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CHEMISTRY RESEARCH FUNDING SCENE IN THE FLEMISH PART OF BELGIUM

OVERVIEW

Belgium is a federal state, with one central ('federal') government, one government for each region (Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels), and one government for each community (Dutch-speaking, French-speaking, German-speaking). Understandably, this makes the description of any public activity, including research funding, quite complex. Regions are in charge of the policy of economic matters, among others, while communities are in charge of the policy of 'personal matters', such as culture, sport, and education.

Research funding in the Flemish part of Belgium is mainly being attributed by following organizations, whose mission is to support research at the universities and that work independent from each other:

F.W.O.-Vlaanderen (Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Vlaanderen (English title: Research Foundation – Flanders)
funding of fundamental research

I.W.T.–Vlaanderen (Innovatie door Wetenschap en Technologie – Vlaanderen) (English title : Institute for the Promotion of Innovation by Science and Technology in Flanders)
strategic, fundamental and applied research

Each university has an internal research council that also gives financial support to researchers. In the Flemish part of Belgium there are 5 universities:

- Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (with sub-division in Kortrijk)
- Universiteit Antwerpen
- Universiteit Gent
- Limburgs Universitair Centrum, located in Diepenbeek
- Vrije Universiteit Brussel

These organizations obtain substantial financial support on yearly basis from the Government.

Some figures about budgets going to chemistry research:

F.W.O. : year 2003: 10 million euros to chemistry research
(total FWO budget 2003 for all domains : 110 million euros)
I.W.T. : yearly average of the period 1993-2003 : 18 million euros
Universities : no information available

Types of supported research:

F.W.O. :

- 4-year projects: support for consumables, equipment and labour; budget ranging between 250 000 and 500 000 euros
- projects for young researchers : period : 1 year; maximum budget: 40 000 euros (equipment and consumables)
- fellowships (most of them go to persons having Belgian citizenship) for PhD students (2+2 years) and postdocs (3+3 years)

- junior and senior visiting postdoctoral fellowships: 1 year; meant for foreign postdocs
- grants for attending international conferences and for covering costs of short (minimum 2 weeks) stays abroad

I.W.T. :

- Strategic basic research: projects of 4 years; budget between 1 000 000 and 2 000 000 euros; only attributed to large interdisciplinary research groups, with members of several universities and participation of industrial partners (without financial support for these industrial partners)
- Fellowships for PhD students (2+2 years)
- Fellowships for postdocs (2 years) in cooperation with industrial partner

Universities:

- G.O.A. (Geconcerteerde Onderzoeksacties – English: Concerted Research Actions): 5 years; budget between 1 000 000 and 2 000 000 euros; consumables and equipment budget attributed in relation to the labour budget; given to excellent research teams
- O.T. (Onderzoekstoelage – English: Research budget): 3 to 4 years; one research team; budget between 250 000 and 400 000 euros; consumables, equipment, labour (usually 1 postdoctoral fellowship)
- Junior and senior fellowships for postdocs who did not obtain their PhD at a Belgian university (1+1 year)
- Postdoctoral fellowships for Belgian researchers (1+1 year)
- Doctoral fellowships for foreign students registered at a Belgian university for the Doctoral Training Programme in the 3rd and 4th year

Application procedure:

For most of the mentioned projects and grants, there is only one call a year.

Evaluation procedure:

The evaluation procedure takes in most cases 1/2 year.

F.W.O. :

referee board (6 members of Flemish universities, 8 members of universities out of Flanders of which at least 2 members from abroad), with input of external referees.

I.W.T.:

referee board with members coming from universities and industry

University Research Council:

members from the academic board, elected member from each faculty; applications are also sent to external referees.

Reporting procedure:

Researchers who obtained projects and/or grants are asked to write each year an interim report and a final report at the end of the project/grant. These reports are always evaluated by the referee boards.

ERA-CHEMISTRY PARTNER: FUND FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH, FLANDERS, FWO

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The National Fund for Scientific Research (Belgium) is an institution of public utility and is responsible for the basic research in Flanders. Its activities are aimed at a push back of the frontiers of knowledge in all disciplines. The Flemish Board of Trustees of the National Fund called Fund for Scientific Research - Flanders is stimulating and funding fundamental academic research at the universities in the Flemish Community and at scientific research institutes. A symmetric Board for the Belgian French community does so for the French speaking universities.

