Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2021

Call for proposals

Netherlands Initiative for Education Research (NRO)
Chapter 1: Introduction / Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2021

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

On 2 December 2019, the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) presented the Strategic Agenda for Higher Education and Research, *Houdbaar voor de toekomst* (Fit for the Future), to the Lower House of Parliament. The Strategic Agenda sets out ambitions for the development of higher education in the Netherlands.

One of the prerequisites for achieving these ambitions, according to the Agenda, is the recognition and appreciation of teachers’ teaching performance in relation to their research and to collaborating in teams. The Strategic Agenda builds on the Strategic Agenda of 2015, *De waarde(n) van weten* (The Value of Knowledge) – both in terms of themes and of emphasis on room for manoeuvre for professionals at Dutch institutions of higher education. Inspired teachers, leaders and directors in higher education who have proven to be successful are crucial in identifying opportunities for and designing good, innovative education.

With a view to giving these professionals the desired room for manoeuvre, the Comenius programme was set up in the autumn of 2016 with part of the resources freed up by the introduction of the *Studievoorschot* (student loan system). Johannes Amos Comenius (1592-1670) was a seventeenth-century pedagogue and education innovator; he is often called the founder of modern education. In his search for good quality education, Comenius combined education research with the development and implementation of innovative teaching methods. The Comenius programme allows teaching professionals to implement their vision of education in practice, in the spirit of the programme’s eponym.

The Comenius programme offers grants to Teaching Fellows (€50,000), Senior Fellows (€100,000) and Leadership Fellows (€500,000). These three categories of Fellows are distinguished on the basis of their experience and the extent of their impact on education. They can use the grant to implement education innovations and improvements in their own teaching practice on a scale suited to their position and the duration of the project.

This call for proposals provides an overview of the application procedure for a Comenius grant for a Leadership Fellow as well as the assessment and selection of applications. You will find information below on the aim of this programme (Chapter 2), the guidelines for the grant application (Chapter 3) and how your application will be assessed (Chapter 4).

1.2 Available budget

The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) will make a total of €6,200,000 available for grants in the 2021 round of the Comenius programme. The grants will be divided equally between universities of applied sciences (Dutch acronym: hbo) and research universities (Dutch acronym: wo).

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2 Although this is called a Comenius grant, it is formally an increase of the government grant. This grant will be awarded through modification of the higher education financing scheme (*Regeling financiën hoger onderwijs*) in connection with changes to the budget of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen*, OCW) for the financial year concerned; as from then, it will be a legal obligation. The Comenius grant is therefore not a personal grant.
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The available budget for this ‘Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2021’ funding round is €2,000,000 in total. The maximum amount of a grant for each project is €500,000.

The grants will be divided equally between universities of applied sciences and research universities. This means that two grants are available for projects at universities of applied sciences and two for projects at research universities.²

1.3 Validity of the call for proposals

The deadline for submitting a letter of intent is 3 September 2020, 14:00 CEST.

The deadline for submitting an application is 8 October 2020, 14:00 CEST.

Timely submission of a letter of intent is a prerequisite for submitting an application. The letter of intent will not be assessed on content.

² In case of collaboration between a university of applied sciences and a research university, the coordinating institution determines the category under which the proposal will be treated.
2 Aim

Section 2.1 describes how Comenius projects contribute to the objectives of the Comenius programme. Section 2.2 describes the specifics of a Leadership Fellow project.

2.1 Projects in the Comenius programme

The Comenius programme’s aim is twofold. First, the Comenius programme funds education innovation projects that contribute directly to innovation and improvement of higher education in the Netherlands for the benefit of students. Second, the Comenius programme facilitates varied career paths for lecturers and researchers at universities of applied sciences and research universities by visibly appreciating excellent and inspired teaching. The projects of Teaching Fellows, Senior Fellows and Leadership Fellows are distinguished on the basis of their impact on education, which becomes broader at each ‘tier’ in the programme.

Improving education through evidence-informed innovation

The Comenius programme provides funding for innovation projects that are so innovative or entail such an ambitious improvement that they are also considered innovative outside the institution implementing the project.  

In their proposal, the applicant must clarify the distinctiveness and added value of the project compared to other projects with the same objective. To do so, they must demonstrate that they have orientated themselves to what is already happening in higher education in the context of the project. If the applicant wishes to apply an existing innovation in the project that has proved successful elsewhere, they must show in the project proposal that the application requires a different, and therefore innovative, approach in their own teaching practice. If the project is building on a pilot, the applicant must demonstrate how further development and/or scaling up of the pilot requires an innovative, original approach and can produce new results.

The innovation must be aimed at improving education. The improvement must directly benefit students at a publicly-funded Dutch institution of higher education. The innovation must be implemented in the student’s (online) educational environment. The motivation and inspiration for the project must be derived from the educational environment and the Comenius Fellow’s own vision of education. This need for improvement should be substantiated by a problem analysis and a professional statement. The specific context and scope of the project should be clearly defined in the proposal.

