**Applicant: Sofie Claerhout**
**Application number: 1287926N**
16 juni 2025

**Concerning** Evaluation application Postdoctoral Fellowship Senior: “An interdisciplinary mission to unravel historical mysteries through the Y-chromosome: from single sperm cells to ancient human remains”

Dear researcher,

This year, the FWO received 439 applications for a Postdoctoral Fellowship Senior, 68 of which could eventually be granted by the board of trustees after a rigorous two-step selection procedure.

The expert panel IntDisPOSTDOC: Specific Interdisciplinary Panel has carefully evaluated your application as well as your defense during an interview. Based on the final ranking of the candidates in this panel, your application was not selected for granting. Consequently, the board of trustees could not grant your application.

Attached you can find detailed feedback on the evaluation. For the evaluation framework that guided these comments and scores, we refer to the score grid.

There will be no further correspondence about this feedback. If you have questions or if you need guidance to interpret the received feedback, reach out to your supervisor.

With kind regards,
Your account administrator

**Applicant: Sofie Claerhout**
**Application number: 1287926N**
16 juni 2025

## Feedback assessment criterion candidate

Strengths:
Dr. Sofie Claerhout demonstrates an solid academic background in forensic genetics, genealogy, and evolutionary biology. Her previous research resulted in multiple high-impact publications, conference presentations, and collaborations with international institutions. She has already demonstrated capability to integrate methodologies from multiple disciplines, particularly through her innovative work on Y-chromosomal mutation analysis.
Weaknesses:
Despite her strong record, some reviewers note that her leadership in managing independent research projects is still developing. The proposal would benefit from more explicit evidence of securing external funding or leading large-scale studies. Additionally, some reviewers suggested that her focus on historical DNA applications could be broadened to further biomedical contexts.
INTERVIEW
Dr. Claerhout demonstrated strong scientific expertise and motivation during the interview. Her background in forensic genetics, Y-chromosomal analysis, and science communication reflects a solid postdoctoral profile. She articulated the scientific rationale of her proposal convincingly and showed a clear vision for the societal impact of her work. However, her experience in leading large-scale, independently funded research projects is still emerging, and further evidence of strategic leadership development could strengthen her candidacy. Her reasoning and critical mindset are generally strong, though there remains room for refinement in articulating a broader scientific trajectory beyond her core domain.

**Score:** 5.50

## Feedback assessment criterion project

Strengths:
The project presents an highly interdisciplinary approach to refining kinship analysis, combining forensic genetics, archaeology, and evolutionary biology. The methodological innovations in Y-chromosomal analysis have the potential to improve historical and forensic applications significantly. The collaboration with international experts ensures access to valuable datasets and specialized expertise. The project is well-structured, with clear work packages detailing data acquisition, sequencing strategies, and analytical methodologies.
Weaknesses:
Some reviewers raise concerns regarding the practical feasibility of implementing the refined kinship models across different historical populations due to genetic drift and incomplete lineage records. Additionally, ethical considerations regarding the use of ancient DNA samples need to be further elaborated, particularly in terms of data sharing and repatriation policies.
INTERVIEW
The proposed project is highly original, technically well-conceived, and strategically positioned within an international research landscape. Its methodological innovation—especially in degraded Y-chromosome sequencing—presents substantial potential to impact both forensic and historical studies. The work packages are clearly defined and feasible, with appropriate risk mitigation strategies. Some uncertainties remain regarding the application of models across diverse historical datasets and the elaboration of ethical aspects tied to ancient DNA research, which should be addressed in future iterations of the project.

**Applicant: Sofie Claerhout**
**Application number: 1287926N**
16 juni 2025

**Score:** 6.00

## Feedback assessment criterion interdisciplinarity

Strengths:
The project exemplifies interdisciplinarity by merging distinct disciplines such as genealogy, archaeology, forensic genetics, and evolutionary biology. The combination of sequencing technology with historical data analysis ensures that the project contributes to multiple scientific domains. The involvement of experts across different fields also ensures an effective integration of methodologies.
Weaknesses:
While the interdisciplinary scope is impressive, some reviewers indicate that bridging communication gaps between forensic geneticists and historians may require additional structured collaboration strategies, such as joint workshops or interdisciplinary training sessions.
INTERVIEW
The proposal succeeds in incorporating multiple distinct disciplines—genealogy, archaeology, forensic genetics, and evolutionary biology—in a coordinated fashion. These fields are treated with mutual respect and contribute meaningfully to a shared research goal. Nonetheless, while the interdisciplinary ambition is evident, further structuring of cross-disciplinary collaboration—e.g., through formalized co-supervision or integrated training events—could deepen the level of interaction and ensure lasting synergy beyond the execution of the work packages.

**Score:** 5.00