

# Rubicon

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Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research

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# 1 Introduction

**The Rubicon is the river that Julius Caesar crossed in 49 BC before the series of victories that prompted his famous words 'veni, vidi, vici' ('I came, I saw, I conquered').**

The Rubicon programme is directed at promising young postdoctoral researchers who are still at the start of their scientific careers but whose scientific qualities give them the potential to become established figures in Dutch scientific research. Rubicon is part of the NWO Talent Line and is intended for the period preceding a possible Veni application.

The programme offers researchers who have completed their PhDs in the past 12 months the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills and experience by spending up to 2 years at a top research institute outside the Netherlands or one year at an excellent Dutch research institute.

The total annual budget for Rubicon is approximately 5.3 million euro, the equivalent of approximately 1.7 million euro per round. The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science contributes 4 million euro a year and NWO adds the resources previously allocated to the Talent programme to this. For the current round and the next 2 rounds after that, NWO has managed to acquire additional funding from the Marie Curie Cofund programme. The funding from the Marie Curie Cofund is about 3.4 million euro spread over the 3 rounds. The total Rubicon budget for the 3 rounds is about 8.7 million euro.

This brochure is valid for the round with the submission deadline of **1 April 2010**.

## 2 Aim

The aim of the programme is to encourage talented researchers at Dutch universities and KNAW and NWO research institutes to continue in academic research after they have gained their PhDs. It offers them the opportunity to enhance their career prospects by spending up to 2 years gaining relevant knowledge, skills and experience outside the Netherlands. The mobility of the researcher plays an important role in this process.

Rubicon also offers Dutch researchers the option of using the grant to conduct research in the Netherlands. However, researchers should preferably apply for a grant to spend time outside the Netherlands, as international research experience is likely to be an advantage at a later stage in the applicant's academic career and in applying for other NWO grants.

The Rubicon programme also offers talented researchers from abroad the opportunity to obtain a grant to spend one year conducting research in the Netherlands.

## 3 Guidelines for applicants

### 3.1 Who can apply

Any postgraduate who is currently engaged in PhD research or who has been awarded a PhD in the 12 months preceding the relevant deadline for the submission of applications may apply for a Rubicon grant.

*NWO can extend the deadline of 12 months after the formal award of a PhD, if the candidate has taken extended sick, parental, maternity or care leave within that period. The deadline may also be extended if the candidate has combined a part-time research appointment with care responsibilities or has undertaken training in a clinical specialism recognised by the Royal Dutch Medical Association (KNMG). The maximum period of one year after the PhD can be extended by a maximum of one year, which means that candidates can submit an application up until 2 years after the PhD at the latest. Candidates who wish to be considered for an extension must submit a request to this effect to NWO before they submit their grant application. They can do this by e-mail (rubicon@nwo.nl).*

Rubicon is open for research proposals from all disciplines except for stem cell research where new human embryos are harvested and used.

Women in particular are invited to submit applications.

Applications are only admissible for selection if applicants fulfil the following formal conditions. Only applications that comply with these conditions will be considered:

- a. Applications must be submitted by individual researchers and not by pairs or teams of researchers).
- b. Applicants must have graduated and/or obtained a PhD at a Dutch knowledge institute.  
and/or  
the Rubicon research must be conducted at a Dutch knowledge institute.
- c. Applicants may **not** apply for a Rubicon grant for a stay in the country in which they graduated, unless that country is the Netherlands.
- d. Applicants may **not** apply for a Rubicon grant for a stay in the country in which obtained their PhD, unless that country is the Netherlands.
- e. Applicants may **not** apply for a Rubicon grant to conduct research at the knowledge institute where they graduated from.
- f. Applicants may **not** apply for a Rubicon grant to conduct research at the knowledge institute where they obtained their PhD from.
- g. Each candidate may only submit an application for a Rubicon grant once. An application is considered to have been submitted when NWO decides that it is admissible for the selection procedure.
- h. Candidates who are still completing their PhD research may only submit an application if their supervisor approves the thesis (by means of a written declaration with the Rubicon application). The candidate may start on the research as soon as the date for the defence of the PhD thesis is known, but no later than 1 December 2010.
- i. Applications in which the harvesting and use of new human embryos takes place are not admissible. Research that uses existing embryos is admissible.