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3 The proposed innovation must fall within the scope of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act applicable at the time the application is submitted.
4 See Section 1.8 of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (only available in Dutch) for a complete list of publicly-funded institutions. Projects should focus on programmes in initial higher education or on pathways that improve access to initial higher education (e.g. transition programmes between intermediate vocational and higher professional education). This means that projects aimed at post-initial higher education, including pathways for PhD students, are excluded.
5 Projects whose primary objective is the professional development of teachers are therefore excluded. Of course, the professional development of teachers can be a component, even a necessary one, of successful implementation of an innovation in the student’s learning environment.
6 The development of educational resources that are not implemented or used in education until after the end of the Comenius project cannot be financed through a Comenius grant.
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The innovation must be set up in an evidence-informed manner. This means that the proposal should clarify why the proposed innovation is likely to lead to an improvement. References to relevant specialist literature and any examples from practice must be used for this purpose. If the applicant makes reference to arguments derived from their own teaching experience, they should demonstrate familiarity with relevant developments within and outside their own institution.

The project plan in the proposal must show the feasibility of the envisaged innovation. It should explain how the project will be set up and implemented, what expertise is required and what the project team composition is. It should also describe how students will be involved in the project. Furthermore, the project plan should include a concise risk analysis identifying potential obstacles and a description of the project evaluation.

Because of the innovative nature of the projects, the results will also be relevant for other teachers and teaching professionals in the Netherlands. Evaluating and being able to share experiences and results is an essential aspect of a Comenius project. It should be clear from the proposal how the innovation and implementation will be evaluated so that the results of the project are visible. This increases the value of the outputs for teaching professionals who are not directly involved in the project. The applicant must also consider how the results and experiences will be shared with teaching professionals within and outside their own institution.

**Contributing to educational careers by appreciating excellent teaching**

A grant for innovation in education is an explicit recognition and appreciation of excellence in teaching and in providing inspired education. The grant will offer Comenius Fellows the opportunity to focus on improving their own teaching practice during the project period and for further development as a teaching professional. Comenius Fellows are also admitted as members to the Comenius Network. This is a network of education innovators who share knowledge and experience and work together on projects to improve higher education. The network serves as a discussion partner for policy makers, politicians and citizens in the field of teaching in higher education.

In the professional statement of the proposal, the applicant should explain their vision on higher education and what the innovation is. The applicant’s own teaching experience and the intended project should also be explicitly positioned within this broader vision. Finally, the applicant should explain how a Comenius grant can contribute to their teaching career and how they hope to inspire other teaching professionals, including through membership of the Comenius Network.

### 2.2 Profile and projects of the Leadership Fellow

**Leadership Fellow**

A Leadership Fellow must have an impact on education in several faculties or in an entire educational institution. A Leadership Fellow has, through their experience and (international) network, a comprehensive view of the field of education and is familiar with current developments in the field of the intended innovation – both nationally and internationally. In addition, the Leadership Fellow (possibly through the composition of the project team) must have the mandate and ‘sway’ to implement this innovation within the faculty or institution.

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7 The tiers of the Comenius programme in which teachers can develop are based on Ruth Graham’s *Career Framework for University Teaching*. See: [https://www.teachingframework.com/](https://www.teachingframework.com/)
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The Leadership Fellow must have at least seven years of teaching experience in higher education, possess educational leadership qualities and have a demonstrable impact on the teaching climate at their own institution. The aim of a Comenius grant, for a Leadership Fellow, is to give impetus to the educational ambitions of the institution and to inspire other teaching professionals. This will allow the Leadership Fellow to develop into an educational leader at a national or even international level.

The Leadership Fellow project

A Leadership Fellow project takes place within several faculties or an entire educational institution. Collaboration between faculties of different institutions of higher education is also possible. The project can be carried out with a grant of €500,000 and a duration of at least 36 months and at most 42 months. The project should give impetus to the education ambitions formulated in the institution’s strategic education plan. This will enable the institution to showcase itself in this area and to take a leading role at the national or even international level. In the dissemination plan, the applicant must take publication channels outside their own institution into account for the future.  

The project must be in line with recent developments in the national – and possibly international – discourse on the project’s theme. The proposal must clarify how the project will contribute to this, including through research linked to the innovation.

*‘Publication’ should be broadly understood to include public dissemination of information about the project, for example in a trade journal, on an online platform, through presentations at conferences or in a scientific journal.
3 Guidelines for applicants

This chapter provides an overview of the guidelines that apply to your grant application. First, it sets out who can apply for a grant (3.1), what kind of grant you can apply for (3.2) and the deadline for submitting your application (3.3). Subsequently, you will find the guidelines for preparing the application (3.4) and specific grant conditions (3.5).

