels: 31 in 5 scientific domains + interdisciplinary panel (cross-domain)
- Updated panel members list published **March 2024**
  - ±12 members incl. scientific chair
  - >50% members with non-Flemish affiliation

SB

- Panels PhD fellowships strategic basic research (SB)
  - 24 SB panels
  - Updated panel members list published **March 2024**
    - ±12 members, moderated by FWO representative
    - >50% members with non-Flemish affiliation
    - ≥ 1/3 involved in R&D business enterprise sector

EVALUATION & SELECTION PROCESS FWO EXPERT PANELS REFORM (FR)

- **Panel structure** fundamental research
  - Fellowship panels (PhD/postdoc)
  - **32** panels: **31** in 5 scientific domains + 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
  - Cult2: Art, Art History, Architecture, Design and Literature
  - 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&M4: Media and Communication Studies, Political Science, 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 REFORM (FR)

- **Panels thoroughly reformed in 2022:**
  - **Med9** panel created
  - Thorough update of the scientific scope of **ALL** panels

    ➔ Check the scopes carefully!
  - New approach towards **multi- and interdisciplinary research**
- **More information:**
  - Digital brochure on FWO website
  - Webinar on FWO panel reform

Evaluation & selection process
FWO expert panels reform (FR)

- 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.
    - The disciplines are at the **same coordinated level**; each discipline is **essential** to achieve the expected 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)

FWO EXPERT PANELS (SB)

- **Panel structure** strategic basic research
  - **24** panels in 5 scientific domains
  - No Frank De Winne panel

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
SBGM - Social sciences and humanities
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, urogential system, hematology, gastroenterology, hepatology, endocrinology, metabolism and reproduction
SBMed8 - Health sciences
SBMed9 - Veterinary and animal production
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

Choose panel that best fits your application!

- Your responsibility to choose (& check!)
- **Motivate** choice (based on contribution to state of the art)
- Out-of-scope = application rejected

PROCESS: SINGLE SUBMISSION 2-PHASE EVALUATION & SELECTION

Phase 1

Remote assessment:
3 panel members

(online) panel meeting
consensus scoring & ranking

Rejected proposals

Feedback by panel

Retained for phase 2 interviews

Phase 2

Panel meeting:
interviews
consensus scoring & ranking

Rejected proposals

Selected candidates

Feedback by panel

EVALUATION BY EXPERT PANELS

Evaluation of your proposal:

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

2nd axis

- Attention to **various researcher profiles and research results**
  - Away from one-sided focus on classical output *(i.e. publications)*
  - Towards broader view on scientific accomplishments (cfr. *international frameworks DORA, CoARA*)
  - Research career: range of scientifically relevant activities, skills, experiences and achievements
  - Adapted application form and evaluation criteria
- Assessment takes into account what might be expected from a last year master student vs. a candidate with scientific seniority

SELECTED TO PHASE 2: INTERVIEWS

- Invitations and instructions **June 13** (**SB**) and **June 27** (**FO**) **2024** (end preselection)
- Interviews **28 Aug - 27 Sep 2024**
- @FWO in Brussels
- Interview format: pitch + Q&A
  - Interview instructions and guidelines will be made available
  - Opportunity to mention realizations since submission date
- Evaluation criteria different from preselection (criterion candidate)
  - Score grid interview
  - Focus on assessing the required competences as a PhD researcher
  - Not the performance but contents of what you say…

EVALUATION CRITERIA "CANDIDATE" & "PROJECT"

FR

Phase 1 preselection

Study results *(academic education)*

- *Evidence of standing out (based on study results, positioning in study group and other evidence)*

Motivation & relevant competences

- *Motivation / research interests*
- *Activities, skills, experiences*
- *Scientific background / competences*

Phase 2 interviews

Potential competence as independent researcher

- *Knowledge about own research field*
- *Insight in project approach and positioning*
- *Reasoning skills and critical scientific mindset*
- *Motivation*

Phase 1 + 2

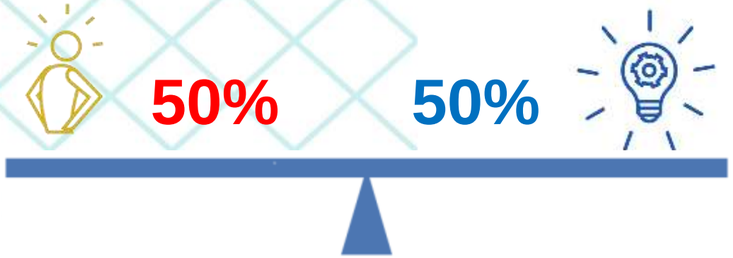
Scientific quality, relevance and challenge, originality

- *Originality / contribution to state of the art*
- *Scientific risks and challenges*

Quality research approach, feasibility

- *Methodology*
- *Feasibility, risk mitigation*

Weighted total score (both phases)



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

EVALUATION CRITERIA SPECIFIC INTERDISCIPLINARY PANEL

FR

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

1/ Candidate

2/ Project

3/ Interdisciplinarity

- *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*

Total score:

50% **30%** **20%**

EVALUATION CRITERIA: "CANDIDATE" "PROJECT" "APPLICATION POTENTIAL"

SB Phase 1 preselection

Study results *(academic education)*

- *Evidence of standing out (based on study results, positioning in study group and other evidence)*

Motivation & relevant competences

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

Phase 2 interviews

Potential competence as independent researcher

- *Knowledge about own research field*
- *Insight in project approach and positioning*
- *Reasoning skills and critical scientific mindset*
- *Motivation*

SB

Potential competence as *strategically thinking and innovation oriented* researcher

- *Insight in strategic importance & positioning project*
- *Notions of economic landscape (IPR, players, innovations)*

Phase 1 + 2

Scientific quality, relevance and challenge, originality

- *Originality / contribution to state of the art*
- *Scientific risks and challenges*

Quality research approach, feasibility

- *Methodology*
- *Feasibility, risk mitigation*

SB

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

Weighted total score (both phases)

50% **30%** **20%**

UNIFORM EVALUATION: *SCORING DESCRIPTORS*

CHECK SCORE GRIDS *PRESELECTION / INTERVIEW USED*

PHD FELLOWSHIP FUNDAMENTAL 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, candidates can refer to evidence of having distinguished themselves during their studies. One can refer to study results (grades, ranking, percentiles), upward trends during course of education, particular situations that can have (positively/negatively) influenced the study trajectory; also to results of additional studies/diplomas, (bachelor or) master thesis score, specific classes successfully attended, or other specific assets. Depending on whether the master studies are already concluded, the narrative should be supplemented with master or bachelor **percentiles** (referring to their university study group), provided by the candidates. Students from non-Flemish universities should provide either a percentile score (if available), or at least their rank within their study group (if available). In addition, detailed course scores should be added. Bachelor percentiles in particular should, if possible, be complemented by intermediate master study results. These quantitative indicators should be used to complement the assessment based on the study narrative.*							
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 subtop 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.		Top student with an excellent/ outstanding academic trajectory and study results, as evidenced by the study narrative and by specific grades, percentiles or ranking.	

