

## **Belgium : Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS)**

### *General*

The National Fund for Scientific Research (FNRS) is an integrated research funding agency of public interest. It is devoted to the development of research-driven science on the basis of the criterion of excellence, through the support of individual researchers and of research programs initiated by laboratories and institutes associated with the universities of the French Community of Belgium.

The FNRS was founded in 1928 by king Albert I. Since 1947 it receives public subsidies, currently from the French-speaking Community of Belgium and the Federal Government of Belgium, as well as private funds like TELEVIE whose grants are targeted to leukaemia research. The FNRS also manages four associated and specialized funds : IISN (nuclear science), FRSM (medicine), FRFC (experimental equipment), FRIA (Ph.D. fellowships). The annual budget of FNRS is about 90 million Euros.

### *Funding instruments*

#### Individual researchers

The FNRS and associate funds support currently 1325 researchers of whom 793 are engaged in a Ph. D. thesis, 177 are conducting post-doctoral research and 355 hold tenured positions. These researchers are integrated in the University institutions, where a number of them are participating in teaching activities.

#### Research groups and consortia

In 2004 a total of 471 research groups have been funded. Of these 24 are involved in nuclear science activities (IISN fund), 212 in life science activities (FRSM fund), 155 in general basic science activities (FRFC fund) and 80 in Televie activities. 120 programs

have also received funding within the framework of the “credit aux chercheurs” program.

The FNRS has selected a list of 120 reference laboratories carrying internationally recognized research in their subject areas.

#### National and international collaborations

In 2004, 1244 scientific collaboration projects have been funded. They concern 226 brief visits abroad, 801 participations in scientific meetings and 128 organizations of scientific meetings.

To stimulate national collaboration the FNRS runs 89 contact groups devoted to various themes on which there is a recognized expertise in the Belgian scientific space. It is also financing courses or lecture series at the postgraduate level.

Finally, the FNRS coordinates the participation of the French community of Belgium in major international organizations such as ESF and CERN, among others.

#### *Evaluation and reporting*

Applications for funding by individual researchers as well as by research groups are submitted on special application forms at the beginning of the civil year. They are evaluated by specialized Scientific Committees each one of which is constituted of 10 Belgian and foreign experts. The evaluation is based on the scientific interest of the proposal, the originality and feasibility of the research and possible followups. The recommendations of the Committees are presented to the FNRS Administrative Board or to the Managing Board of the fund concerned. The University rectors are part of these Boards and play a significant role in the final selection process.

The scientific results of the programs that have been supported as well as the activities of individual researchers are subjected to regular reporting, which is evaluated by the Scientific Committees.

The fields covered by the research supported by the FNRS and by the expertise of the Committees span the range of engineering sciences (5 Committees), basic sciences (6 Committees), earth sciences (4 Committees), humanities and social sciences (8 Committees), life sciences (5 Committees) medical sciences (5 Committees) and sciences of the matter (2 Committees).

#### *Complexity research*

Complexity research is funded by FNRS mainly through the fields of Statistical Mechanics and Nonlinear Science. These fields are mostly covered by the Mathematics, Physics and Physical chemistry Committees of the basic sciences sector and by the Physiology Committee of the life sciences sector.

#### *Result dissemination*

The FNRS places great emphasis on the promotion of science to the public perception. It publishes the magazine “La Lettre du FNRS” on a monthly basis and an annual report on the research funded by the organization. Each year the Televie program launches a funding campaign as well as a series of conferences and demonstrations for the public.

In order to encourage scientific excellence the FNRS is also delivering several scientific prizes covering a wide range of disciplines.