3.1 Who can apply

Conditions for applicants in the Comenius programme

Applications can be submitted by teaching professionals working in publicly-funded institutions of higher education in the Netherlands (Article 1.8 of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act; only available in Dutch).

An applicant will act as project leader and may, in their application, specify a team of colleagues, advisers and students (the ‘project members’). The applicant must submit the application in ISAAC and, during the assessment procedure, will receive all relevant communication from NRO and OCW. After the grant is awarded, the applicant will be the contact person for NRO and OCW.

Applicants in the Comenius programme must satisfy the following conditions:

- An applicant can only submit one application per year in the Comenius programme.
- A Comenius Fellow who previously received a Comenius grant can ‘move up’ within the programme, but cannot apply again for the same grant, or for a grant at a lower tier. To ensure the continuity of projects, an application for a grant in the next-level tier may be submitted in the last year of the current Comenius project, but they cannot overlap.
- If a grant is awarded, only the applicant – so not the rest of the team – will be appointed a Comenius Fellow and will be admitted to the Comenius Network.
- From the 2020 round onwards, an applicant may submit a maximum of two full applications in consecutive years in the same tier of the Comenius programme. This condition does not apply to preliminary applications in the same tier, or to full applications submitted in other tiers.

Conditions for applicants in the Comenius Leadership Fellows round

One application may be submitted for each institution. The Executive Board endorses the proposal with a substantive recommendation and a statement that the project leader and the project team will be given sufficient scope to implement the project if the grant is awarded.

To promote a wide distribution of Comenius Leadership Fellows across the country, institutions that received a Leadership Fellow grant in 2020 are excluded from submitting an application in the 2021 round.

In addition, the applicant must satisfy a number of conditions:

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9 It is not possible to register a co-applicant in ISAAC.
10 The Comenius programme consists of three funding rounds: Teaching, Senior and Leadership Fellows.
11 In the Leadership Fellows round, where no preliminary applications or full proposals are submitted, the same rule applies to applications.
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- The applicant must, at the time the grant is awarded, have a contract of employment with the institution where the project is intended to be implemented for at least the duration of the project and for at least 0.5 FTE. If the applicant has a contract of employment for less than 0.5 FTE with the institution at the time of submitting the application, the Executive Board’s statement must indicate that the contract will be extended for at least the duration of the project at the time the grant is awarded.
- The applicant must have at least seven years’ experience in higher education at the start of the project.
- The applicant will have a coordinating or administrative role and must be able, in this capacity or through the team composition, to implement the innovation across the entire scope of the proposed project.
- The applicant must demonstrate, with a recommendation from the Executive Board, that the project is ‘supported’ within the institution and that the project team will be given sufficient scope to implement the project if the grant is awarded.

The NWO Code for Dealing with Personal Interests applies to all persons, including NWO staff, who are involved in the assessment of and decision-making on applications submitted under this call for proposals. This code lists personal interests that clearly exclude participation in the assessment procedure and personal interests that require consideration of whether and under what conditions the applicant may participate in the assessment procedure. Pursuant to Section 2:4 of the Dutch General Administrative Law Act, the appearance of bias must also be excluded. In terms of eligibility to submit an application, this means that members of the Assessment Committee cannot be applicants or a member of the project team in this funding round.\(^{12}\)


### 3.2 What can be applied for

The budget available for the ‘Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2021’ funding round is €2,000,000 in total. The available budget for each application is at least €450,000 and at most €500,000. You can submit applications with a duration of at least 36 months and at most 42 months. The start date of a project cannot be before the planned announcement of the decision, so not before 1 May 2021.

You can apply for a grant to cover the direct staff costs and material costs associated with the project. All costs must be substantiated. You can only apply for a grant to cover the costs of persons and institutions established in the Netherlands.

The Comenius grant will be disbursed, through government funding, to the institution where the project will be implemented. This means that an account for the financial settlement of the project must be included in the institution’s annual report.

A separate form (Excel file) is available for processing the budget associated with your application. You must fill in this budget form and send it as an appendix to your application when you submit it digitally.

Funding can be requested to cover direct staff costs as well as the material costs associated with the project.

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\(^{12}\) Members of the Assessment Committee are not excluded from submitting an application in the other tiers (Teaching Fellows, Senior Fellows) of the Comenius programme.
Staff at educational institutes

The following maximum rates (hour/day) are used to finance the wage costs of staff working at a publicly-funded institution of education (secondary education, vocational education or higher education), in accordance with the Guide to Government Fees for 2017. The fees are based on the cost-effective fee plus additional fees.