## 3.2 What can be applied for

### 3.2.1 Research outside the Netherlands

Candidates can apply for a stay of at least 6 months and no longer than 2 years at an institute outside the Netherlands. The host institute must be a publicly financed and recognised academic research institute. The researcher conducts the Rubicon research at a single host institute. In certain cases, external data collection or field research may be approved.

For a stay at a foreign institute, the host institute employs the laureate under comparable conditions to those for an average postdoc employed at the host institute. The size of the grant depends on the country of destination and the length of the stay and is determined according to a basic payment of 56,400 euro and a list of correction coefficients per country of destination. On top of this the grant includes 230 euro per month for research costs and NWO covers travel costs; once if the stay is 12 months or shorter and twice if the stay is longer than 12 months. NWO's standard rates for various destinations can be found on the NWO website ([www.nwo.nl/rubicon](http://www.nwo.nl/rubicon)).

### 3.2.2 Research in the Netherlands

Candidates can only apply for a stay in the Netherlands of exactly one year. Combining a period at a Dutch institute with a period at a foreign institute is not permitted. Combining Rubicon research at several institutes in the Netherlands is also not permitted.

The Dutch host institute will be assumed to be the employer and NWO will pay it a lump-sum grant of 55,000 euro. NWO will not act as the employer and the *Regeling Overlaten Werkgeverschap* will not apply.

Potential host institutes are Dutch universities which conduct research (Erasmus University Rotterdam, Tilburg University, Radboud University Nijmegen, University of Groningen, Delft University of Technology, Eindhoven University of Technology, Wageningen University and Research Centre, University of Twente, Leiden University, Maastricht University, Utrecht University, University of Amsterdam, VU University Amsterdam), Open University of the Netherlands and Transnational University of Limburg, KNAW and NWO research institutes, Netherlands Cancer Institute, Tilburg Theological Faculty, the Theological Universities of Kampen and Apeldoorn, and University for Humanistics.

## 3.3 When can applications be submitted

The next deadline for the submission of applications is 1 April 2010. Applications cannot be improved or added to after the deadline. For more information on the submission of applications see 3.6 and 4.1.

## 3.4 Drawing up an application

The application must include a research proposal written in English (max. 3 pages A4, 1700 words), the candidate's CV (max. 3 pages A4), a list of publications, 2 letters of recommendation (preferably from professors) and one written invitation from the intended host institute.

Applications from candidates who have not yet been awarded a PhD must be accompanied by a form approving their thesis. For further information see the application form, which will be available on the website approximately 8 weeks before the deadline. Forms are also available on the website for letters of

recommendation, the written invitation from the host institute and the written statement approving the thesis.

### 3.5 Specific conditions

Rubicon grants are to be used to acquire knowledge and experience via postdoctoral research and not to obtain a degree at a foreign university.

The research must start between 1 September and 1 December 2010. If the research is terminated prematurely, NWO will decide whether all or part of the grant is to be repaid.

Any research proposals that raise ethical questions must be carefully considered before the scientific research is carried out. Certain research projects require a statement of approval from a recognised medical ethics review committee or an animal experiment committee. For some research proposals a licence in accordance with the Population Screening Act (WBO) is required. A Rubicon applicant is responsible for determining whether his/her research proposal might raise ethical questions and for obtaining a statement of approval from the correct ethics review committee and/or obtaining a licence on the basis of the Population Screening Act, if necessary.

NWO subscribes to the *Openheid Dierproven* (Freedom of Information on Animal Experiments) and the Biosecurity Code. Rubicon applicants must subscribe to and comply with the prevailing codes. The specific requirements of the Marie Curie Cofund programme committee with respect to ethical aspects are detailed in Appendix 1. Due to the cofunding that Rubicon receives from the Marie Curie Cofund, all Rubicon applications must satisfy the conditions set by the European Commission. If the research involves human embryo stem cells, the Marie Curie programme committee and the ethics review committee must both approve the research before the project can start.