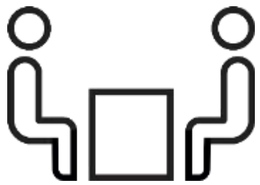
PHD FELLOWSHIP FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH EVALUATION/ score grid with scoring descriptors - PRESELECTION

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Unacceptable	**Weak**	**Mediocre**		**Good/Very good**		**Excellent/Outstanding**	
1.b. Motivation and substantiation of relevant competences of the candidate							
Does the application ("motivation statement") reveal a proper motivation and research interests? Assess the candidate's (present as well as developing) scientific background and competences (including e.g. experimental skills, presentation or writing skills, commitment/perseverance, ...) in relation to the proposed project and to the requirements for a PhD researcher in general. *Assess further evidence in terms of a range of (passed 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 –passed or planned- activities and experiences such as (e.g.) dedicated courses, internships, presentations, collaborations, international contacts, mobility. (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).* *The assessment should take into account what might be expected from a last year master student vs. from a candidate with some scientific seniority.*							
No scoring possibility	☐ Expertise and skills apparently are not in line with what should be expected from a PhD student. Some crucial competences are missing and likely not to be acquired.	**One or more of the following items apply:** ☐ The application reveals fair/reasonable motivation regarding development towards a researcher. Less convincing evidence of (past and planned) activities and experiences. ☐ Scientific background and competences to carry out PhD research may be less present, and how they will be acquired is less well substantiated.		**ALL of the following items apply:** ☐ The application reveals a proper/strong motivation and research interests. This is evidenced by relevant (past/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. experimental skills, presentation or writing skills, commitment/perseverance, ...).* Some first achievements (of master thesis/started PhD research...) may be an asset, *e.g.(intermediate) results, publications, software, data, prototypes or other output, scientific recognition as by e.g. thesis awards, ...*		Requirements as in "good", AND ☐ the candidate has substantiated to have actively acquired all proper competences to successfully conduct PhD research. Clear plan to further enhance these capacities. Reveals clear motivation and drive.	

PHD FELLOWSHIPS DISTRIBUTION PER PANEL

Distribution

- Available PhD fellowships (**293 FO, 195 SB**)
- 90% fellowships **proportionally** distributed to each panel (quota)
- 10% fellowships assigned after all panel selections to best remaining candidates (wildcards)
  - Best ranked candidates with score for candidate (≥4), project (≥4), interdisciplinarity (≥4), **(SB)** for application potential (≥2)
- Additional PhD fellowships by co-hosting organisations (Plantentuin Meise, INBO, VITO, WL)



Process

- (2 x quota) candidates invited for interview
- (quota) candidates assigned PhD fellowship directly by panel
- (10% and additional) best ranked candidates from reserve list
- **Reserve list** with ungranted candidates will be sent to university (BOF, …)

FEEDBACK TO CANDIDATES

- All feedback AFTER selection decision Board (**4 Oct, 2024**)

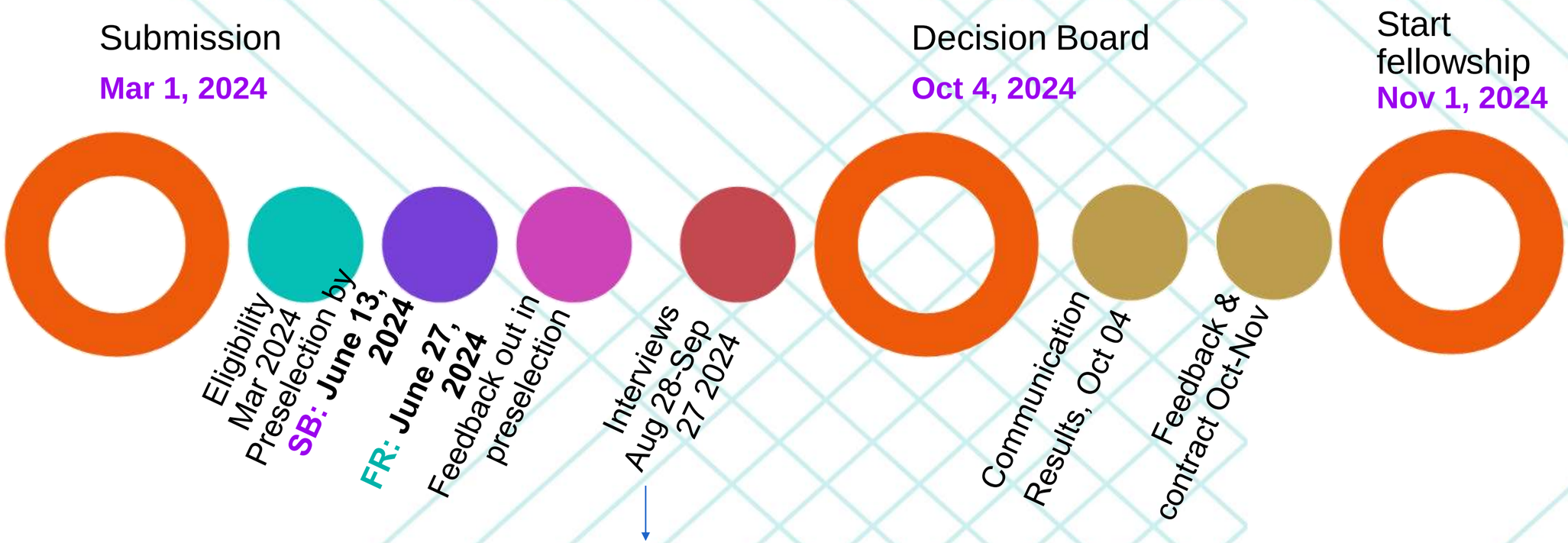
  - Compiled by panel member
  - Including comments based on panel consensus decision and scores
  - Template per criterion (candidate, project, interdisciplinarity, SB: application potential)
    - *Strengths*
    - *Weaknesses*
    - *Interview findings*
    - *Conclusions – why (not) to be funded*
    - *Comments and suggestions for improvement*
  - No further correspondence on feedback

- Do NOT contact panel members!

Out in step 1
- Scores preselection
- Panel comments

Out in step 2 *or* grant
- Scores interview
- Synthesis panel comments step 1 & 2

TIMELINE CALL 2024 EVALUATION & SELECTION



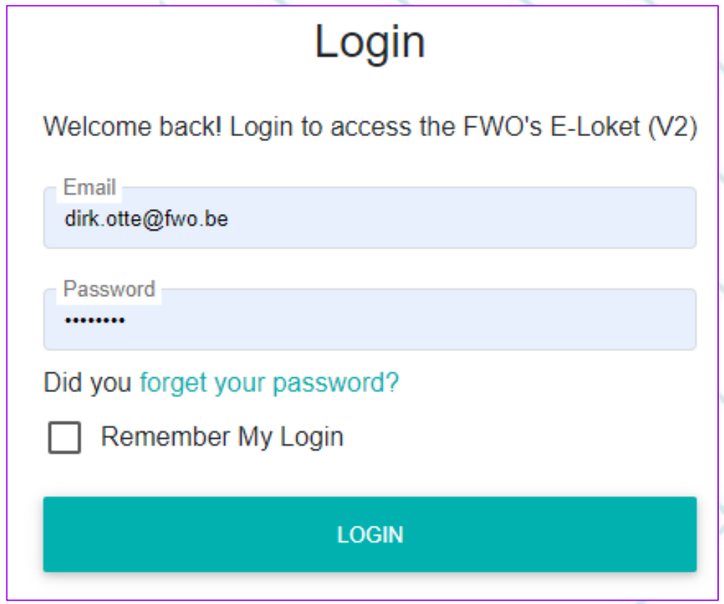
Dates interviews published early 2024

OUTLINE

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

PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION – E-PORTAL (E-LOKET)