Staff at publicly-funded institutions of education and research, including staff with a permanent employment contract, must be remunerated according to the following maximum rates (hour/day):

- Secretariat/students: €53/424
- Junior/research assistant academic staff and non-academic staff/teaching staff: €72/576
- Mid-level/university teaching staff/lecturer-researchers: €87/696
- Senior/associate professor: €95/760
- Director/professor/lecturer: €119/952

These rates are explained in further detail in the Guide to Government Fees for 2017, which is available at [www.nro.nl/projectbeheer](http://www.nro.nl/projectbeheer) (only available in Dutch).

You should specify in the application how you wish to allocate the requested staff costs to the different members of the project team (where relevant), stating your considerations for this allocation. You should specify the day rates for each staff category in the budget. These may not exceed the above rates, but you may specify a lower rate.

Wage costs for project staff who are not employed by a publicly-funded institution of secondary or higher vocational education should be entered under material costs. Even if these costs are covered by co-financing, whether in cash or in kind, they should still be entered under material costs.

Material costs

The requested budget for material costs may not exceed 20% of the total budget requested. All costs must be substantiated.

A budget can also be requested to cover material costs such as:

- training sessions or courses for the applicant and members of the project team, as needed for the project;
- remuneration for professionals who are not affiliated with a publicly-funded institution of higher education (for example: external advisers, software developers, designers, and so on);
- travel (e.g. to visit research institutions in the Netherlands and abroad that contribute substantively to the project);
- attending national and international conferences, as needed for the project;
- costs associated with the dissemination of project results, knowledge transfer and knowledge utilisation, including the costs associated with publishing academic publications about the project through open access.

Costs of purchasing previously developed digital educational resources and licences for such resources are not eligible for funding under the Comenius programme, even if they have to be purchased specifically for the project. The time spent on further development of these educational resources by the applicant or project staff, however, can be entered under staff costs.

The costs of equipment, consumables or administrative or technical assistance that must be considered part of the normal facilities package of an educational institution and the costs of using laboratories and computers in data centres are not eligible for funding, unless the research requires the use of facilities that demonstrably exceeds normal use.
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Only costs relating directly to the research are eligible for funding, which means you cannot receive a grant for accommodation, overhead, maintenance or depreciation costs, for example.

**Co-financing**

It is possible to contribute co-financing, in cash or in kind, in the form of staff and material costs. Co-financing may not, however, exceed the requested budget (a maximum of €500,000) as OCW must remain the main financier of the project. Furthermore, the budget form must clearly indicate which staff costs or material costs are covered by co-financing. The applicant must add a letter of guarantee to the application form (as a single merged PDF file) in which co-financing is guaranteed by the institution. No standard form is available for a letter of guarantee. A letter of guarantee must, in any event, meet the following requirements:

- The letter of guarantee should not exceed 250 words.
- It should indicate that the institution in question is the guarantor of the specified co-financing.
- It should specify the total amount of co-financing.
- The letter of guarantee must be signed by an authorised member of the institution’s staff. If co-financing is in kind, this generally concerns the project member’s manager. If co-financing is in cash, this concerns the staff member responsible for the institution’s business operations.

### 3.3 When can applications be submitted

The deadline for submitting letters of intent is **3 September 2020, 14:00 CEST.**
The deadline for submitting applications is **8 October 2020, 14:00 CEST.**

When submitting your letter of intent and application in ISAAC, you will have to enter some additional details online. You should therefore start submitting your application at least one day before the deadline of this call for proposals. Letters of intent and applications submitted after the deadline will not be admitted to the procedure.
3.4 Preparing and submitting the letter of intent and application

Applications should always be submitted to NWO through ISAAC, our electronic application system. Applications not submitted in ISAAC will not be admitted to the procedure.

As the applicant, you are obliged to submit your letter of intent and application through your own ISAAC account. If you do not have an ISAAC account, be sure to create this at least one week before submitting. This will ensure that any possible registration problems can be resolved in a timely manner. If you already have an ISAAC account, you do not need to create a new account to submit a new application.

If you work for an organisation that is not included in the ISAAC database, you can report this to relatiebeheer@nwo.nl. We will add the organisation to the database. As this takes several days, we ask that you report this no later than one week before the deadline.

Should you have any technical questions about ISAAC, contact an ISAAC helpdesk employee (see 5.1).

Submitting a letter of intent

The applicant indicates that they will submit an application in this round by means of a letter of intent. Timely submission of a letter of intent is a prerequisite for submitting an application.

Letters of intent must be submitted no later than 3 September 2020 14:00 CEST through the online application system, ISAAC.

After submission of the letter of intent, the applicant applying for a grant can no longer be changed.

The letter of intent must be completed directly in ISAAC; no standard form is available for this. A letter of intent in ISAAC consists of two input fields: the title and the summary. Enter the title of the application in the first input field. This can still be changed when submitting the application. In the summary input field, enter the following:

- A brief summary of the project proposal of up to 250 words, in English. This can still be changed when submitting the application.
- The composition of the project team and the names of the project members who are already known. This composition can still be changed when submitting the application.
- Possible suggestions for (international) referees.

