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BEWARE Programme

Big ambitions and great achievements

Report on the closing event of the BEWARE programme
on 27 February 2018 at the Musée Hergé in Louvain-la-Neuve



One of the European Commission's ambitions is to promote international mobility among researchers. Promoting the development of knowledge and boosting skills within our universities, businesses and research centres are other ambitions of the Walloon Region.

Over the last four years, these two major ambitions have found a shared area of expression in Wallonia.

The BEWARE (BELgium WALLonia REsearch fellowships) programme, cofunded by the Walloon Region and the European Commission (through the European Union COFUND programme/FP7 - Marie Curie Actions), has emphatically demonstrated its relevance.

The BEWARE programme has attracted to Wallonia 85 high-level researchers who either hold a PhD or have at least four years' professional experience.

These researchers come from 34 different countries, with France, Belgium, India, Spain, Algeria and Brazil at the top of the list. The other countries are Australia, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, China, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Senegal, South Africa, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia, the United States of America, Venezuela, Vietnam and Zambia.

The BEWARE programme offered them contracts of up to 36 months: an interesting proposal for mobile researchers, who generally receive shorter contracts.

The programme also invited them to take up either an R&D position within a business or research centre (BEWARE Industry) or a research position within a university (BEWARE Academia). In the latter case, a quarter of the researcher's working time had to be dedicated to an area of applied research within a Walloon business.

The main mobility criterion was very clear. Researchers of all nationalities, including Belgian, could claim a grant provided that they had not spent more than 12 months in Belgium during the three years prior to submitting their BEWARE project.



A part of the 85 researchers was present at the Musée Hergé

A REAL PLEBISCITE ...

The BEWARE programme, with a budget of 34 million euros, received nothing but praise during its closing evening on 27 February 2018 at the Musée Hergé in Louvain-la-Neuve.

During this event, four researchers with BEWARE contracts spoke about their experience. In addition to their own areas of research, they stressed the warm welcome they received in their host institution(s), the quality of the work they have been able to deliver, the relevance and coherence between their skills and the needs/wishes of the Walloon partners and the prospects this programme has opened up.

Although some of them will not remain in Wallonia at the end of this experience, others have decided to spend a few more years developing new research in their host institutions. Of particular note is the snowball effect that this programme has managed to generate.

BEWARE has also allowed several Belgian researchers who had moved abroad to return home to continue their careers, armed with their fresh experiences. This «brain gain» was not one of the programme's priorities, but it provided an opportunity for Belgian researchers planning to return home.

The programme was therefore an excellent resource for the institutions or businesses who hosted these returning researchers, allowing them to offer new and interesting career prospects.

«It is important to develop experience overseas», said Dr Michel Rasquin, one of the four researchers to speak during the programme's closing evening and one of these Belgian researchers. «But the desire to return home arises at some point. Being able to return to Belgium and continue my career thanks to grants like BEWARE is a wonderful opportunity», he confirmed.





From left to right : Alan Craig, Didier Paquot, Serge Schiffmann and Yves Houet

...FROM THE BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE...

For Didier Paquot, Director of the Economy, R&D and European Affairs Department of the Union wallonne des entreprises (UWE), the BEWARE programme has undeniably allowed the Walloon beneficiary companies to become more productive and more international, regardless of their size».

«Innovation is vitally important for our businesses», he said. «Smaller businesses do not necessarily have sufficient internal R&D resources to develop their products and services. Giving them access to high quality researchers for a long period is definitely a wonderful asset.»

«The BEWARE programme allows them to grow and develop, also internationally. By promoting international mobility for researchers and bringing foreign researchers into Walloon businesses, the BEWARE programme has given these businesses greater access to foreign markets and resources. We know that Walloon businesses are often wary when it comes to the internationalisation of their activities. Now we have a tool that facilitates this type of relationship.»

Another positive observation is the links that this programme has strengthened between businesses and universities, even within the Region. «These are bridges that are not always easy to build», stressed Mr Paquot.