Funding figures

FWO's funding for chemistry research was about 10 million euros in the year 2003. 6,6 million euros was granted to basic chemistry research and 3,1 million euros to applied chemistry research. The total research funding budget of FWO was 110 million euros in the year 2003 and so the share of chemistry research funding of all FWO funding was about 9 %.

FWO is responsible for about a half of the resources that the Flemish community spends on academic research. In the year 1999, FWO spent 57% of the money destined for academic research. That represents 21% of the total science policy budget and 16% of the R&D funding.

Position, aims, strategies

FWO is an institution of public utility and is responsible for the basic research in Flanders, Belgium. FWO is the central organisation and mediator between the Government and the Flemish academic community. FWO gets 80% of its funding from the Flemish Government and 20% from the Federal Government. FWO funds all fields of research and has no prior priorities or earmarked budgets for research fields.

FWO supports and stimulates fundamental research and advances its quality on the basis of academic, inter-university competition. Quality is promoted by quality-based choice with no regard of host institution, interim and retrospective evaluation that feeds back to both of the researchers and the Referee Board (consisting of scientists). Science policy is based on bottom-up principle and those who receive funding are selected based on excellence.

Flemish and Federal governments have each formulated a policy memorandum giving the main guidelines on the science policy to be pursued. Within the framework of government policy, the Flemish Community concludes a management agreement with the FWO. The FWO has an advisory voice on the Flemish Council for Science Policy. There is also a close collaboration with the Science and Innovation Section of the Ministry of the Flemish Community.

The policy plan of FWO for the years 2001-2005 has been drafted in the general context of government policy and in consultation with the Flemish academic community. FWO Board of

Trustees prepares the science policy guidelines as well as the funding strategies and principles. In the Board of Trustees administrative, financial and social environment as well as the government and ministries are represented.

FWO does not directly co-operate with other chemistry research financiers in Belgium. The tasks are separated while FWO deals with fundamental research, and IWT with applied and strategic research. In addition, BOF is the special research funds of the universities that act as a complementary decentralised mediator. BOF supports either medium or large research projects while FWO funds entire scale from small to large.

There are no priorities for chemistry funding. At least one third of the chemistry projects are interdisciplinary. Other disciplines involved in chemistry-dominated projects are physical chemistry, biochemistry, solid state chemistry etc.

Decision making and evaluating bodies

Referee Boards do not make actual decisions but give academic recommendations about applications and scientific reports that are then transmitted to the Board of Trustees for decision. The applications are evaluated by the Referee Board based on the external reviews. Referee Board ranks the worthwhile applications and gives financial proposals. Referee Boards have twin tasks of prioritisation and evaluation. They give both academic and budgetary recommendations. Referee Boards thus oversee the quality of the fundamental research financed by FWO.

A Referee Board comprises of 14 researchers: 6 from the Flemish academic community, 8 from outside Flanders of which at least 2 foreigners. Flemish academics are thus always the minority. Members are recognised experts in their discipline and are appointed solely for their expertise, they are not representatives of their universities. Referee Boards are appointed by the Board of Trustees based on the proposal of the Referee Boards. There are more than 30 Referee Boards in FWO.

The composition of Referee Boards guarantees Belgian basis for anticipating specific problems without leaving the entire initiative to foreign expertise. The term of members is 3 years and can be renewed twice. The non-Flemish Board members must have at least passive knowledge of Dutch in order to be able to go through the files. There is horizontal communication between the Boards. When an application relates to several areas it may be dealt with by several Referee Boards of equal status.

Referee boards are governed by *Domain Councils*. Domain Council is a bridge between the Referee Boards and the governing bodies. Members of Domain Councils are chairmen of the Referee Boards. Their primary task is to allocate files across the different boards in order to guarantee optimum treatment of all applications.