After submitting the letter of intent, the applicant will receive a confirmation of receipt at the email address registered in their ISAAC account.

Letters of intent serve to provide insight into the research topics, project members involved and maximum number of applications. After the deadline for submission of letters of intent, the applicants will be notified of the total number of letters of intent submitted. The Assessment Committee does not assess the letters of intent.

If, after submission of the letter of intent, an applicant decides not to submit an application, for whatever reason, they are requested to withdraw their letter of intent in ISAAC. The applicant is not obliged to provide a reason for withdrawing the letter of intent; if the applicant nevertheless wishes to explain this, they can do so via comenius@nro.nl.
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Submitting an application

To submit an application, the applicant must use the application form that is available on the grant page of the NWO website.

Fully completed application forms must be submitted no later than **8 October 2020 14:00 CEST** through the online application system, ISAAC.

Applicants will be notified of receipt of their application.

**Executive Board’s statement on tasks and budget management**

Along with the preliminary application and the full application, the applicant must include a statement of the Executive Board demonstrating that the project is ‘supported’ within the institution and that the applicant will be given sufficient scope to implement the project if awarded a grant.\(^{13}\), \(^{14}\) There is no standard form for a statement of the Executive Board. This statement must, in any event, meet the following requirements:

- The statement should not exceed 250 words.
- The signatory should indicate that they are in a position to decide on the applicant’s scope of tasks.
- The signatory declares that if the grant is awarded, the applicant and the project team are free to arrange their schedules in accordance with the project proposal submitted.
- The signatory declares to make the applicant the budget holder of the material budget.
- The statement should be written directly in the application form or submitted with the application as a single, merged PDF file.
- A substantive recommendation by the signatory on the relevance of the project and the commitment of the institutions involved is permitted, provided the maximum number of words is not exceeded.

**Research field codes**

You must specify, in ISAAC, one or more research field codes that apply to the proposed research. You should enter these in the ‘General’ tab at ‘Research fields’ before submitting the application. You can only use the NWO research field codes for this. These are available at [www.nwo.nl/research field codes](http://www.nwo.nl/research field codes). In any event, you should always specify the discipline code for ‘Educational Sciences’ (41.90.00). Below that, you should state the main research fields and sub-fields in order of importance. There are no requirements regarding the number of research field codes to be entered.

### 3.5 Grant conditions

The [NWO Grant Rules 2017](http://www.nwo.nl) and the Approval of Funding for Scientific Research apply to all applications.

**Scientific integrity**

Research funded by NRO must, in accordance with the NWO Grant Rules 2017, be carried out in conformity with nationally and internationally accepted standards of scientific research as laid down in the Dutch Code of Conduct for Scientific Integrity (2018). By submitting the application, the applicant commits to this code. In the event of a breach (or possible breach) of the aforementioned standards in the case of research funded by NRO, the applicant must immediately inform NRO and submit all

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\(^{13}\) If project members are from more than one institution, the statement of the Executive Board may specify that the other institutions have been consulted. No additional statements are required.

\(^{14}\) In the event of co-financing, the statement of the Executive Board and the letter of guarantee may be combined in a single letter.
relevant documents to NRO. You can find more information about the code of conduct and the policy on scientific integrity on the following website: www.nwo.nl/integrity.

**Deadlines for the start and end dates of a project**

An awarded project must start at the latest in the academic year following award (1 September 2021). The start date of a project cannot be before the planned announcement of the decision, so not before 1 May 2021. The end date of a project is no later than 31 October 2024.

**Developing educational resources**

Developing educational resources and carrying out education research can be part of a project, but not the final aim. Any educational resources developed must be implemented in teaching practice within the duration of the project. Developing educational resources that can only be implemented in practice after project completion cannot be the main aim of a project within the Comenius programme.

**Creative Commons**

Educational resources developed within the framework of the projects must be made available under a Creative Commons Licence (at least 'Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike' or less restrictive) at a publicly accessible location that is easy to find. Project leaders should in any event make the proceeds available via SURFsharekit, a storage environment provided by SURF, so that NRO can link them to NRO’s national digital higher education knowledge hub for innovations in education.

**Open access**

If you receive a grant under this call for proposals, all scientific publications related to your research must be freely accessible worldwide (open access) at the time of publication. There are several ways for researchers to publish through open access. A detailed explanation can be found at www.nwo.nl/en/policies/open+science. You should refer to these publications in the national digital higher education knowledge hub (see below).

