

BY THE NUMBERS

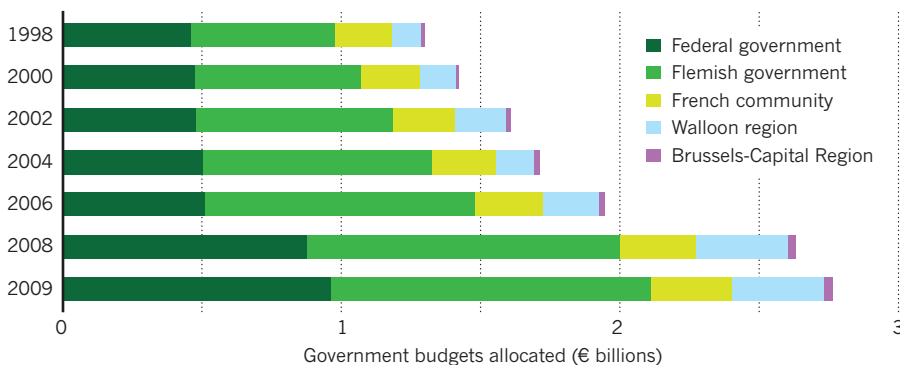
Belgium

BY KATHARINE SANDERSON

Famed for its beer, chocolate and the statue of a urinating boy in its capital, Belgium also has a well established scientific heritage. The country excels in biotechnology and space science, and has a world-leading nanotechnology research centre, the Interuniversity Microelectronics Centre in Leuven. Belgium also has the world's highest number of clinical trials per capita; this has been attributed to the nation's research capacity and very short time to approval for Phase I trials, compared with other European nations. The science budgets of Flemish-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia are administered separately, as is that of the small Brussels-Capital Region. Collaboration between individual researchers is not unusual, but there are few formal mechanisms to promote cross-region collaboration.

GOVERNMENT BUDGETS ALLOCATED TO RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Belgium's research funding has increased in general over the last 12 years, both regionally and country-wide.



Flanders has **61.7%** of Belgium's **36,318** researchers. Its government funds **6** research centres, with a total budget of **€150 million**.



Wallonia has **21%** of Belgium's researchers. **1,400** biotechnology researchers, in **300** research centres and **6** university science parks. It generates **79%** of Belgium's biotech revenue.

UNIVERSITY SPIN-OFFS

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LEUVEN

- Belgium's oldest university; Flemish-speaking.
- Second institution in Europe with a technology-transfer office.
- Created **90** firms since 1979.
- Attracted **€325 million** in investment to the region.

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LOUVAIN

- French-speaking; split from the Flemish university in 1968.
- Generated **45** spin-off companies between 1980 and 2008.
- The combined revenue from these companies was **€380 million**, and they have created **2,434** jobs.

EMPLOYMENT IN THE CAPITAL

- The remaining 16.6% of researchers are in the Brussels-Capital Region.
- Brussels-based biopharmaceutical company UCB (Union Chimique Belge) is building a biotechnology plant at its Braine-l'Alleud site. The plant, which will produce drugs for clinical trials in nervous system and immunological diseases, is scheduled to open in 2012 and will employ 100 professionals.

Q&A

Elisabeth Monard



The secretary-general of the Research Foundation — Flanders (FWO) in Brussels, which is responsible for much of the region's science funding, discusses its scientific research prospects.

What is the FWO's budget?

Since the mid-1990s, the Flemish government's budget for science has doubled. The FWO's budget for this year is almost €195 million (US\$268 million). For 2011 there could be a 5% cut, but we are optimistic, because the government has said that it has a plan for 2012 onwards, to invest more in science.

Is Belgium a good place for young scientists?

I think so. At the FWO we have fellowships for PhD students and postdocs. Only those with a master's from a European university can apply for the PhD fellowship. Our postdoc fellowships are open to all nationalities. We get more applications each year.

What opportunities exist in Belgium for foreign researchers?

We have a programme, Odysseus, to attract top senior and mid-career researchers. A university offers a position, and we offer funding, up to €1.5 million a year for five years. From 2011 onwards we will start a new programme, co-funded with the European Commission's Marie Curie Actions scheme, to attract more postdocs from other countries.

How international are Belgian scientists?

We have programmes to help our researchers move to other research groups all over the world. FWO fellows get a bench fee, which gives them mobility. And researchers can apply for grants to go abroad for up to a year. We are a bit afraid that our good researchers will go elsewhere because of the shrinking budget. I'm not worried that they are leaving, rather that they won't come back. **K.S.**