

Frequently Asked Questions about the Toptalent Programme 2008

(Read Toptalent 2008 brochure first!)

1. What is the selection procedure?

There is a two-part selection procedure. First the universities produce a shortlist of candidates, then the shortlisted candidates are assessed by NWO.

2. When and where should I submit my proposal?

You can submit a proposal to your chosen university. The university will publicise the procedure and a deadline (in the autumn of 2007) for the submission of proposals. For information, contact the person designated in the university address list at the back of the brochure.

3. Is the Toptalent Programme open to people who have already obtained a Master's degree?

The programme is intended for people who are still studying for their Master's. You can only participate in the Toptalent program if you have obtained your degree not before September 1st 2007 and will obtain your degree no later than September 30, 2008.

4. Can I submit a proposal more than once?

No, you can only participate once. Candidates that submitted a proposal in the previous round cannot participate in the current one.

5. Do I have to be enrolled on a two-year research-based Master's degree course?

In principle: yes. However.. all universities are entitled to extend the definition, since not all studies have two-year research-based Master's degree courses. If you have any questions about the Master's definition used by the university, please contact the person designated in the university address list at the back of the brochure.

6. Do I have to have Dutch nationality to apply?

No, you can have any nationality.

7. How talented do I have to be?

Candidates must rank among the top 10-15% of their peer group. As a general rule, you must at any rate expect to graduate *cum laude*. The program is intended for candidates who wish to present their research ideas in a proposal written by the candidate.

8. How important is the required letter of recommendation from my intended supervisor?

The recommendation is very important. A good letter of recommendation will spell out the candidate's merits.

9. How important is my CV?

The CV is very important. Make sure that the CV section of the form is as complete as possible. Don't forget to give your average marks where these are requested and mention all your relevant experience. Remember that some information may not be immediately comprehensible to committee members and give brief explanations of e.g. prizes and awards (whether judged on a nationwide or university basis, how many awarded each year, and the size of the award) and offices held in clubs (what sort of club, how many members, etc.). Include details of links to relevant websites.

10. How important is the research plan?

The research plan is very important. It must show that your research idea is interesting and original, hence originality and creativity are important factors. Also it must be clear that you have the ability of tackling the research well, meaning that you should be able to formulate clear research questions and that you are able to transform your ideas in a clear approach and method. On top of that you should be able to clarify in what way your research will contribute to science, technology or society. Use the structure given in the application form.

11. Who can submit proposals to NWO?

Only the Executive Board of the relevant university can submit shortlisted proposals to NWO. It must do so no later than 8 January 2008. .

12. Does the Executive Board have to submit the proposals via the Iris system?

Yes, the use of the electronic Iris system is obligatory. See www.iris.nwo.nl for further information. The Iris helpdesk (iris@nwo.nl, tel. 0900-6964747 (15 eurocent p/m)) is available only on weekdays between 11 am and 5 pm (Dutch time). A crucial preparatory step in submitting an application via Iris is to convert the completed application form and letter of recommendation to PDF format.

13. Submission to NWO: is PDF format really necessary?

Yes. PDF is the only format accepted by the Iris system because it is the only one that guarantees that the files received by NWO are completely identical to those sent by the applicants. If you experience any technical problems with conversion from Word to PDF, contact your own computer support service or the Iris helpdesk.

14. Submission to NWO: the Iris system asks for the name of a 'kenniseenheid' (university etc.). What should the Executive Board fill in here?

There is a special name for Toptalent applications: NWO-TOPTALENT, with place name Den Haag (The Hague). This name is on the list and must be selected by the Executive Board. After this, the Board should give the private address of the student. This is better than the address of a university department or section, because mail addressed to students in that way frequently gets lost or delayed.

15. Who will be called for interview by NWO?

The candidates shortlisted by the universities will be assessed in the first instance on the basis of the information provided in their applications. Those given the highest priority rating will then be interviewed by the NWO assessment committee.

16. When will the NWO interviews be held?

The interviews will probably be held in March 2008..

17. When will the results be announced?

The results will be announced in April/May 2008.

18. Are there other ways of obtaining research grants?

NWO has a huge number of grant schemes (see www.nwo.nl), but most of them are reserved for postdoctoral researchers (usually with experience). The only other NWO grant scheme for doctoral students is the Mozaïek Programme, which is designed to encourage ethnic minority students to undertake doctoral research. The probable deadline for grant applications under that scheme is January 2008.