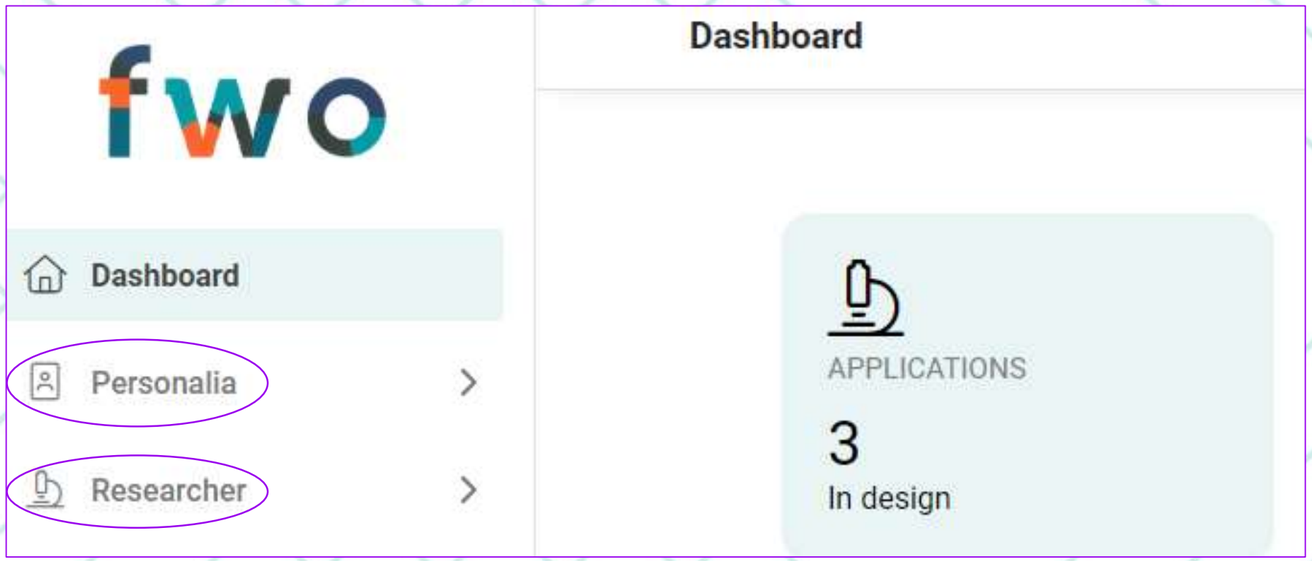
Direct access: https://fwoweb.fwo.be or via www.fwo.be



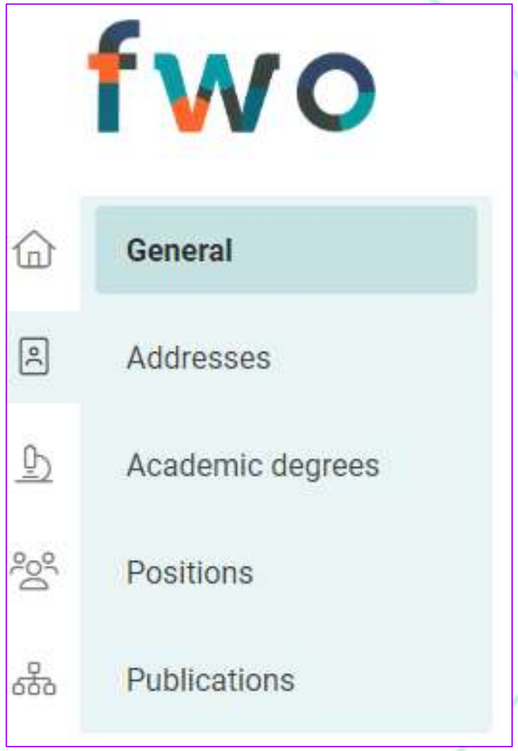
Or first:

register in time!

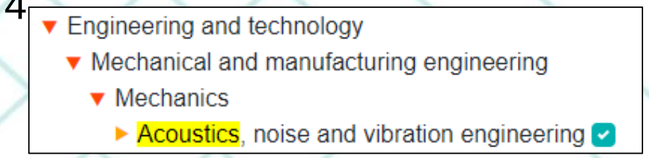
-> FWO validation / 48hrs



Preparing your application – personal details
Advice on completing the form



- General:
  - National registration number
    - Also non-Belgian applicants with Belgian ID card
  - ORCID registration https://orcid.org/
  - Scientific Disciplines: use level 4

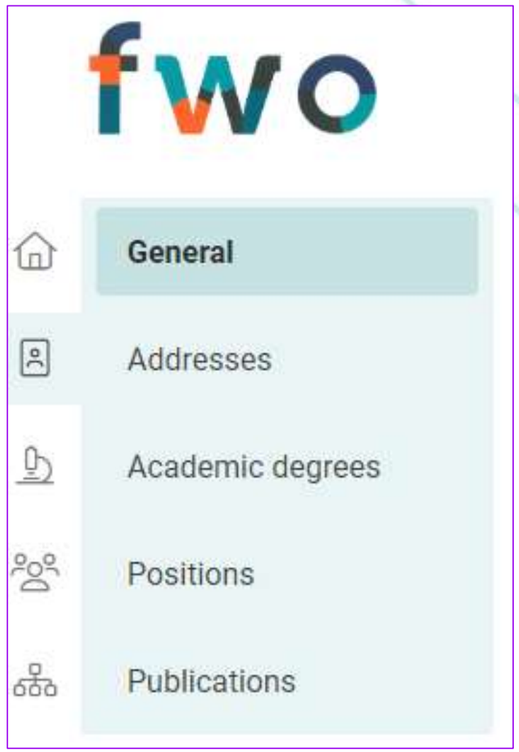


- Addresses
  - *(future) Belgian service address!*
  - *Legal domicile address*
    - *Non-Belgian domicile in EU: add TIN code (tax identification number)*
- Academic degrees & positions
  - Correct, complete & up to date!
- Publications
  - Complete list as on Mar 1, 2023
  - Published or *accepted for publication*

PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION - PUBLICATION LIST

- Publication types
  - A1 peer reviewed articles in journals
  - No distinction between WoS , VABB-SHW a.o.
  - A2 *non-peer reviewed articles in journals*
  - B (1 2 3) related to books
  - C (1 2 3 4) conference proceedings, PhD, patent …
- Adding publications
  - Import XML (Flemish universities bibliography) – A1 -> C1 only
  - Other publications: add manually
  - **Only if published or accepted for publication**
- PhD application: situation as is on submission (**1 Mar 2024**)
  - No updates sent to panel
  - Mention new publications during pitch/interview