Board of Trustees decides on funding based on the recommendations of the Referee Boards. Board of Trustees delineates the general policy of FWO. It determines the strategy and establishes, optimises and monitors procedures relating to selection and evaluation. Board maintains close contact with the academic community, government and society. Board of Trustees consists of vice chancellors of the four major universities including the chairman and vice-chairman, a second delegate from these universities, a delegate of the other university centres, the secretary of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Sciences and Arts, the chairman of the Royal Academy of Medicine, the Commander of the Royal Military Academy with an advisory voice. In addition there

are nine co-opted members: delegates of the administrative, financial and social environment, representatives of government and ministries.

Senate examines all items submitted to the Board of Trustees and entrusts them to the Board. The Senate proposes the funding of proposals on the basis of the academic priorities proposed by the Referee Boards taking the budgetary possibilities into account. Senate prepares the resolutions of Board of Trustees. Senate consists of vice chancellors of the four major universities, the secretary of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Sciences and Arts and two additional members of the Board of Trustees.

Funding instruments

43 % of the funding is person based and 57 % is project based. There are no priorities to fund either persons or projects.

Funding instruments are following.

1 Support for individual researchers:

- young university graduates can prepare a doctoral thesis with the Research Assistantship or the Special Doctoral Grant
- young clinicians can obtain half time Clinical Doctoral Grant to complete their doctoral thesis
- Postdoctoral fellows, can also obtain mobility allowance
- Senior Clinical Investigators
- Operating costs and equipment funding for personal research for young and/or established researchers

2 Supporting prominent research teams: operating costs, equipment and personnel funding

3 Promoting (national and international) scientific contacts and co-operation by:

- establishing Scientific Research Networks for co-ordination, national and international co-operation
- junior and senior visiting postdoctoral fellowships
- grants for organising international congresses in Belgium
- grants for active participation in international congresses abroad
- grants for study and training periods abroad
- bilateral agreements
- sabbatical leaves

4 Awarding scientific prizes

5 Participating in international co-operation projects, especially in the frame of ESF

Support for individual researchers and support for the prominent research teams are the most important funding instruments.

Research projects

Funding principles

The average size of research project is 81 000 euros for the first year, and somewhat 20% lower for the other years. The length of the funding period is four years. The prolongation or extension of funding is possible only in rare cases, usually for 2 years. This needs a new application.

Following expenses can be funded: salaries, equipment, facilities and 3% overhead. Overhead share is growing in the future up to 10%. The typical overheads of the universities in Belgium are up to 30%. VAT can be paid. Salaries of permanent staff can also be funded. Funding can be used to other purposes than originally planned only in rare occasions and that must be requested in advance.

Research teams at Flemish universities and collaborating institutes in Flanders can be funded. It is possible to fund a foreigner in Belgium, if she/he is a professor at a Flemish university. It is not possible to grant funding to foreign institute or university. Researcher cannot normally take funding with him/her when moving to another institute and certainly not if moving to another country due to legal constraints.

Application processing and peer review

There is one call per year and the deadline is the first of February. It takes about 5 months from application to decision.

Applicants are required to submit curriculum vitae and description of the envisaged research situated nationally and internationally. There is an application form in the form of template and in future it will be interactive on line. The applications are required in Dutch. Part of the form destined to foreign referee is required in English. There are regulations and instructions for applicants in Dutch.

Each proposal is given 2 reviews. All the reviewers are international and they need to be eminent researchers. The applicant chooses the reviewers. Delegating the choice of referees to applicants has the benefit that the applicants locate themselves in their field by means of the level of the referees they approach. Board of Trustees members, Referee Board members and co-authors (during the last 3 years) are excluded. External referees do not make budgetary recommendations.

The referees get the request automatically from the computer system by e-mail. Reviewers are given one month time for the review. There is a specific evaluation form (in English) but no specific instructions for reviewers. One referee usually reviews only one application. Reviewers are not paid for the evaluation.

Specific evaluation criteria are international scientific level of the research team, methodology, originality and innovating nature of the project, importance of the project, focusing of the project, feasibility of the project, co-operation and coordination between research teams, necessity of the budgeted resources. Rating 1-5 is given.

Referee Board ranks the applications that have got good marks. All members of the Referee Board read each application. They are given 2 weeks time for this. There are 14 members in the Board and

up to 40 project proposals can be processed in one meeting. Ranking is written down in the meeting, and the secretary takes notes about the argumentation.