«Finally, a programme of this type also gives our businesses an external perspective of their own activities. And by hosting mobile researchers, it also brings our businesses face-to-face with new cultures. In some cases, this can also mean new partnerships or even participation in other European/international programmes.»

Any wishes? Any questions? «*This programme is a success*», said Didier Paquot, who suggested that, «*perhaps we should also look at the after-sales service. This means the long-term integration of researchers who come to Wallonia and want to stay here. Perhaps an additional Walloon programme in this area would be a good idea*».

Didier Paquot was born in Liège in 1959 and has a degree and a Masters in economics from the Université de Liège. He joined the Union wallonne des entreprises (the Walloon business federation) in 1999, where he manages the Economic Affairs, R&D and European Affairs Department. He is also a scientific associate at the Université de Liège.



...AND THAT OF THE UNIVERSITIES...

The academic world share this analysis. The vice-rector for research at the Université libre de Bruxelles, Professor Serge Schiffmann, informed us that this programme had clearly met the expectations of the academic institutions.

«We too often think that fundamental research in the academic sector and more applied research cannot go together», said the speaker representing French-speaking rectors. «This is not true. The borderline is porous. Universities are very aware of this in the work they do for society. In the context of the BEWARE programme, the Walloon Region has acted as a real link between this applied research and more fundamental upstream research. This programme has allowed us to put together a trio of stakeholders with different profiles so that everyone can benefit.»

«This programme is primarily about the researchers. It has benefited their careers», he continued. «It also involved the universities, which is good for the development of new knowledge, as well as for the implementation of more fundamental knowledge and resources. Lastly, the third party involved is none other than the world of business, which was expecting specific results from the research. This tool, this programme, has therefore succeeded in creating a link between these three types of actors, a result that has been beneficial to each of them. It should also be noted that this programme was as useful as it was responsive, making it even more attractive.»

Serge Schiffmann is a Doctor of Medicine from the Université libre de Bruxelles (1986), where he is also a lecturer. He has managed the ULB Neuroscience Institute since 1999. He is also vice-rector responsible for research and commercialisation (2014).

The author of a large number of publications and a member of scientific committees both in Belgium and overseas, he teaches in Faculties of medicine and science and at the College of Engineers.

...AND RESEARCH CENTRES

Yves Houet, chemical and civil engineer and General Manager of Celabor, highlighted among other things the importance of this programme for the development of his Centre. Celabor is an approved research centre in the Walloon Region and has 48 employees; it specialises in agrifoods, plant extraction, packaging and the environment.

Three «BEWARE» researchers joined Celabor in the course of the programme.

«They have given us not only their technical and scientific expertise,» said Yves Houet, «but they also came with their networks. This was a clear added value for us. As these researchers also have an entrepreneurial streak and a more international outlook, they have put their resources to good use, particularly at European level, to develop new contracts for Celabor and launch our participation in new European research projects.»

Another participant fully satisfied with this dimension and international openness. We should also note that the additional work generated by the contributions of the BEWARE researchers in the research centre also provides the mobile researchers themselves with prospects for long-term stability within Celabor. So we see a short-term programme having longer-term effects in terms of knowledge, international networks and jobs in the Walloon Region.

Yves Houet obtained his degree in chemical and civil engineering from the Université de Liège in 1996. He began his career there as a research engineer in polymer and composite materials.

For the last two years, he has been General Manager of Celabor, an accredited research centre in the Walloon Region with 48 employees, specialising in agrifoods, plant extraction, packaging and the environment.



THE COMMISSION'S TRIPLE «I»

During the programme's closing event, Dr Alan Craig, in charge of the Commission's COFUND programme within the *Research Executive Agency* (the executive arm of the European Commission), also stressed the success of the BEWARE programme.

«This programme, co-financed by the European Commission and linked primarily to the international mobility of researchers, has clearly achieved its goal», he confirmed.