CHECKLIST BEFORE STARTING NEW APPLICATION



General

- Gender
- Place of birth
- Nationality
- ORCID iD (*Open Researcher and Contributor ID*)

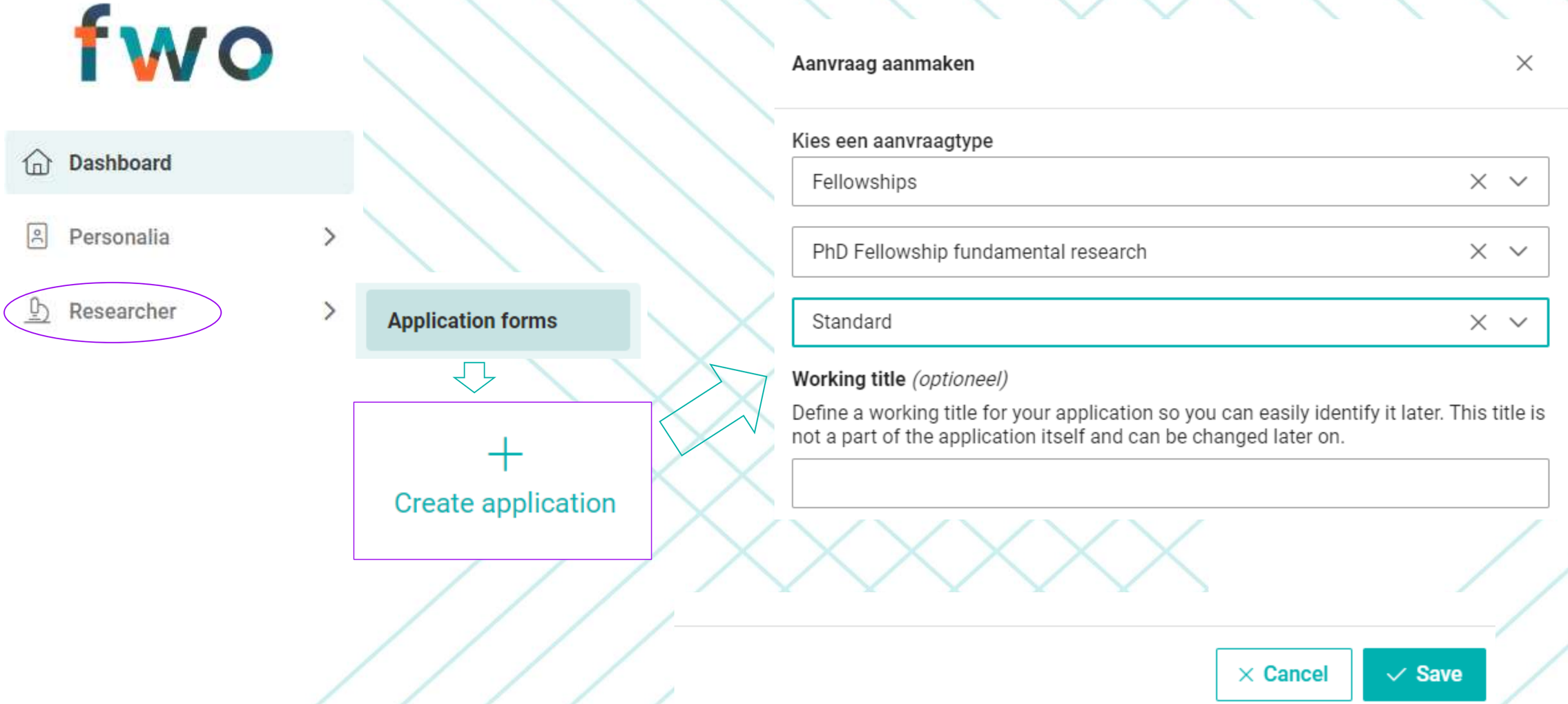
Addresses

- Domicile address (in Belgium or abroad)
- (Future) service address

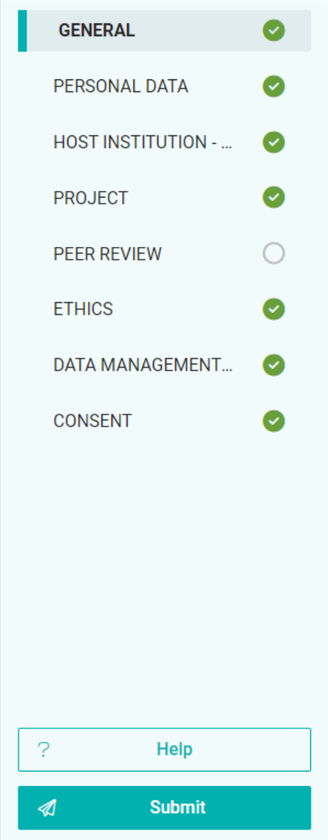
Academic degrees

No access to new application ⛔ *before these 7 items are completed…*

STARTING A NEW APPLICATION FORM



APPLICATION FORM: GENERAL

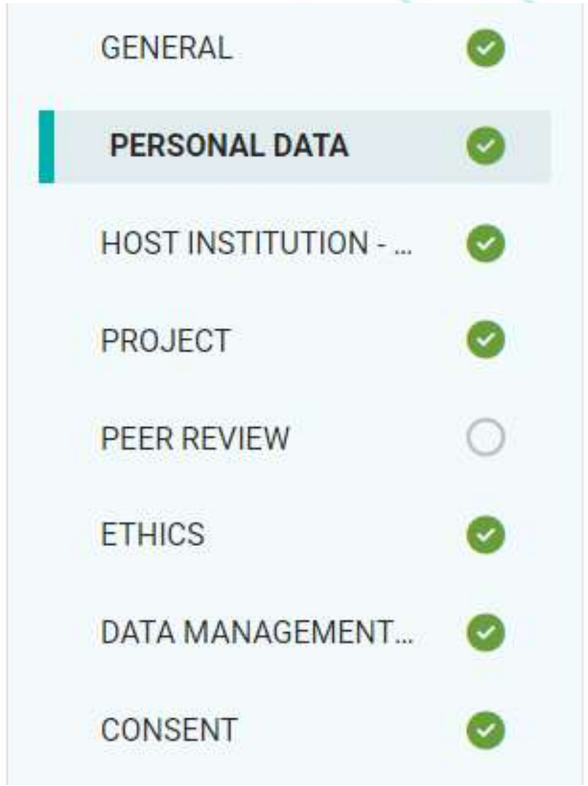


- **Title of your research proposal** *(NL-EN)*
- **Abstract** *(NL-EN)*
- **Up to 5 scientific disciplines fitting proposed research** *(Personal data)*
- **Up to 3 free-text keywords or concepts** *(NL-EN)*

SB
- **Position your proposal in terms of economic finality**
  - **Companies and sectors**

SB
- **Transition areas and their science, technology and innovation priorities**
  - *Socio-economic benefits In line with 2025 Flemish transition priorities NL – EN*
  - *Picklist Transition Areas -> Priorities*
  - *E.g. Health and Wellbeing -> Disorders of the brain*
  - *E.g. New Energy Demand and Delivery -> Technologies for energy grids*