Applicant can receive the reviews only on request, and only the summary, not the text in the referee report. No other person can receive the evaluation. Applicants are not given a chance to improve their application on the basis of the evaluation. The applicant chooses the reviewers and thus the names of reviewers are available for the applicant.

Decision-making and follow-up

Board of Trustees decides on funding based on the recommendations of the Referee Board. Budgets are cut up to 50% because of unrealistic budgets and lack of financing. There is no negotiation with the applicant if the budget is cut. There is fixed amount of funding for technical and scientific staff. About 28 % of the proposals are funded. All that get the best marks are funded.

Projects are required one scientific intermediate report and final report. For scientific report three pages of text and a list of publications are required. There are instructions to write the report containing a report format (in Dutch). Financial report is required continuously as a request for payment. If the project does not progress in the planned and desired way, the funding can be stopped.

Referee Board evaluates the intermediate and final scientific reports. These evaluations provide opportunities for fine-tuning and are a decisive criterion in any continuation of the support of the FWO and in the selection of new applications. Evaluation criteria are the extent to which the target set has been achieved, and high level publications in international publications with an editorial board. Grading used in the evaluation is good, qualified and inadequate. A qualified grade represents a request for the scientist to provide additional information for the Referee Board. An inadequate grading is reported to the Senate and Board of Trustees. The academic authorities of the host institution are also informed. An inadequate grading means that the Senate may decide that the person may no longer apply funding from FWO either temporarily or permanently. Results of evaluation are taken into consideration when next application of the applicant is considered.

FWO Fellowships

There are pre-doctoral and post-doctoral mandates. The length of pre-doctoral or research assistant mandate is 2 x 2 years and post-doctoral fellowships 3 x 3 years. It is not possible to prolong the funding period. The funding covers salary and in addition mobility allowance for post-doctoral fellows. There is a fixed salary level adapted to the individual family situation. Funding does not cover overheads. Funds cannot be used for other purposes than originally planned.

PhD students must not be older than 30 years and PhDs not older than 35 years. The applicants must work at Flemish university but permanent staff cannot be funded. The funding can be granted also to EU citizens working at Flemish university. It is not possible to grant funding to foreign institute (possible only through mobility of fellows). Researcher can take his/her funding to another Flemish university but not to foreign university. The latter is possible only in the case of mobility (normally 1 year). The fellowships are personal and are granted to the person, not to the institute.

The applications are required in Dutch. There are 2-3 reviewers for each application. The applicant chooses the referees. Board of Trustees members, Referee Board members and co-authors are excluded. For PhD students the referees are professors at Flemish universities. For PhDs, one reviewer is Belgian professor and the other a foreign professor. 0-30 % of the reviewers are international.

There can be up to 70 mandate proposals in a Referee Board meeting. There are equal chances for all institutions and disciplines.

PhD students are required a report after 2 years, and in the end of the project. PhD fellows are required reports every year. If the project does not progress in the planned and desired way, the funding can be stopped at the first renewal date. For scientific report three pages of text and a list of publications are required.

Legal and administrative considerations

Granting funding abroad. Covenant FWO-Flemish Community of Belgium determines that FWO supports basic research at the Flemish universities in some cases collaborating with other scientific institutions in Flanders. Other institutions are excluded. EU citizens that work in Flanders can apply funding.

Conflict of interest. The rules of conduct concerning conflict of interest are decided by the FWO Board of Trustees. The following cannot be external referees: members of Referee Boards and the Board of Trustees, co-authors with the applicant within the last three years. Reviewer declares a conflict of interest in the referee report.

A person is excluded from the process if an own application or if a family member or member of research service is concerned. A Referee Board member shall not take part in the selection or evaluation of his own files. A Board member who is the supervisor/head of department of an applicant for fellowship shall take part in the discussion on the ranking, but may be barred from speaking when his own candidate is involved.

Publicity. All deliberations and proposals of Referee Boards are strictly confidential, only the outcome is public. Board members in breach of this may be called to account by the Board of Trustees. Titles of funded research projects and fellowships are published. Applicant can receive the summary of reviews only on request. No other person can receive the evaluation.