**Obligations after grant award**

Whether the project will deliver the intended result cannot yet be determined at the start of the project, which is why the project leader explicitly assumes an obligation of effort after the grant has been awarded. There is, however, no obligation of result. In addition to complying with the obligations laid down in the Dutch General Administrative Law Act, the NWO Grant Scheme 2017 and the grant award, the effort expected of the Comenius Fellow consists of the following elements:

- The Fellow should carry out the project plan proposed in the application to the best of their abilities.
- Fellows should report in the interim (December 2021, 2022 and 2023) and no later than three months after the end date of the project on the progress and completion of the project. They should do this through NRO’s national digital higher education knowledge hub for innovations in education (under development, to be launched in December 2020), so that outputs and interim results can be shared quickly with the higher education sector. Project leaders will receive more information about this in due course.
- At the end of the project, NRO will ask for a final report. Part of this is an evaluation of the project (approx. 1 page), intended for the public, briefly explaining what the purpose of the project was, what results were achieved and what lessons were learned.
- The financial accounts of the projects are included in the annual report of the institution where the project is implemented. At the end of the project, it must be possible for the directorate of Student Grants and Loans in Higher Education (HO&S) to request a project statement from the institution where the project has been implemented.
- A brief report on the project is published in the institution’s annual report.
- Active membership of the Comenius Network.
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**Reporting interim changes**

Any changes in the project team that affect the duration of the project or that concern the Comenius Fellow must be reported to NRO immediately by the applicant. NRO will advise OCW on a case-by-case basis, of possible consequences of these changes for grant award.
4 Assessment procedure

This chapter describes how the assessment procedure is carried out (4.1). Subsequently, in 4.2, you will see which criteria the Assessment Committee uses to assess your application.

4.1 Procedure

This section explains the funding round procedure on a step-by-step basis. The procedure consists of the following steps:

- Submitting letters of intent
- Submitting applications
- Processing of applications by NRO
- Pre-selection (optional)
- Assessment by referees
- Assessment Committee’s preliminary assessments
- Submitting a rebuttal
- Selection for the interview phase by the Assessment Committee
- Interviews and assessment by the Assessment Committee
- Decision by the Minister

Submitting the letter of intent and application

The procedure starts with the submission of a letter of intent, after which an application can be submitted. See Chapter 3 of this call for proposals for the guidelines for submitting a letter of intent and an application.

Processing the application

As soon as possible after submitting the proposal, the applicant is notified of whether their application will or will not be processed. The NRO secretariat determines this based on a number of administrative criteria (see the admissibility criteria in 4.2).

After the admissibility check, applicants are given a one-time period of five working days to correct any errors found by NRO (only). Applicants are advised to remain available in the week after the deadline for submitting the application so that they can make any corrections.

If an application does not meet any of the stated criteria after this period, the Minister will qualify it as ‘inadmissible’ and the application will not be processed.

Pre-selection (optional)

If the number of applications submitted within a sector is four times the number of awards, a pre-selection may be applied. NRO reserves the right to apply a pre-selection in one of the two sectors. In the event of pre-selection, the Assessment Committee will assess the applications on the basis of the assessment criteria. The Assessment Committee will give the applicant the opportunity to respond and will then advise the Minister. The Minister can then decide to reject the applications least likely to succeed.

After determining admissibility, the NRO secretariat decides whether there will be a pre-selection of applications. Applicants will be notified of this immediately.
Assessment by referees

The applications admitted for processing are submitted to at least two independent referees (from the Netherlands or abroad). The referees provide substantive and substantiated comments on the proposal based on the assessment criteria and a standardised form.

Referees are selected on the basis of their expertise. When submitting a letter of intent, applicants may suggest potential referees with whom they have no direct working relationship. Suggesting referees is no guarantee that these referees will be approached to assess the application. The members of the Assessment Committee may also be asked to make suggestions.

The NRO bureau determines who will be approached as a referee. If it appears that a referee’s comments are overly focused on the person of the applicant or researcher, or are otherwise unprofessional, the bureau reserves the right to have these comments modified before submitting them to the applicant, or not to pass them on.

Assessment Committee’s preliminary assessments

All applications and referees’ reports are submitted for comments to at least two members of the Assessment Committee (the preliminary assessors). The preliminary assessors give substantive and substantiated written comments on the proposal and make use of the referees’ reports to substantiate their assessment. They may also form an opinion on the objectivity of the referees’ reports which they consulted. The preliminary assessors formulate these comments on the basis of the assessment criteria (see 4.2). The preliminary assessors also assign a score for each major criterion.

Submitting a rebuttal

The preliminary assessments are then anonymised and presented to the applicant. The applicant only receives the substantive comments, not the provisional scores. The applicant will also receive the anonymised referees’ reports consulted by the preliminary assessors when preparing their assessments. NRO aims to send the preliminary assessments and reports in the week of 4 January 2021. Applicants are advised to be available in early January 2021 to prepare a rebuttal.

The applicant has eight working days to write a rebuttal of up to 1500 words by means of a standard form. In the rebuttal, the applicant may specify any factual errors in the preliminary assessment and clarify possible ambiguities in the application as noted by the preliminary assessors.