APPLICATION FORM: PERSONAL DATA



- **Explain any career breaks**

STUDY RESULTS (ACADEMIC EDUCATION

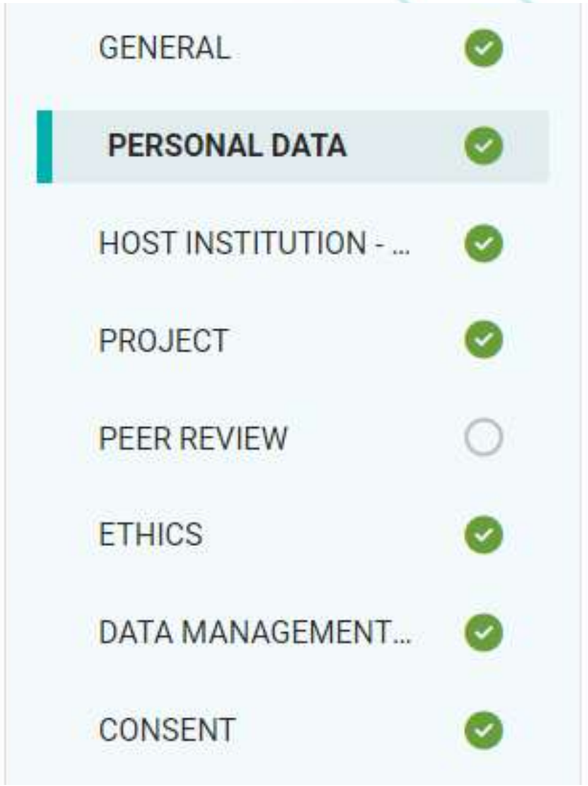
- **Study narrative** new

Show how your academic study trajectory has formed the ideal preparation for doing a PhD, in general and specifically on the topic of the proposed project. Where appropriate, refer to your grades of relevant courses, percentiles or relative ranking or other study results. You may also highlight specific programs or courses you took. If applicable, include additional information on your personal situation where you believe this may have affected your study results and should need to be taken into consideration during the evaluation.

- **Study results positioning by percentile**

- **(Optional) Text field to provide additional information on your study results**

APPLICATION FORM: PERSONAL DATA



MOTIVATION AND COMPETENCES

- **Motivation statement**

- **Scientific activities, experiences and achievements**

- **Earlier mobility (research stays) in another organization**
- **Concrete mobility (research stays) within the FWO PhD fellowship**
  - *Concrete invitations can be uploaded (tab PROJECT)*
- **Scientific awards**
  - *E.g. best master thesis, etc.*

ACADEMIC EDUCATION (STUDY RESULTS)

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

- Positioning your results: study narrative
  - Evidence of distinguishing yourself / standing out during studies
    - Master thesis, marks and grades for dedicated courses, …
  - Clarify study results / percentile
  - Other studies (advanced master (ManaMa), specific courses, …)
    - If in last master year: 1st master year results

HOW TO… PERCENTILES (EXAMPLE)

Diploma	Acjaar	# diploma's	P10	P20	P30	P40	P50	P60	P70	P75	P80	P85	P90	P95
Bachelor	2018-2019	152	59,80	61,09	61,81	62,97	63,97	65,11	67,39	68,66	69,74	71,06	72,73	76,61
Bachelor	2019-2020	146	59,31	60,49	61,61	63,13	63,90	65,06	66,94	67,79	68,74	71,35	75,49	78,02
Bachelor	2020-2021	164	58,39	59,60	60,86	62,30	63,87	65,78	67,67	68,71	70,55	71,47	75,20	79,11
Bachelor	**2021-2022**	158	59,48	60,43	61,15	62,18	63,07	65,34	67,39	68,53	69,43	71,81	74,66	**78,65**
Bachelor	2022-2023	173	58,71	60,26	61,03	62,30	63,74	64,71	66,87	67,79	70,03	71,84	74,20	76,64
Master	2018-2019	117	65,96	68,57	69,77	71,38	72,33	72,83	74,69	75,14	76,03	76,88	78,74	80,42
Master	2019-2020	72	62,96	65,54	67,79	68,83	69,63	71,54	73,08	74,07	74,54	75,75	76,13	77,98
Master	2020-2021	80	64,63	67,07	69,34	70,40	71,19	73,00	74,62	75,41	76,03	76,63	77,98	79,63
Master	**2021-2022**	92	62,87	64,58	66,64	68,28	68,74	70,23	71,82	73,10	73,95	**74,44**	75,04	76,18
Master	**2022-2023**	89	62,52	65,21	66,74	67,77	69,61	**71,33**	73,03	74,32	75,25	76,42	77,66	80,36

Karel: MSc 2023 with 72,08% - - - > **P60** (89 students) - - > *top 40% of study group*

Tess: MSc 2022 with 74,93% - - - > **P85** (92 students) - - > *top 15% of study group*

Shari: MSc 2024
-> BSc 2021 with 78,65% - - - > **P95** (158 students) - - > *top 5% of study group*

*A/ Your study result ≠ percentile value -> Look for the closest percentile value that is **LOWER** than your result.*
*B/ Your study result **=** one or more percentile values - > Look for the lowest percentile value that **EQUALS** your result.*
(e.g. 69,00% -> P75)

P70	P75	P80	P85	P90	P95
67,00	**69,00**	**69,00**	70,00	72,00	78,00

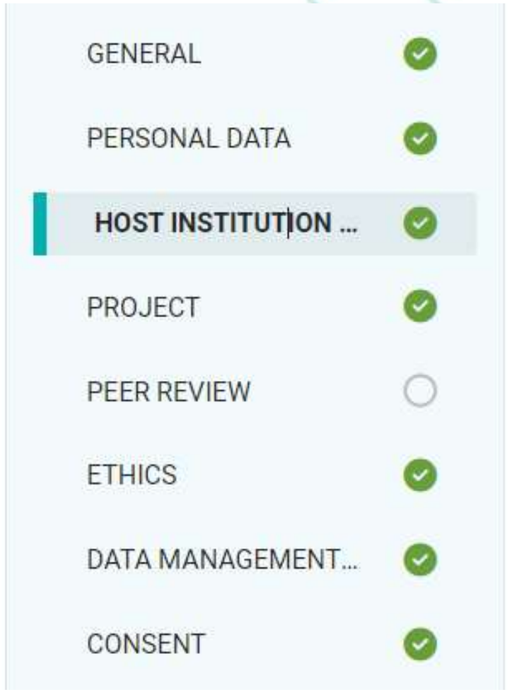
Beware of percentiles in small (<25-30) study groups!! (use aggregated academic years or other info)

MOTIVATION AND COMPETENCES

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

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

APPLICATION FORM: HOST INSTITUTION - PROMOTOR



Main Flemish host institution

- **Main promotor**
- *Optional co-promotor(s)*

Additional host institution: Flemish or Federal scientific institutions

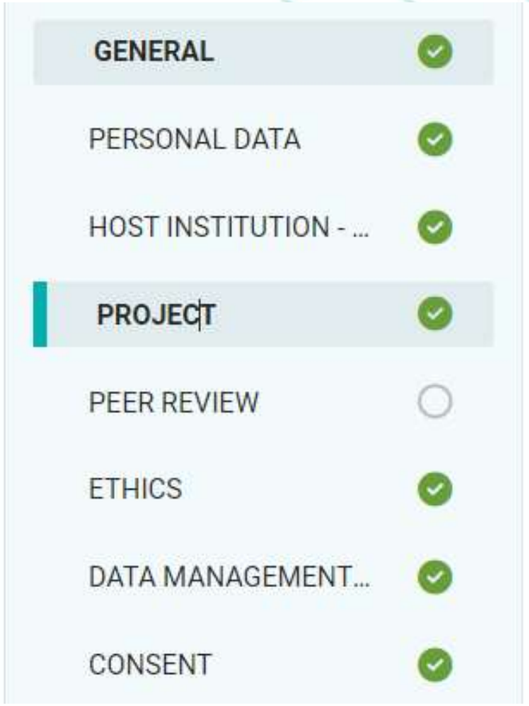
- = collaboration/research location
- *Pick list*
- *Co-promotor(s)*

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

Do not add recommendation letters!

