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SCIENCE AND INNOVATION POLICY IN FLANDERS (BELGIUM)

Department of Economy, Science and Innovation of the Government of Flanders (EWI) (<http://www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/en/>)

The Department of Economy, Science and Innovation (EWI) is charged with the preparation, monitoring and evaluation of policy concerning economy, science and innovation in Flanders. Furthermore, the Department coordinates the cooperation between the different agents of the Flemish government regarding economic, scientific and innovative domains. Transforming Flanders to one of the most advanced and prosperous regions in Europe, is the most important strategic goal. International cooperation is one of the corner stones of the science and innovation policy that is designed to stimulate

- excellent scientific research;
- an appealing and sustainable climate for investments;
- an open, creative, innovative and entrepreneurial society.

The science and innovation policy of Flanders is implemented by agencies:

Agency for Innovation by Science and Technology (IWT) (<http://www.iwt.be/english/welcome>).

This agency supports innovation in Flanders by various ways:

- Funding: innovative projects of companies, research centres, organizations and individuals are financed through assignments set by the Flemish Government. In 2008, 297 million € were paid out to Flemish innovative projects.
- Advice and services: all Flemish companies and research centres are supported. They are helped during their applications and technological advice is provided during their innovative projects. IWT is the national contact point for European funding programmes and assists in transferring technologies throughout Europe via the Enterprise Europe Network.
- Co-ordination and networking: collaboration is stimulated by bringing innovative companies and research centres in contact with Flemish intermediate organizations that stimulate innovation. This is done via the Flemish Innovation Network.
- Policy development: IWT supports the Flemish Government in its innovation policy. Among other things, the effectiveness of the Flemish innovation initiatives are studied and evaluated.

Research Foundation –Flanders (FWO) (<http://www.fwo.be/en/index.aspx>)

Research Foundation –Flanders (FWO) finances basic research which is aimed at moving forward the frontiers of knowledge in all disciplines. Basic research is carried out in the Flemish universities and in affiliated research institutes. Therefore FWO is Flanders' main instrument to support and stimulate fundamental research based on scientific inter-university competition.

FWO supports

- individual researchers and research teams by financing both talented, recently graduated students to obtain a doctoral thesis (Ph.D.) as well as Postdoctoral Fellows;
- young researchers at the start of their academic career;
- research by supplying personnel, equipment and consumables for top priority research proposals.

National and international mobility of researchers is promoted by

- establishing Scientific Research Networks to promote co-ordination, national and international contacts at postdoctoral level;
- attracting junior and senior Visiting Postdoctoral Fellowships to join a FWO research project or network bringing in additional expertise;
- providing grants for active participation of researchers in international congresses;
- providing grants for study and training periods abroad;

- bilateral agreements and participation in international corporate projects;
- sabbatical leaves;
- providing grants for organising international congresses in Belgium;
- mobility allowances for FWO-Postdoctoral Fellows.

FWO also participates in European research organisations like ESF, EUROHORCs, DUBBLE at ESRF, CECAM, EUPRO,... and awards scientific prizes to distinguished researchers.

Hercules Foundation (http://www.herculesstichting.be/in_English/index.php)

The Hercules Foundation was set up in 2007 by the Flemish Government as a structural funding instrument for investments in (large) research infrastructure. The Foundation is intended to support fundamental and basic strategic research in Flanders.

Bilateral cooperation with Asian countries

Universities in Flanders are obliged to spend 3% of the Special Research Fund (BOF) for international cooperation. Most of the universities have dedicated programs for collaboration with Asian countries, in particular with China, India and Vietnam.

Besides this, FWO spends 1.5 M€ per year dedicated for bilateral basic research projects. Vietnam and China have been selected among the Asian countries as preferential partners since already for a long time cooperation existed in previous government programmes.

With Vietnam the cooperation is organised through NAFOSTED (National Foundation for Science and Technology Development) and at present 5 bilateral projects are funded.

With China an active bilateral programme exists consisting of a researcher exchange programme run by FWO and the Chinese National Natural Science Foundation and a programme run by FWO and the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology with a focus on agronomy, biotechnology and micro-electronics.

Auteur principal: Prof. VANHELLEMONT, Jan (Department of Economy, Science and Innovation. Flemish Government)

Orateur: Prof. VANHELLEMONT, Jan (Department of Economy, Science and Innovation. Flemish Government)