A research project can only start when NWO (if applicable) has received a copy of the approving ethical statement and/or Population Screening Act licence. NWO also expects that the candidates pay due consideration to the timetable of the Rubicon evaluation and the time needed for the assessment by the ethics review committee or the application for a Population Screening Act licence. For complex questions related to ethical issues, NWO reserves the right to consult an external adviser. If after consulting the applicant, NWO is of the opinion that an ethical assessment is needed for an application then the applicant is obliged to take the necessary measures for such as assessment. If the applicant fails to obtain the necessary statement of approval from an ethics review committee then the grant shall be immediately withdrawn.

Applicants can pose any questions they may have to the Rubicon programme coordinator.

For all Rubicon grants, the host institute should state in the letter of invitation that it is willing to offer the applicant facilities for at least the duration of the research, and that it shall employ the laureate. A Rubicon grant does not constitute a contract of employment with NWO.

Rubicon research may be conducted on a part-time basis provided that the time the researcher devotes to it amounts to at least 75% of the normal 40-hour working week. If less than 100% of the time is devoted to Rubicon research then the grant shall be proportionately reduced or the grant period extended in accordance with the percentage reduction in the working hours.

The researcher may spend the remaining 25% of the normal 40-hour working week (or part of it) in paid employment. Only if the income derived from this is clearly

intended to cover the same costs as the Rubicon grant shall this amount be deducted from the Rubicon grant. For example, if a researcher receives both a Rubicon grant and a Marie Curie fellowship grant, the Rubicon grant will be reduced accordingly.

Researchers who expect to receive other funding should contact Ms Helga Varwijk, tel +31 70 344 0852, e-mail [rubicon@nwo.nl](mailto:rubicon@nwo.nl).

The General Terms and Conditions of NWO Grants 2007 apply, except where they are at variance with the specific terms and conditions of Rubicon research grants (see Terms and Conditions of Rubicon Research Grants 2010, available on the NWO website: [www.nwo.nl/rubicon](http://www.nwo.nl/rubicon)).

### **3.6 Submitting an application**

Applications can only be submitted using the Iris electronic application system. To access Iris you need to apply for an access code via the NWO website ([www.iris.nwo.nl](http://www.iris.nwo.nl)). Other information about Iris can be found on the NWO website. For technical problems, please contact the Iris helpdesk.

Only applications that are submitted on time and completed in accordance with the guidelines in this brochure (see 3.2 "What can be applied for") will be taken into consideration. Use of the Rubicon application form is compulsory.

You may not submit the application or any enclosures by e-mail or post. The application must also state in which of the 3 disciplines the applicant wishes to be considered (see 4.1). The available choices are specified within the Iris system.

## 4 Assessment procedure

### 4.1 Procedure

The first step in the procedure is to assess the applications submitted for compliance with the requirements specified in Chapter 3. Applications that do not comply with these requirements will not be considered.

The views of external referees will not be sought. Applications must be rated at least as 'very good' by the committee to be eligible for a grant. Grants will be awarded by the boards of the responsible NWO divisions based on the basis of priority and available budget. The entire assessment procedure takes approximately 4 months.

### 4.2 Criteria

Proposals will be assessed on the basis of the following quality criteria:

*Quality criteria:*

– *Quality of the applicant*

NWO will judge whether the candidate is among the best members of his or her generation in the relevant field of study. Evidence for this will be sought in the CV, including publications (number and quality), the 2 letters of recommendation and the written invitation from the host institute.

– *Quality of the proposal*

The quality of the proposed research and its significance for the relevant field of study (whether it is innovative and pioneering) and the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of the research plan (the length of the proposed period of research must be in proportion to the work to be done).