The applicant will specifically be asked to respond to the comments in the preliminary assessments, possibly through reference to referees’ reports where appropriate. Applicants will not be asked to respond in detail to the referees’ reports, as the referees will not receive this rebuttal. The Assessment Committee will use the rebuttal when assessing the application.

Submitting a rebuttal is not compulsory. Furthermore, an applicant may decide, based on the preliminary assessment, to withdraw the proposal from further assessment.\footnote{In that case, the applicant can notify the secretary at comenius@nro.nl. The secretary will then ask the applicant to register the application as ‘withdrawn’ in ISAAC.}

Selection for the interview phase by the Assessment Committee

The application, referees’ reports, preliminary assessments and the rebuttals serve as input for the assessment meeting. On the basis of this prioritisation, the Assessment Committee prepares a written advice to the Minister about the quality and prioritisation of the applicant, with the recommendation to invite at most four applicants (of the highest-scoring proposals) per education sector for an interview.
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with a delegation of the Assessment Committee, and not to honour the other proposals. The Assessment Committee will base this advice on the assessment criteria.

All applications are assigned a qualification based on the final score. The following scale is used:

- 1.0 up to 1.4: excellent
- 1.5 up to 3.4: very good
- 3.5 up to 5.4: good
- 5.5 up to 9.0: insufficient

To qualify for selection, an application as a whole must be assigned at least the qualification ‘good’. In addition, it must be assigned at least the qualification ‘good’ for all the main criteria. For more information about the qualifications, see: www.nwo.nl/qualification_system.

If, after assessment, two or more applications with the same weighted total score (two decimal places after the decimal point) receive equal scores and these applications are at the threshold of selection or qualifying for a grant within the grant limit, the application that received the highest score on the criterion ‘Innovative nature of the project’ will be given the highest score. If applications still end with equal scores after this, the application that received the highest score on the criterion ‘Educational profile of the applicant’ will receive the highest score. If applications also end up with equal scores after this step, the committee will determine the order of priority by means of an anonymous majority vote (Article 2.2.7., paragraph 3(a), sub iv of the NWO Grant Rules 2017). In the event of a tie, NRO will determine the priority by means of a drawing of lots by a civil-law notary.

The Minister makes the final decision on selection for the interview round. After the decision, the applicants will be notified as soon as possible of the outcome (invitation or rejection), along with a brief explanation of the advice of the Assessment Committee.

### Composition of the Assessment Committee

The Assessment Committee in the Comenius Leadership Fellows round assesses applications from research universities as well as universities of applied sciences. Members of the Assessment Committee currently work, or have recently worked, in higher education.

The Assessment Committee comprises at least:
- education researchers;
- directors or former directors in Dutch or Flemish higher education;
- students with experience in representative bodies/teaching evaluations at institution level.

Applications will be assessed by the full ‘science-wide’ committee. When forming the Assessment Committee, NRO aims to achieve as wide a background in research fields as possible. However, it cannot guarantee that all research fields will be represented in the committee.

### Interviews and assessment by the Assessment Committee

During the interview, the applicant will have the opportunity to comment on the questions or the assessments of the committee, as explained in the written invitation. The applicant and the Assessment Committee then discuss the project proposal.

All applications are again assigned a qualification based on the weighted average score, for which the above scale and method are used. The interview may result in a re-assessment of the proposal’s qualification and its score. To qualify for funding, an application as a whole must be assigned at least the qualification ‘good’. In addition, it must be assigned at least the qualification ‘good’ for all the main criteria.
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The Assessment Committee prioritises the proposals and advises OCW on the applications to be honoured.

**Decision by the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science**

The Minister makes the final decision on the submitted applications. Applications will be honoured on the basis of the criteria set out in 4.2, the prioritisation determined by the Assessment Committee and the available budget.

Applicants will be notified about the outcome as soon as possible, along with a summary setting out the reasons for the Assessment Committee’s advice.

**Objection and appeal**

An interested party\(^{16}\) may object in writing to a decision relating to the ‘Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2021’ round within six weeks of the date on which the decision was communicated. The interested party should lodge their objection to OCW. More information on lodging an objection can be found at [www.bezwaarschriftenocw.nl](http://www.bezwaarschriftenocw.nl) (only available in Dutch).

**Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Period</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 September 2020, 14:00 CEST</td>
<td>Deadline for submitting the letter of intent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 October 2020, 14:00 CEST</td>
<td>Deadline for submitting applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October/November 2020</td>
<td>Processing of applications; Assessment by referees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November/December 2020</td>
<td>Assessment by preliminary assessors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early January 2021 (approx. week of 4 January)</td>
<td>Applicants will receive the preliminary assessments before preparing a rebuttal (eight working days before submitting the rebuttal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2021</td>
<td>Assessment meeting for selection of interview candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-March 2021</td>
<td>Notification about invitation interview phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early April 2021 at the latest</td>
<td>Interviews and assessment meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2021</td>
<td>Minister’s decision to award/reject the proposals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No later than 3 May 2021</td>
<td>Applicants notified of whether their application has been awarded or rejected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Amendments to the procedure**

NRO or OCW may consider it necessary to adapt the timeline during the course of the ongoing procedure. Applicants will be informed of this as soon as possible.