- *FWO will invite main promotor only to provide recommendation*
- *Co-promotors will be notified by FWO*

APPLICATION FORM: PROJ



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Download template

Project description – *WORD template* ***≤10 pages*** ***(SB: 12 pages)***

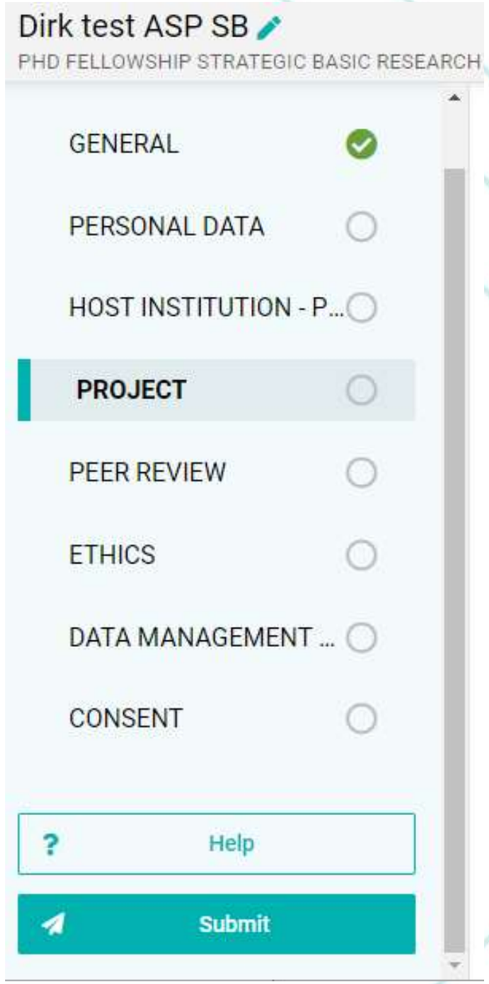
- *Improvements w.r.t. 1st application*
- Rationale and positioning w.r.t. the state-of-the-art
- Scientific research objectives
- Research methodology and work plan
- *ic dimension and application potential*
- Upload

OTHER FUNDING

PROJECT POSITIONING AND EMBEDDING

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

APPLICATION FORM: PROJECT (IT'D)



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

OTHER FUNDING

- **Proposal content submitted before AND funded or funding decision still pending?**

Potential overlap, complementarity, added value, …

Update FWO on pending evaluations!

- ***Be open and transparent!***

PROJECT POSITIONING AND EMBEDDING

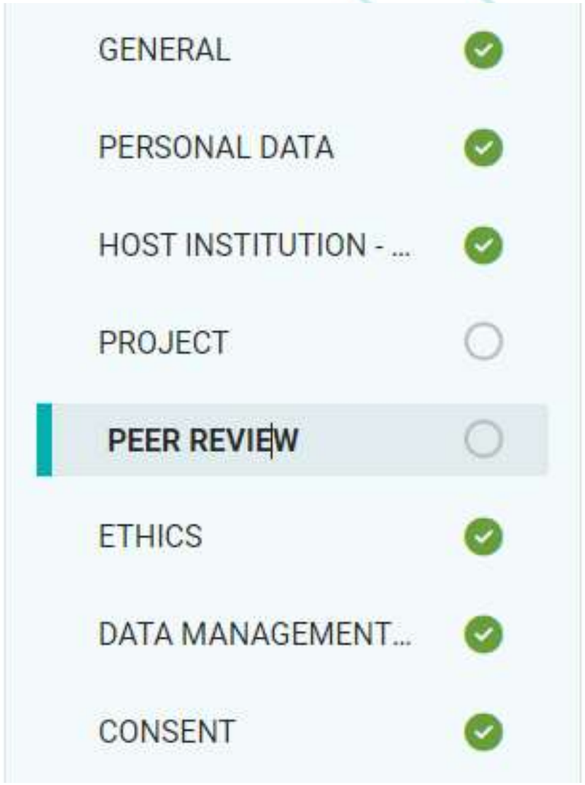
- **Fit into the research activities of the host institution(s)**
  - Position your previous/current research
- **Position the project in a national and international context**
- **Gender and diversity issues**
- **Work with societal actors**

} **RRI**: *responsible research and innovation*

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

- **Communication of results to a non-expert audience**

APPLICATION FORM: PEER REVIEW (EXPERT PANEL)



INTERNAL PEER REVIEW

Motivate your choice of expert panel

5 scientific fields -> Thematic Panel -> In line with scope (updated 2022!)

Specific Interdisciplinary Panel -> In line with functional definition

Select the appropriate panel

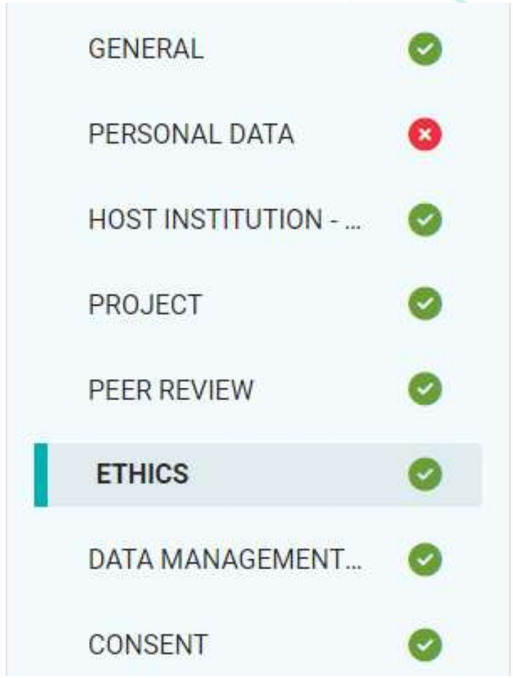
(FR) Based on contribution to state of the art

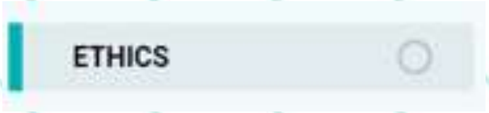
(SB) Based on contribution to state of the art (not per se field of application)

Motivate your choice of expert panel

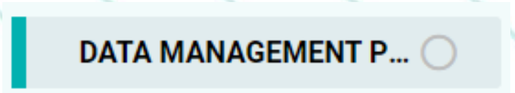
- Avoid out of scope (= project score 0)
- Double check before submitting expert panel (submit = submit)

