

NWO Call PhDs in the Humanities 2020 – FASoS Selection Procedure

Are you a professor in our faculty and have you spotted a talented humanities student who has done or is in his/her last year of the MA (esp. a Research Master)? Are you a talented MA student and interested in doing a PhD in the Humanities? The NWO funding programme *PhDs in the Humanities* might be just for you!

The NWO programme finances individual PhD positions in the humanities. Based on the previous rounds, FASoS is likely to be able to nominate three PhD candidates to NWO. You can only submit a proposal for a PhD-candidate if you are selected by the dean of FASoS. Selection is done through a faculty procedure, which is coordinated by the Graduate School Board; please see description below. NWO makes the final selection and decides who will receive the grant.

You can apply for two types of PhD positions:

- standard PhD positions (4 years, 1 fte or 5 years, 0.8 fte)
- PhD positions for lecturers (5 years, 0.5 fte)

Your proposal must clearly fall within the range of NWO humanities disciplines¹. If you have a background in the social sciences, your proposal can be considered if it has a clear emphasis on humanities research.

Your proposal comprises a research project AND a PhD candidate AND a PhD supervisor. The PhD supervisor acts as the main applicant of the proposal.

It is highly advisable that the PhD candidate has obtained a research master's diploma. FASoS is free to propose candidates “who have not completed a two-year master's research degree but are of a comparable level”, but, based on past experience, having completed a ReMA is a clear plus in the CV of a candidate.

How to apply

1. Writing applications (until Monday January 6, 2020)

Candidates and prospective supervisors write a proposal. Please see Annex I for tips for applicants based on past experience in this funding scheme, to help you prepare for the application. During this period, make sure to have consulted the research funding advisor, [Merle Achten](#).

The Research Panel does not need to be consulted, as feedback and coaching will be provided by the GS Board.

¹ Please check the [NWO overview of SSH panels](#) if your discipline falls under one of the first four panels (linguistics; historical sciences; philosophy and religion studies; cultural sciences): and the [NWO overview of research fields](#) for the relevant discipline code. Please note that STS does not have a NWO code but might still be considered as humanities.

2. Submission of proposals (Monday January 6, 2020, 12:00h)

You (either prospective supervisor or PhD candidate) can submit your draft proposal until January 6, 2020, 12:00h, at the latest to [Sabine Kuipers](#). Proposals have to:

- follow the guidelines / formats proposed by NWO
- consist of a research project AND a candidate AND a supervisor

3. Reviewing applications (January 14, 2020)

The GS Board assesses the proposals for the Faculty Board based on the NWO criteria, i.e.

- the quality of the PhD candidate
- the quality of the research proposal

4. Selection by the Faculty Board (January 29, 2020)

Based on the advise of the GS Board, the Faculty Board decides which proposals are submitted on behalf of FASoS. You will be informed about the Faculty Board's decision latest on February 5, 2020 by Sabine Kuipers.

5. Feedback and rewriting proposals (January 29 until end of February, 2020)

You will be offered personal feedback on your proposal as soon as possible from one of the members of the GS Board following the FB decision. If selected, you will have until the end of February to revise and fine-tune your proposal on the basis of this feedback.

During this time you **must** contact the financial manager Sanne Winkens (s.winkens-gartener@maastrichtuniversity.nl) for budget preparation and **mandatory** financial approval.

6. Submission to NWO (First week of March 2020²)

The main applicant (= professor) must submit the proposal to NWO before the deadline. The FB sends a letter of endorsement to the NWO, together with a list of the selected applicants and the proposal titles.

7. Preparation NWO interviews

All candidates that receive an invitation for an interview are obliged to join the interview preparation offered by our research funding advisor. Please contact [Merle Achten](#). In most cases the candidate will be invited to participate in a mock interview with faculty staff in March or April.

Contact person for the faculty selection procedure:

If you have any questions about the procedure, please contact [Sabine Kuipers](#), Assistant Research Office.

² The NWO call is not out yet, but is expect to open end of November/December 2019. With the opening of the call the deadline will be announced. Based on previous rounds the exact deadline will be in the first week of March.

ANNEX 1

Tips for the Applicants and Students writing Draft Proposals for the NWO PhD Projects in the Humanities Program

This document is compiled by several FASoS staff members who have been former panel members of the NWO PhD's in the humanities funding instruments. Panel members are not allowed to give any comments on proposals written by candidates from their own faculty as soon as these proposals have been submitted, but for the past rounds, they can.

- (i) State the aim of your proposal in a clear way: what exactly do you want to research and what kinds of results do you envisage?
 - (ii) Make the proposal as transparent as possible and don't make it too complicated as: looking for subjects who are hard to find (for instance researching various actors simultaneously who are all needed in order for your project to be successful (for instance museum, artist, researcher, visitor, art reviewer)) since the committee will decide that the project is too vulnerable.
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1. First of all note that the "promotor" is the applicant in this scheme, which implies that this should be a full professor or associate professor. Therefore, in case you are an assistant professor interested in working on a proposal with a student the first thing you should do is contact the relevant (associate) professor and have him or her involved in the process right from the start.
 2. The NWO PhD Projects in the Humanities program is a highly competitive program. Many proposals are of higher quality than what is common in the context of other programs. This high quality is not only produced by the students/PhD candidates themselves but also by the input of senior and experienced applicants/supervisors. Since PhD positions are scarce at many Humanities faculties, these seniors put considerable effort in the proposals. Proposals only have a reasonable chance if supervisors and candidates write the proposals together and in close interaction. Underestimating the required effort is the biggest mistake one can make in the context of this program. If you really want to do/supervise this research and get the funding, the proposals need to be crystal clear, consistent, well-substantiated and typo-free from the first to the last sentence.
 3. Despite the fact that unofficially the role of the supervisors is considerable, the quality of the student's curriculum vitae is the leading factor in the first selection. Distinctions (*cum laude/summa cum laude*, double degrees), awards, grants and evidence of academic publications, research experience, presentations and other relevant academic activities are very important. Be precise and consistent in how you present this information. First your exams (BA/MA/ReMa) and grades, then awards, publications and presentations. Distinguish between peer-reviewed and professional publications and be precise. Don't say just "forthcoming". In a serious publishing process, one should distinguish between submitted, accepted (with minor or major revisions, or revise and resubmit), and in press (it is only "in press" if you already know the page numbers, since that means you have seen the proof prints). Check whether or not you are allowed to mention publications that have not yet really been published (in some programs this is not allowed).
 4. Follow the format very precisely—do not grant yourself any freedom in skipping bullet points or putting the information somewhere other than where the format provides.