Intellectual property rights. Decree of Flemish parliament concerns with intellectual property rights. Financially the host universities get all the rights, intellectual property rights stay with the researcher.

Research ethics. There is legislation on bio-medical ethics in Belgium. In addition, World Medical Association (WMA) Declaration of Helsinki, guidelines from Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) and European Medical Research Councils (EMRC) have to be followed. All applications involving experiments on humans and/or samples of human origin or experiments on animals are submitted to the local ethical committee of the host institution.

Gender Equality. There is legislation on non-discrimination on basis of gender, race and age. All eligible applicants have the same opportunities.

Obstacles and best practices for transnational research programmes

FWO has common-pot or jointly funded research programmes only with special government allowances with NWO (Netherlands) and in the frame of ESF. It would not be acceptable outside this frame.

Main obstacle for jointly funded chemistry research programmes within European countries would be the different procedures in each agency. Main obstacles in FWO would be the earmarked money and separate evaluation procedure. FWO gives equal chances to all disciplines and the earmarking would prevent the competition within the normal FWO calls. In addition, the separate procedure would cause extra work for a small research funding agency administration. Exceptions are made in the frame of ESF only.

To overcome these obstacles there should be new funding from European Research Council (ERC). Best practices would be bottom-up approach with a very good peer review and review panel in the frame of ESF or a new ERC. There should be single procedure for all disciplines. The call should be performed in open competition with normal national calls.

OTHER MAJOR FUNDING BODIES IN BELGIUM

IWT – Institute for the promotion of innovation by science and technology in Flanders

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www:iwt.be

The Institute for the promotion of Innovation by Science and Technology in Flanders (IWT-Flanders) was established in 1991 by the Flemish government as a regional public institution to provide R&D and innovation support in Flanders. For this IWT has several financial tools and an annual budget of 190 million euros (in 2002) available to support projects. In addition to direct funding, a variety of services is provided to the local industry in the field of technology transfer, partner search, information about international subsidy options, etc. IWT has also an important co-ordination mission, aiming at a strong co-operation between all organisations in Flanders, offering technological innovation services to companies. Over the years IWT has expanded into the knowledge center for R&D and innovation in Flanders.

From 1993 – 2003 the yearly average funding for chemistry was about 18 million euros.
Industrial research: 13.3 million euros (of which 50% pharmaceutical industry) (average 93-2003);
Strategic Basic Research (SBO): 7 – 8 million euros (for 2003); Grants: +/- 38 grants of 4 years/year = 4 million euros/year (average 93-2003).

Main characteristics of funding policy and procedures

IWT supports RTD-projects for industrial basic research activities, projects for industrial development activities, and projects for strategic basic research of industrial relevance. The RTD-projects for industrial basic research or for industrial development are submitted by industrial enterprises. These are the so-called "bottom-up" projects, in all scientific or technological disciplines. Applications for RTD-support can be introduced continuously, and co-operation with universities or other research institutes is not mandatory. There is a special scheme for SME-projects with special attention for administrative simplification

The decision to award a grant is taken by IWT's Board of Directors. Support for strategic basic research projects of industrial relevance is applied for by universities or other research institutes in the framework of specific action programmes and by individual researchers in schemes for post-graduate grants or post-doctoral fellowships. Except for the grants scheme the involvement of an industrial partner is mandatory. Proposals have to be submitted in Dutch or English and evaluation is done by peer review, using international referees and panel members. The average processing time between submission and decision of a proposal depend on the funding instrument and are about 75 days for industrial research, 4 – 5 months for Strategic Basic Research and 3 months for grants. All costs such as salaries, consumables, equipment are eligible for industrial research and SBO, for the grants the eligible costs are salaries and consumables. The success rate for industrial research is 85%, 17% for SBO and 36% for grants. Project outcome is assessed by reporting and follow up meetings and by PhD thesis for grants. IWT has partnerships with academic groups from other countries and is much interested in participating in transnational research funding programmes.