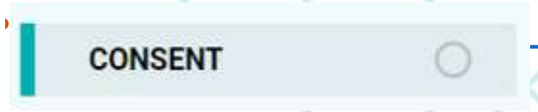
APPLICATION FORM: ETHICS / DMP / CONSENT





- Research Foundation - Flanders - Research ethics (fwo.be)
- fwo-manual-ethics-checklist.pdf
- ! Non-human primates -> ethical approval at least 1 month before panels **(< Aug**

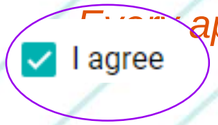




- Flanders - Data Management Plan (fwo.be)

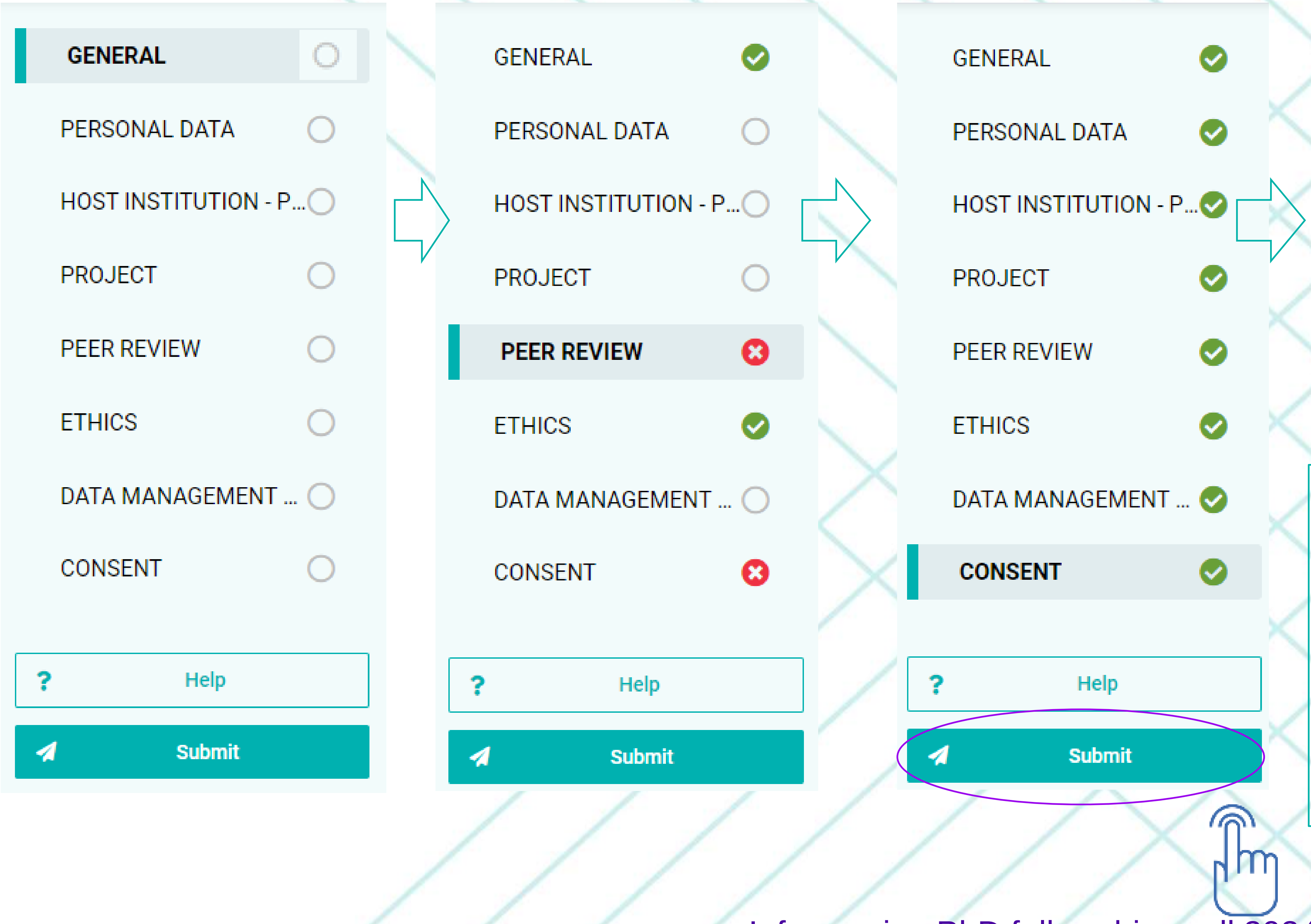
- **DECLARATION BY THE APPLICANT**
- **General** *(including GDPR)*
  Declaration that all personal data info is accurate and up-to-date

- **Research Integrity**
  Read the detailed information and the RI clause
  Every applicant and beneficiary is expected to know the rules and what they will be committed to



APPLICATION FORM: SUBMIT

March 1 2024 – 17:00 CET



Dear researcher,

With this message we confirm that your application [ApplicationType] (file number [ApplicationNumber]) has been submitted.
Your application will be submitted for evaluation to the members of the FWO Expert Panel [code panel – Engels omschrijving panel].
If you were mistaken about your panel choice, you must let us know in a motivated letter **no later than seven working days** after the **official** submission date via [gebied]@fwo.be.

Kind regards,
The FWO administration

- Automatic confirmation
- ApplicationNumber
- Panel code

→ Eligibility check: Q&A with FWO

OUTLINE

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

FURTHER READING & CONTACT

- Programme webpages
  - Fundamental Research NL - EN
  - Strategic Basic Research NL - EN
- Including
  - Regulations (legal version: Dutch)
    - General / PhD programme / bench fee / peer review
  - Supporting documents
    - Presentation info session PhD Fellowships / screenshots e-application
    - Information on percentiles
    - Scoring grids (preselection – interview)
    - Guidelines interview

- Help! Who to contact
  - Additional info & specific questions
    - *Contacts at your university*
    - *FWO account administrators per scientific domain (or SB)*
  - FWOhelpdesk@fwo.be
    - (e-portal/IT problems only)

Thank you for your attention

Social Sciences and Humanities

Stef SLEMBROUCK

- Humanities
  - Cult1: Linguistics
  - Cult2: Art, Art History, Architecture, Design and Literature
  - 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&M4: Media and Communication Studies, Political Science, Social Work, Social and Cultural Anthropology and Sociology

Allow me to repeat

1. Carefully check **the scope of your selected panel** (FWO-website)
2. **SBMG = only one panel for Social Sciences and Humanities**.
3. **Talk to your supervisor**
   - Make a list & tick the boxes for the various dimensions to be covered & talked about
   - Your promotor should be aware of discipline- and field-specific expectations

TIPS AND TRICKS (PROJECT)

Outline of STATE OF THE ART entails a motivation of your selected topic and focus (”socio-economic”, ”problem driven”, “scientifically salient”)

1. Key issues in the (sub)field
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: **be self-aware** about 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**
  - Not limited to scientific output (articles, etc.)
  - Cash in on socio-economic relevance
  - Active 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're 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 2024

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

OUTLINE

- Questions before you start
  - why me (candidate), why this research (project), with whom (project positioning)
- Application
  - General parts
  - 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 thesis

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WHY ME? (CANDIDATE)

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

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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

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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!

