

Postdoctoral Careers in Europe: Belgium





Introduction

Whether you are in the final stages of your doctorate or have just finished, you will probably be planning your next career move. One of the questions you will be asking yourself is whether to stay in your native country or embark on an academic career abroad. If you decide on the latter, Europe will almost certainly be on your shortlist of possible destinations. This eBook is for postdocs interested in starting or continuing their academic career in Belgium.

A multicultural and multilingual country, Belgium offers outstanding research facilities across the public and private sectors. The European Union capital, Brussels, has more policy and law makers, international companies, research organisations and think tanks per square foot than anywhere else in the world, providing unique opportunities for researchers.

In this ebook, you will find out about the Belgium higher education system, and gain valuable insights into funding options, career advancement, the job market in Belgium and practical ways to get a foot in the door.

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Research and Funding

Belgium's position at the heart of the European Union has further stimulated a strong international perspective in research across all disciplines. Research is carried out in universities, public and private research institutes and multinational companies. The private sector is the primary source of investment in research, which has traditionally been strongest in the areas of medicine, biochemistry, statistics and astronomy.

Funding is managed at community and university level, with the two most prominent research foundations - the [FWO \(Research Foundation Flanders\)](#) and the [Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique](#) - providing grants and fellowships for EU and international scholars. Other funding programmes for non-EU postdocs can be explored via the [Council for the International Exchange of Scholars \(CIES\)](#) and the [Belgian American Educational Foundation BAEF](#), which offers bilateral research fellowships for American scholars.

Career Progression

The academic career ladder varies according to each language community, however, all Belgian universities are open to hiring international researchers and lecturers. Flanders-based universities have increased their English-taught programmes in recent years, further facilitating mobility. French-speaking universities have fewer programmes in English so foreign applicants will need to have a good grasp of French before applying.

In the Dutch speaking regions, the first rung on the ladder would be as a postdoctoral researcher or part-time lecturer followed by, or in conjunction with, a 'tenure-tracked' lectureship. Higher-ranking permanent positions start with Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor followed by Professor. In the French-speaking regions, postdoc positions last for up to four years and are followed by permanent Assistant Professor/Lecturer roles. Higher ranks comprise tenured Associate Professor up to full Professor.

The Higher Education System

Belgium is a federal state organised into three distinct language communities: Dutch (Flanders region), French (Walloon region) and German (a small area of East Walloon). Responsibility for higher education is devolved to the French and Dutch-speaking communities, with both sharing responsibility for the delivery of education in the bilingual Brussels-Capital region. There are [six Dutch-speaking universities](#), [seven French-speaking universities](#) and a number of university colleges and private international institutions. The highest ranking institution in Belgium is Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven).

Universities and university colleges offer a two-tier system of three-year undergraduate degrees, and either 'research' or 'professional' two-year Master's degrees, with many programmes taught entirely in English, particularly in the Dutch-speaking regions. PhDs are offered by research universities only, and take around four to six years to complete. Self-funded PhDs are rare in Belgium; most are supported by the university under a type of employment contract. Higher education is funded at community and regional level, and universities manage their own budgets and staff recruitment with little influence from government. Students are charged a comparably low annual tuition fee of around €835/\$910 (EU/EEA nationals) and €835/\$910 to €4,175/\$4,560 (non-EU nationals).



Salaries

Universities follow fixed pay scales and each institution has its own system of setting academic salary grades.

Average academic salaries in Belgium (gross monthly salary):

- Postdoc researcher: €3,600 to €5,600
- Lecturer: €3,770 to €5,500
- Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor: €4,500 to €6700
- Full professor: €5,500 to €8,500

Internationalising the Curriculum

Belgium has a high cost of living, and Brussels has been named as one of the most expensive cities in the world (although Paris and London are both more expensive). Rent and energy prices can be particularly steep. However, some universities will help with relocation and initial living costs.

To find out more about living and working in Belgium, visit our country profile [here](#).

The Job Market

With the principal European Union institutions, NATO and a vast range of major international organisations and companies based in Brussels, there are numerous opportunities for foreign researchers in Belgium.

The university sector is more limited, with many postdocs finding themselves in consecutive temporary positions for a number of years. However, there have been moves to better support early career researchers in gaining permanent employment. Recent reforms include introducing a tenure-track style system (Flanders region) with an annual budget to create permanent posts for promising research fellows.

For those choosing a career outside universities, you will find various opportunities in [research institutes](#) as well as with the two main research councils, the FWO and FNRS, which advertise their vacancies and grants at certain times of the year. Although Belgium is a multilingual society, getting by with English alone may prove difficult and some knowledge of French, Dutch or German will help you stand out from the competition.

You can search for jobs in Belgium at www.jobs.ac.uk.



Job Application Process

There is no centralised application process in Belgium, and each institution has its own recruitment strategy. If you are applying directly to a university, you will generally be asked to send a CV/resume, motivation/cover letter and publication list along with your online application form. Application forms for tenured or permanent posts may require a lot more detail.

Like other Northern European countries, Belgians prefer factual information rather than a rundown of your greatest attributes. A simple, reversed chronological resume highlighting your qualifications is best. Although not required, most Belgians attach a photograph to their resume. Keep your cover letter short and use it to highlight your vision, career goals and how you would fit in with the organisation. If you are invited to interview, you will be asked to send all of your publications in advance and you may have to give a trial lecture.

Application Tips: Ensure you write your application in the language of the job posting, either Dutch, French, German or English. If you do not have the relevant language skills, email in advance to ask if you can write your application in English. Writing an application in Dutch to a French-speaking organisation (or vice versa) would be considered impolite.