KULeuven Katholieke Universiteit

Naamsestraat 22, Belgium
3000 LEUVEN
www.kuleuven.be

The K.U.Leuven is a Flemish University of Catholic signature with an international orientation. It has the legal statute of private institution. As a university it distinguishes itself from other research centres by its autonomous statement of problems, by the disinterested character of its fundamental research, by its focus on education and by the fact that within its walls it encompasses almost all academic disciplines. The K.U.Leuven's first and second cycle undergraduate programmes contribute to as broad a participation as possible of young people in a qualitatively outstanding university education, which takes place in an intellectually stimulating, socially supportive and student-centred environment. At the same time the K.U.Leuven continuously directs itself towards new target groups. In addition, it pays special attention to the training of young researchers, mainly within the context of their doctoral studies. It also offers postgraduate programmes in a number of fields, aimed at the broadening and deepening of knowledge. At K.U.Leuven, both fundamental and applied research is conducted in all academic disciplines. In the past few years in particular, K.U.Leuven's research output has increased considerably, both quantitatively and qualitatively, thus positioning Leuven at the highest level among European universities.

VUB Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Campus Etterbeek, Gebouw M, 3de verdieping, Belgium
BRUSSELS
www.vub.ac.be

The Vrije Universiteit Brussel covers two parkland campuses in the Brussels Capital Region (the main campus in Etterbeek & a medical campus in Jette) and provides a wide range of teaching: 33 first-degree programmes, 42 programmes leading to a second degree and 58 postgraduate specialisations, many of which are taught in English. Since its separation from the French-speaking ULB in 1970, the VUB has grown to become a medium-sized Dutch-speaking university, with over 9,000 students and some 2,450 members of staff (including 600 faculty teaching staff and 800 research workers), occupying a major position in Brussels, in Flanders and beyond.

University Gent

Ghent University Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 25, Belgium
9000 GHENT
www.ugent.be

Ghent University offers high-quality, research-based education in all academic disciplines. Today Ghent University attracts over 26,000 students, with a foreign student population of over 1,000 EU citizens and some 900 students from non-EU countries. Most of the research funding available at Ghent University is distributed on the basis of a competitive selection procedure which is organised either by the university itself (the Research Council), or by funding agencies of the regional or federal governments, or by international organisations, in particular the European Community. Thus a certain portion of our researchers' energies must necessarily be devoted to drawing up an ever increasing number of research proposals. The annual revenue for 2004 amounts up to 351 million euro; the direct funding received from the Flemish Community makes up 47.7% of the total revenue.

U.A. University Antwerp
Middelheimlaan 1, Belgium
2020 ANTWERPEN
www.ua.ac.be

The University of Antwerp consists of 7 Faculties which are characterised by high quality teaching based on fundamental and applied research centred around a number of centres of excellence. The Faculty of Natural Sciences covers a vast array of domains within the traditional departments of physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics and information sciences. Academic teaching at the University of Antwerp is closely linked to original scientific research carried out by the University's academic staff. Researchers were from the start forced to actively seek external funding for scientific research. Thus, the research component (primarily externally funded) has taken an important place. The figures illustrate this solid research orientation in a number of ways: UA derives about half of its income from external funds for scientific research. Besides the 850 academics supported by the operating allowances, over 700 researchers (employed on externally financed research projects) exclusively conduct research. Annually, more than 3,000 original scientific works are published, and every year around 70 of the over 600 graduate students obtain a doctorate (PhD). Furthermore, about 400 students annually obtain a postgraduate degree at UA. Besides fundamental and basic scientific research, a great deal of applied and policy-oriented research is carried out.

LUC Limburgs Universitair Centrum
Universitaire campus D, Belgium
DIEPENBEEK
www.luc.ac.be

The Limburg University Centre (LUC) is an independent, though state-subsidized university counting about 2046 students, about 256 teaching and research staff and about 192 administrative and technical staff (numbers of personnel in full-time equivalents). At present the LUC undertakes programmes of education and research in its three constituent faculties, Faculty of Applied Economics, Faculty of Sciences and Faculty of Medicine. In 2001 the Flemish and Dutch Ministers of Education have signed an agreement by which the transnational University Limburg has been founded. In the framework of this (separate) institution academic staff from the LUC and from the nearby Universiteit Maastricht (in the Dutch Province of Limburg, the Netherlands) will jointly undertake research activities and offer degree programmes in Biomedical Sciences and Informatics/Knowledge Engineering.