5. Always formulate *questions (with question marks)* that one easily recognizes as such (make them stand out through formatting and/or layout). Panel members hate searching for a proposal's main questions. The same applies to other important information in the proposal. Even from a cursory reading a panelist has to be able to detect all the important information of the proposal.
6. All proposals will be assessed by the panel members themselves. For this reason, the panel is large and diverse. This implies that the proposals need to be interdisciplinarily *robust*. They need to be understandable to academics from all Humanities' disciplines, but even more importantly, they need to survive the scrutiny of empirically oriented linguists, archeologists and analytical philosophers on methods. A few tips on how to present your **methods**:
 - a. Always make a clear distinction between *selecting* and *analyzing* your material in your methods section. One could even make a further distinction between selected and elicited material (in case of interviews, you elicit material, but an archive is already "there").
 - b. About *selection*: If you study a sample of novels or a set of archives from a wider set of relevant novels or archives (in a particular country, time period, genre et cetera), clarify how representative your sample is for what you want to know. What are the criteria of your selection, what percentage do they represent of all relevant material in a particular country/time period/genre? How generalizable are the results of examining your cases? Please do not assume that just mentioning the archives or the novels or your "case studies" is sufficient. No linguist/archeologist/analytical philosopher will take that and they will simply kill your proposal, even though historians or literary scholars or STS researchers are used to doing it like this. In case of an ethnographic approach, be very specific about whom you observe, openly or covertly, through which gatekeeper, for how long, during which time of the week *et cetera*, and what that means about the representativeness of your research. In case of virtual ethnography: be very precise on your selection of sites, how you store elusive information, where your analysis begins and ends (which elements of and links to the sites?) et cetera.
 - c. About *analysis*: Literary scholars and historians often only explain *what* they are going to analyze (gothic novels, historical events and developments), but not *how* they will analyze these. What are the relevant *dimensions* or *categories* of your analysis and how does that relate to your questions and your theoretical approach? Give examples and spell out how these answer your questions. It is certainly not enough to say that you will do *archival research* or *discourse analysis*, or *qualitative interviews*. What kind of information do the archives provide you are interested in, what kind of documents do they store? And how are you going to code your documents?
7. As the panel is large and diverse, it is also of crucial importance that your proposal has a strong **narrative**. Make sure that you pull your reader right into the text from the first lines of the proposal onwards. Proposal writing is an exercise in seduction through words! Two panelists will be assigned to present your proposal at the first meeting. It is important that you have already won over these panelists so that they can convince the other panelists of the qualities of your proposal. People need to find your research "interesting" and "timely" even when it is far from their own expertise.
8. There is no need to take over all positivist/experimental talk like hypothesis, testing and results from the empiricist tradition but it is worthwhile to make a distinction

between your *questions* and what you *expect* to find, and how your expectations inform the structure of your thesis, choice of chapters etcetera. In contrast, proposals that just start out from chapters make the impression that no research is needed, and that the outcome is already known, which makes the more empirical researchers in the panel highly suspicious.

9. This is a humanities program. Therefore, make sure that the proposal meets the qualitative standards of humanities research. This includes the development of a sound and innovative theoretical framework (Which debates are you contributing to and why is your approach/question relevant?) and (if applicable) the demonstration of historical awareness. It also presupposes knowledge of the necessary languages to bring your research to a good end and a commitment to hermeneutics.

10. In 2019, these were the criteria on which the assessment of the proposals was based:

Quality of the PhD candidate/lecturer PhD candidate.

The following indicators will be considered for the assessment:

- study duration, number of studies, honours, prizes, travel grants, publications, relevant academic activities (such as internships, international activities, board activities)
- motivation for doing academic research
- experience relevant to carrying out the proposed PhD project

Quality of the research proposal:

- scientific importance
- originality/innovative character of the objectives and methodology (originality)
- clarity of the problem posed; operationability in subquestions
- suitability of the approach chosen and methodology for the objectives set
- feasibility of the work plan
- satisfactory composition of the supervision/research group

Further ranking criteria for applications on ex aequo positions

- Distribution of applications across disciplines
- Quality and sustainability of the faculty embedding

All candidates are preselected by their respective universities and perfectly qualified to execute PhD research. Therefore, if you want to appear as an *exceptionally good candidate*, you have to offer at least (and preferably more than):

- ReMa with *cum laude*
- Research experience as, e.g., (formal!) research assistant to your supervisor or as junior researcher in an externally funded research project
- An international, peer-reviewed publication (preferably not co-authored)
- A paper presentation at an international conference on a related topic
- A prize or award for your ReMa thesis (preferably by a national organization rather than your home university)
- A (competitive) grant to facilitate pre-PhD research or research related to your ReMa thesis

Even though these criteria might change, they give an indication of what NWO finds important.

11. Good luck!