Work Permit

Foreigners who wish to work in Belgium must acquire a work permit. This does not apply to EU/EEA or Swiss nationals. You will need to apply for the correct permit through the regional government. For more information on work permits in the different regions of Belgium, consult the Federal government's website [here](#).

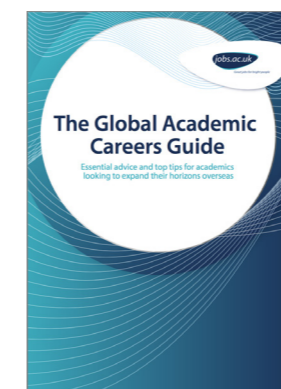
About this ebook

'Postdoctoral Careers in Belgium' has been compiled by jobs.ac.uk as part of the 'Postdoctoral Careers in Europe' series, helping you take your first step into the European academic world.

Europe is one of the most popular destinations for freshly-minted doctorates. Ancient and prestigious universities, excellent funding opportunities and diverse research networks attract thousands of international students, postdocs and academics to Europe each year. Add to this the prevalent use of English as a working language and a commitment to international cooperation in research which is unparalleled worldwide, Europe has much to offer aspiring academics.

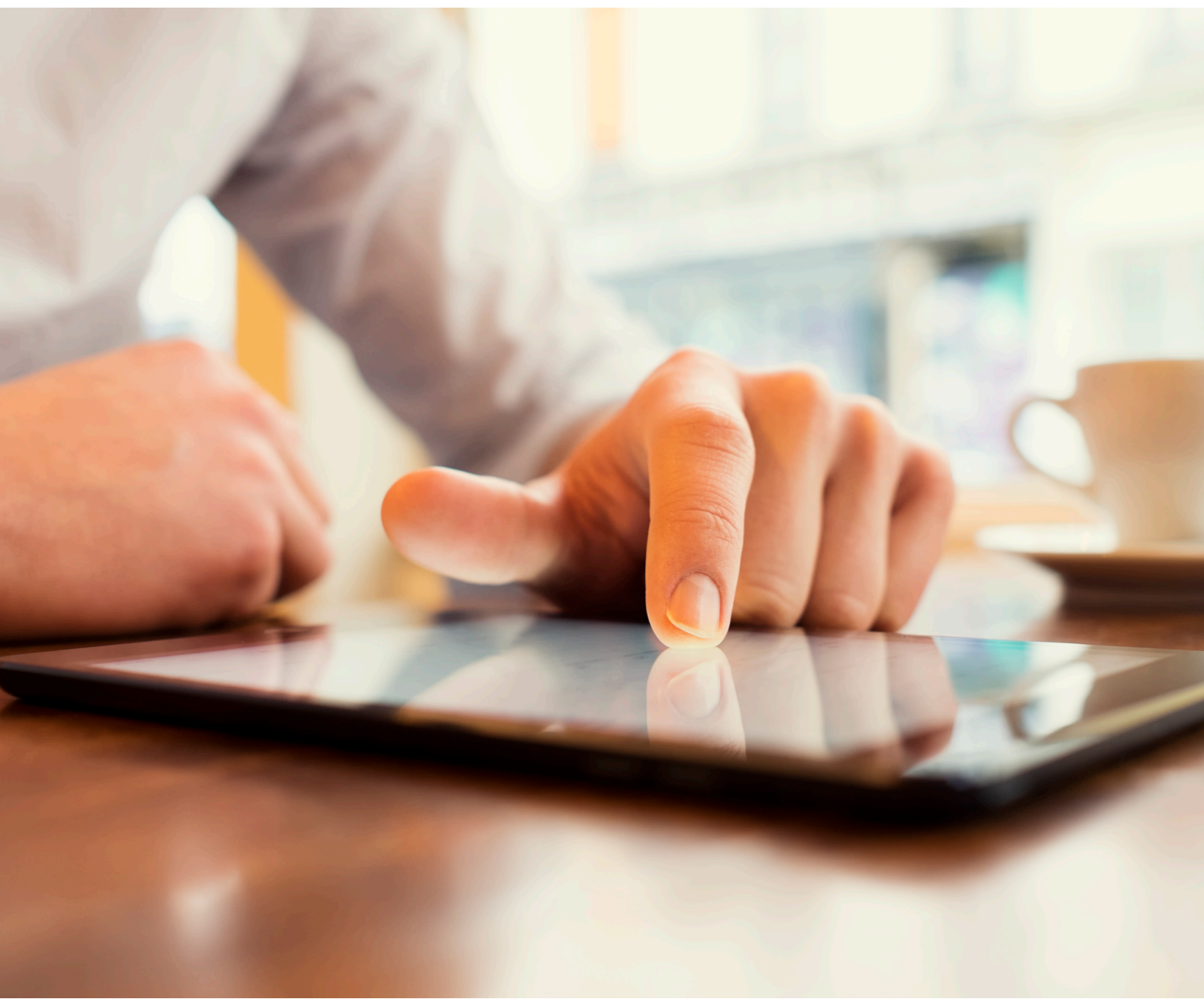
Combined, the European Union member states invest almost €300 billion in research and development each year. There is a strong tradition of cross-border collaboration, providing a unique research perspective as well as offering ample opportunities to work with colleagues across the continent. Whether you choose a job in a European university, research institute or company, you will experience fantastic research facilities, generous funding and progressive working conditions.

Recommended reading:



The Global Academic Careers Guide

Essential advice and top tips for academics looking to expand their horizons overseas. This ebook will tell you more about the scale of the new global market, help you consider the pros and cons of seeking employment outside your nation of origin, and give you important information that will improve your success rate if you do decide to give working abroad a try.



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