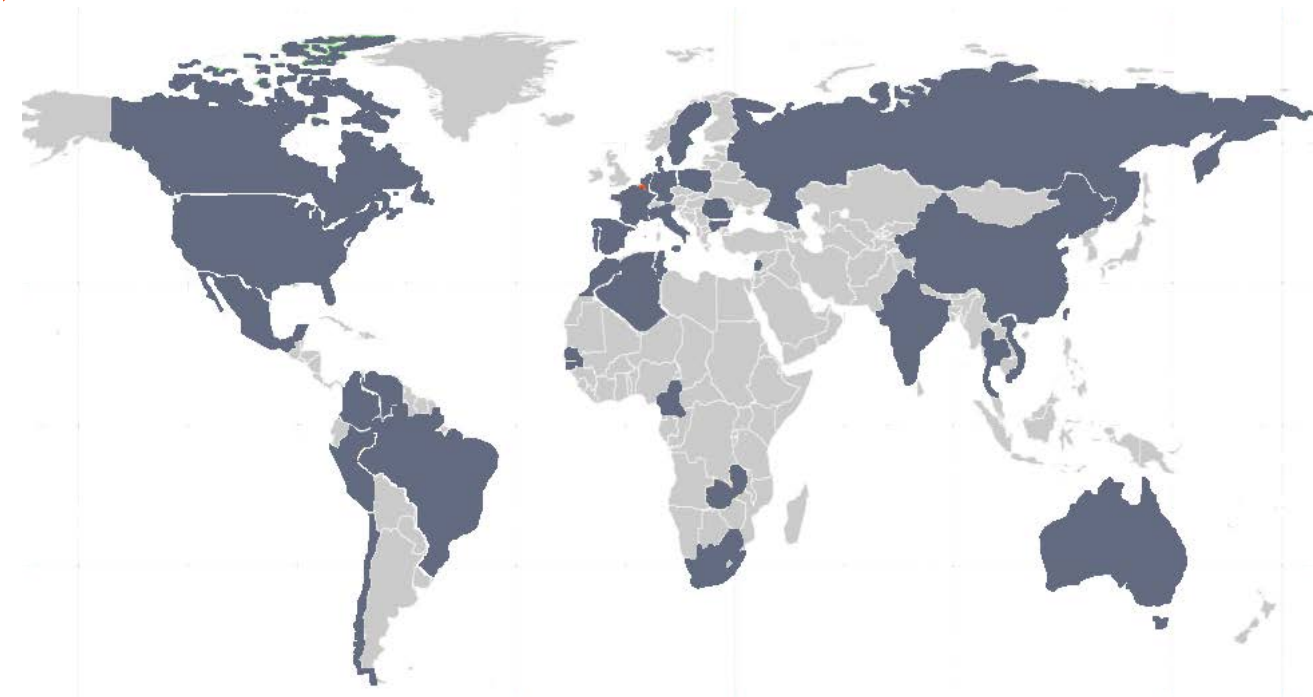
«This mobility was based on European quality and resource standards for all the researchers involved, regardless of their background and discipline. These standards were applied to all researchers, particularly with regard to pay.» (Ed. note: the Commission dedicated 14.5 million euros to the BEWARE programme).

Alan Craig stressed the success of BEWARE, particularly in terms of collaborations between businesses and universities: *«With 85 researchers enticed to Wallonia, this Region has fared much better than a neighbouring country with the same type of instrument», he pointed out. «Thanks to the BEWARE programme, Wallonia has clearly achieved the threefold objective in terms of brain circulation that the Commission intends to promote with its co-financing programmes: promoting the international, inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral dimensions of research and its consequences».*

«This threefold approach has now become the norm for European co-financing programmes, a philosophy that is perfectly in line with realities on the ground as we see them in Wallonia.»

Alan Craig is a mathematician by training and has spent the majority of his career as a researcher in the United Kingdom.

He has chaired a number of assessment committees for the Commission during the same period. In 2007, he joined the «Marie Curie» unit of the DG RTD as a seconded national expert and has been working at the REA (Research Executive Agency) since 2010, with particular responsibility for the COFUND programme. He has also been the recipient of a Marie Curie grant.



THE RESEARCHERS APPOINTED BY THE BEWARE PROGRAMME COME FROM EVERY CONTINENT, HELPING TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF THE SMES, RESEARCH CENTRES AND UNIVERSITIES OF WALLONIA.



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