– *Quality of the host institute*

The host institute should offer the applicant a stimulating research environment and possess good facilities for academic research. The quality of the host institute will be considered in relation to the proposed research.

### 4.3 Composition of the committee

Three multidisciplinary advisory committees will be appointed per round to assess the applications:

- Physical Sciences (EW), Chemical Sciences (CW), Physics (N) and the Technology Foundation STW will appoint a single advisory committee for the natural sciences cluster. The Division for Physics is the official secretary for this cluster.
- Social Sciences (MaGW) and Humanities (GW) will appoint a single advisory committee for the arts and social sciences cluster. The Division for the Social Sciences is the official secretary for this cluster.
- Earth and Life Sciences (ALW) and Medical Sciences (ZonMw) will appoint a single advisory committee for the life sciences cluster. The Division for the Earth and Life Sciences is the official secretary for this cluster.

# 5 Other information

## 5.1 Contact

### Coordinator Rubicon

- Ms H.R. Varwijk MA  
Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)  
Policy Development and Support
- PO Box 93138
- 2509 AC The Hague
- Telephone: +31 70 344 0852 (secretary)
- E-mail: [rubicon@nwo.nl](mailto:rubicon@nwo.nl)
- [www.nwo.nl/rubicon](http://www.nwo.nl/rubicon)

## 5.2 Timetable

1 April 2010 (by 23.59)	Deadline for submitting applications via the Iris system
May/June 2010	Meeting of the multidisciplinary assessment committee
End of June 2010	Decisions made by the divisional boards of the 3 clusters
Start of July 2010	Announcement of the awards to the candidates
1 September 2010	Earliest possible starting date for research

## 6 Appendix: Conditions stipulated by the European Commission for the ethical aspects

1. **Informed consent:** When describing issues relating to informed consent, an appropriate level of ethical sensitivity will need to be shown, and due consideration given to the issues of insurance, incidental findings and the consequences of leaving the study.
2. **Data protection issues:** Avoid the unnecessary collection and use of personal data. Identify the source of the data and describe whether it is collected as part of the research or if previously collected data is being used. Consider issues of informed consent for any data being used. Describe how the identities of individuals providing the data are protected.
3. **Use of animals:** Where animals are used in research then the application of the 3Rs (Replace, Reduce, Refine) must be convincingly addressed. Numbers of animals should be specified. Describe what happens to the animals after the research experiments.
4. **Human embryonic stem cells:** Research proposals that will involve human embryonic stem cells (hESC) will have to address all the following specific points:
  - a. the applicants should demonstrate that the project serves important research aims to advance scientific knowledge in basic research or to increase medical knowledge for the development of diagnostic, preventive or therapeutic methods to be applied to humans.
  - b. the necessity to use hESC in order to achieve the scientific objectives set forth in the proposal. In particular, applicants must document that appropriate validated alternatives (in particular, stem cells from other sources or origins) are unsuitable and/or unavailable to achieve the expected goals of the proposal. This latter provision does not apply to research comparing hESC with other human stem cells.
  - c. the applicants should take into account the legislation, regulations, ethical rules and/or codes of conduct in place in the country or countries where the research using hESC is to take place, including the procedures for obtaining informed consent;
  - d. a project involving hESC cannot start before the Marie Curie programme committee has given its consent.
  - e. the applicants should ensure that all hESC lines to be used in the project have been derived from embryos:
    - i. for which the donor's/donors' express, written and informed consent was provided
    - ii. freely, in accordance with national legislation prior to the procurement of the cells.
    - iii. that result from medically-assisted *in vitro* fertilisation designed to induce
    - iv. pregnancy, and were no longer to be used for that purpose.
    - v. for which the measures to protect personal data and privacy of the donor(s), including genetic data, are in place during the procurement and for any use thereafter. Researchers must accordingly present all data in such a way as to ensure donor anonymity;
    - vi. for which the conditions of donation are adequate, and that no pressure was put on the donor(s) at any stage, that no financial inducement was offered to donation for research at

any stage and that the infertility treatment and research activities were kept appropriately separate.