**4.2 Criteria**

**Formal admissibility criteria**

NRO will only process your application if it meets a number of formal conditions, which are as follows:

- The application has been submitted by a person who meets the requirements set out in 3.1.
- The letter of intent and application have been submitted on time and by the same applicant.
- The letter of intent and application have been submitted through the applicant’s ISAAC account.

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\(^{16}\) The Comenius grant is paid in the form of an increase in the government grant to the institution where the applicant is employed. This means that if the applicant wishes to lodge an objection, it is the institution that formally lodges the objection.
Chapter 4: Assessment procedure / Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2021

- After any requests to supplement or amend the application form have been processed, the application form is correct, complete and has been filled in according to the instructions.
- The application has been written in English.
- The application falls within the scope of the aim of this call.
- The applicant has not submitted a preliminary application/full proposal in one of the other ‘tiers’ of the 2021 Comenius Programme.
- The application is accompanied by a signed statement of the Executive Board of the institution from which the application is being submitted and meets the requirements of 3.4.
- The period for which a grant is requested is at least 36 months and at most 42 months. The planned start date of the project is between 1 May 2021 and 1 September 2021. The end date of the project is no later than 31 October 2024.
- The budget accompanying the application has been drawn up in accordance with the guidelines in the call for proposals, including any letter of guarantee in the event of co-financing.
- Apart from the budget, no appendices may be attached to the application. The application form, the statement of the Executive Board and any letter of guarantee must be submitted as a single, merged PDF file.

Assessment criteria

Applications will be assessed on the basis of the following main criteria.

1. Innovative nature of the project (30%)
2. Expected results of the project (20%)
3. Quality of the project plan (20%)
4. Educational profile of the applicant (30%)

1. Innovative nature of the project (30%)
   a. To what extent does the project seek to implement an innovative solution or ambitious improvement that meets a need in higher education?
   b. To what extent does the proposed solution differ from initiatives in other institutions with a similar objective?

2. Expected results of the project (20%)
   a. Is it convincingly explained in the problem analysis in which educational component an improvement is desirable and why?
   b. Does the applicant demonstrate that the proposed innovation can lead to an improvement (for instance on the basis of relevant literature and examples from practice)?
   c. Are the intended outputs, such as learning outcomes and specific products, clearly defined? Are they of added value for students and possibly others?
   d. Is the scale and context of the project consistent with a Leadership Fellow project as described in Chapter 2?
   e. To what extent is it made clear how the project aligns with the institution’s strategic (education) plan?
   f. Has the applicant convincingly substantiated how the project could be of value for other education professionals?

3. Quality of the project plan (20%)
   a. Are the activities, methods used and planning clearly defined in the project plan and are they appropriate for achieving the intended results?
   b. Do the project plan, planning and concise risk analysis convincingly demonstrate the feasibility of the project?
   c. Does the project team have the necessary expertise to carry out the project? Are the different roles and division of tasks clear and appropriate?
d. Are the activities and outputs of the project evaluated in an appropriate manner, based on evaluation criteria and procedures?

e. Is the dissemination plan suitable and sufficiently ambitious?

4. Educational profile of the applicant (30%)

a. Does the applicant match the profile of a Leadership Fellow (as described in Chapter 2), given their teaching experience and current role at the institution?

b. To what extent does the professional statement testify to excellent teaching and an inspired vision of innovation in education? Does the project stem from this broader vision of education?

c. Does the professional statement show how a Comenius grant and membership of the Comenius Network can contribute to the applicant’s ambitions and teaching career?

Policy considerations

When honouring the proposals, the Minister can also take budgetary considerations into account in addition to the quality criteria.
5 Contact details and other information

5.1 Contact

Specific questions
For specific questions about the ‘Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2021’ round and this call for proposals, please contact:

Vera Counet MSc (programme secretary)
Tel.: +31 (0)70 344 0928
Email: comenius@nro.nl

Technical questions about the electronic application system ISAAC
If you have any technical questions about ISAAC, please contact the ISAAC helpdesk. Please read the ISAAC manual before consulting the helpdesk. The ISAAC helpdesk can be contacted from Monday to Friday between 10:00 and 17:00 CEST on +31 (0)20 346 71 79. You can also send your queries by email to isaac.helpdesk@nwo.nl. You will receive a response within two working days.

5.2 Other information

NRO advises applicants to contact the institution’s grant adviser at an early stage if they are considering submitting an application for a grant under the Comenius programme.