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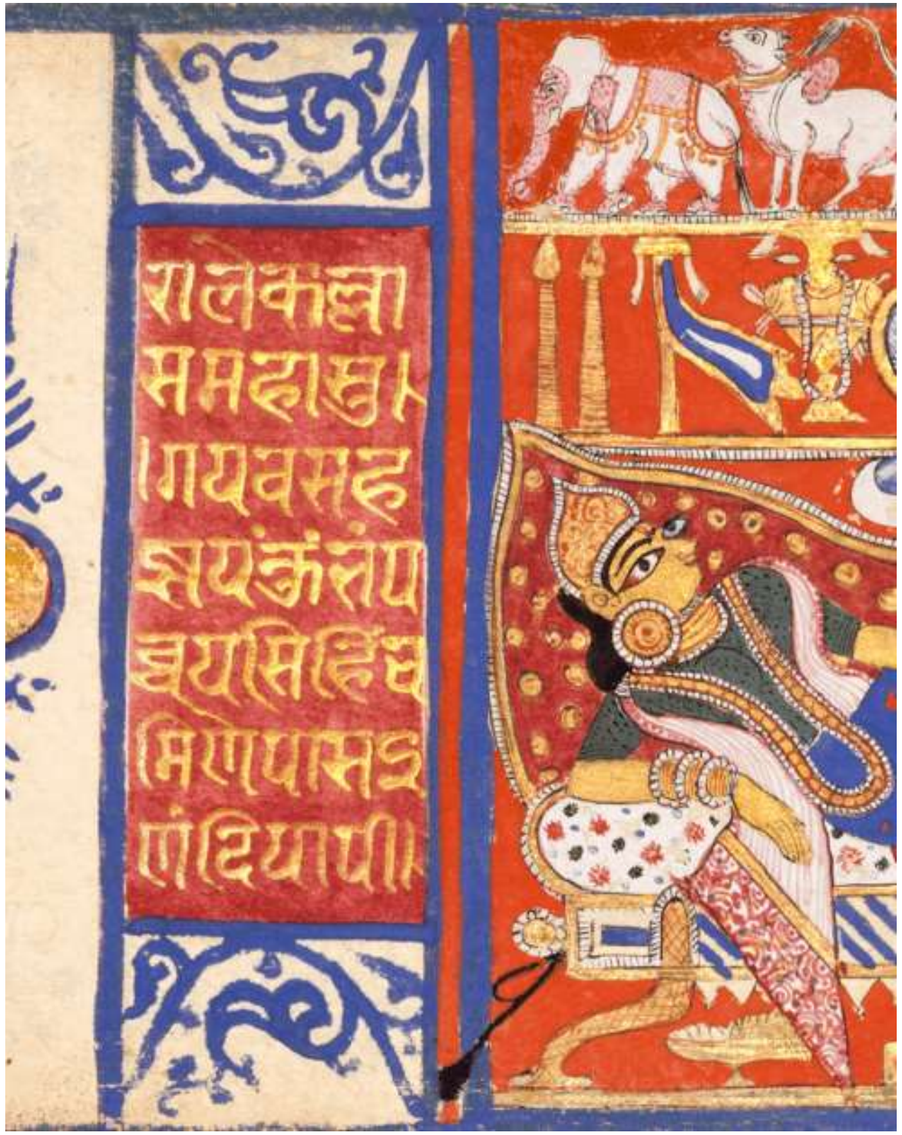
PROJECT PROPOSAL: GENERAL



- 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!

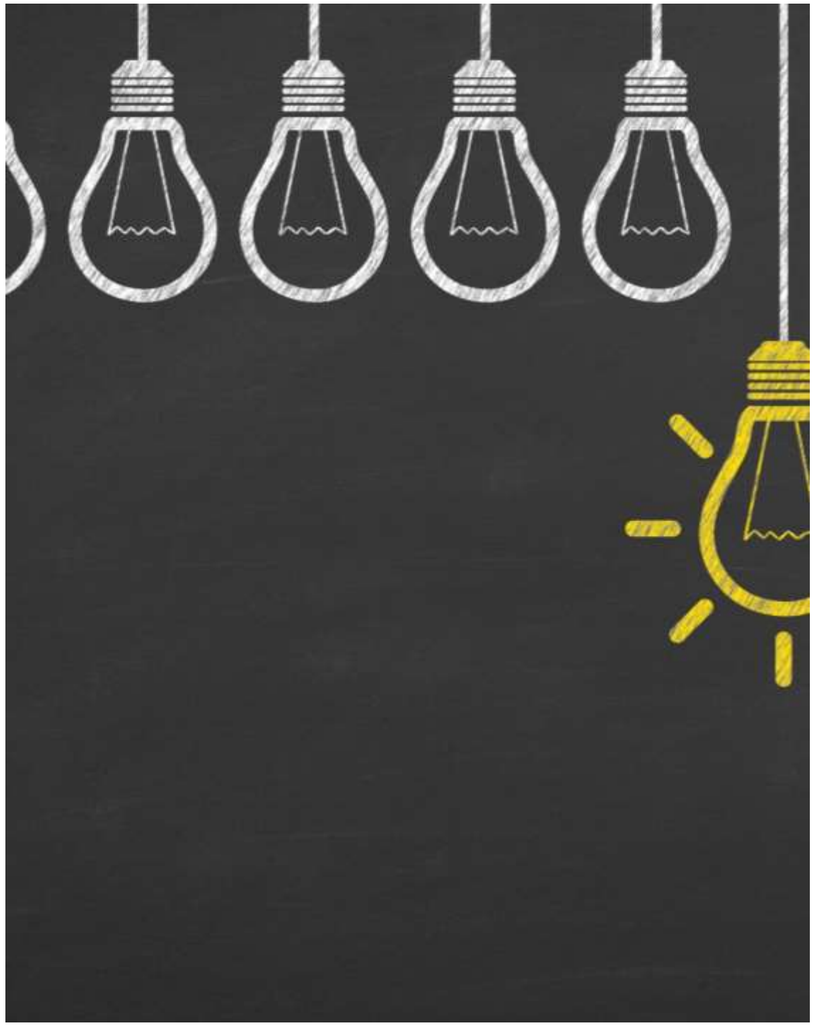
PROJECT PROPOSAL: GENERAL (2)

- 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



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

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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

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PROJECT OUTLINE (4)

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

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PROJECT OUTLINE (5)

- Peer review
  - Motivation of expert panel
  - Carefully choose the best panel
  - Multidisciplinary panel
    - Strong motivation needed

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PROJECT OUTLINE (6)

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

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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

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FINAL SCORE

- Range of scores: A to D
- Fundable
  - **A+:** top 5% of the proposals
  - **A:** top 10% of the proposals
- Fundable if the budget allows it
  - **A-:** top 20% of the proposals
- Below fundable range
  - **B**: top 50% of the proposals
  - **C or D**: 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

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CASE 1

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

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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.

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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.

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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

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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
    - 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**

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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

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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 *re 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

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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
    - Consider change of topic, change of panel

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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**

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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

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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

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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

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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

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GOOD LUCK!

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