

# Compensation scheme 'Parental leave during the application process for personal grants'

## Introduction

The Dutch Research Council (NWO) receives many applications from talented scientific researchers for its funding programmes for personal grants. The purpose of these personal grants is to motivate individual researchers during the different phases of their careers. This offers excellent researchers the creative scope to conduct challenging and innovative research, and retains these researchers for science.

NWO usually handles applications for research grants through a tender procedure, where the grant applications that have been submitted within a single funding round are ranked according to objective criteria. The best applications receive the highest score and are therefore the first to be considered for a grant. The grants are awarded in order of quality of application until the maximum grant limit has been reached.

NWO must guarantee that all applicants have an equal chance of receiving a grant. In principle, this means that all applicants must be treated equally. NWO therefore works with a pre-determined evaluation procedure with a fixed time frame within each funding round. NWO has, however, noticed that during the evaluation procedure, that applicants who are on parental leave during the evaluation procedure may drop out prematurely, if a particular step in the evaluation procedure requires the applicant to

make an active contribution that coincides with the parental leave. Examples include submitting a response to referee reports and attending an interview.

This means that in these cases equal treatment of all applicants will not result in equal opportunities for all applicants. To overcome this NWO is already using an extension scheme for particular funding programmes. Up until now NWO has also been offering pregnant applicants customised solutions, which were determined on a case-by-case basis.

To improve transparency and legal certainty, NWO has laid down the options for customised solutions in these policy regulations, the 'Parental leave during the application procedure for personal grants' compensation scheme. This compensation scheme regulates the conditions and circumstances under which applicants of personal grants may qualify for an alternative handling of their application, in order to promote equal opportunities for applicants to obtain a grant.

# 1 Definitions

These policy regulations include the following definitions:

## 1.1 Applicant

the person applying for a personal grant from NWO and who wishes to make use of the compensation scheme due to parental leave.

## 1.2 Call for proposals

the scheme for a specific grants round published by NWO, as referred to in Article 2.1.2 of NWO Grant Rules 2017. Also referred to as the 'Brochure'.

## 1.3 Domain Board

the Board of one of the domains of NWO, as referred to in Articles 6.2 and 6.3 of NWO Grant Rules 2017.

## 1.4 The opportunity to submit

in relation to personal grants, NWO offers a maximum number of opportunities for a person to submit an application. An opportunity to submit shall refer to one of these opportunities.

## 1.5 Input

a point in time during the evaluation procedure in which the applicant is expected to make an active contribution, on the grounds of which the application submitted by the applicant is evaluated. The most common examples of this are submitting a response to referee reports and attending an interview.

## 1.6 Parental leave

leave in relation to the arrival of a child. In the context of this scheme, this includes:

- pregnancy and maternity leave as referred to in Article 3:1 of the Dutch Work and Care Act;
- adoption leave and leave in relation to the arrival of a foster child as referred to in Article 3:2 of the
- Dutch Work and Care Act;
- partner's leave as referred to in Article 4:2 of the Dutch Work and Care Act.

Sick leave is not covered by this scheme.

## 1.7 NWO

the Dutch Research Council. In this scheme, NWO refers to the institution or official who is competent to represent NWO or to take the relevant decision on the grounds of the NWO Competence regulations currently in force.

## 1.8 Personal grant

a grant of NWO that aims to encourage talented scientific researchers in the different phases of their careers. An application for a personal grant may only be submitted by a sole natural person.

## 1.9 Executive Board

the executive board of NWO, as referred to in Article 2 of the NWO Administrative regulations 2017.

## 1.10 Grant limit

the amount determined in a call for proposals that is the maximum budget available for the awarding of grants for a particular grants round, as referred to in the Articles 4:2 and 4:25-4:28 of the Dutch General Administrative Law Act.

## 1.11 Pre-notification

a short application that must be submitted and evaluated before it is possible to submit a full application, as referred to in Article 2.2.2 of NWO Grant Rules 2017. In the call for proposals is determined whether a pre-notification phase takes place in a particular grants round.

## 1.12 Pre-selection

an overall initial evaluation of all submitted applications, which may take place if, after the submission deadline, the total amount of grant applied for appears to exceed more than four times the grant threshold, as referred to in Article 2.2.3 of NWO Grant Rules 2017.

## 2 Scope

**2.1** These policy regulations specify how NWO uses its authority to deviate from the application process as laid down in the call for proposals to promote the equal treatment of all applicants.

**2.2** The scope of the compensation scheme is restricted to:

- personal grants, insofar as declared applicable in the call for proposals for the relevant grants round<sup>1</sup>.
- parental leave, as defined in Article 1.6 of this scheme.

**2.3** The compensation scheme is observed by the executive board, the boards of the domains and coordination bodies of NWO, as well as the persons working under their responsibility who are involved in the processing of grant applications.

**2.4** Deviation from the compensation scheme is only permitted in very exceptional cases. If application of the compensation scheme leads to a result that is unacceptable on the basis of the general principles of good governance, the director of the coordinating domain may – on the recommendation of the programme coordinator or the programme secretary – deviate from the compensation scheme in favour of the applicant.

**2.5** The executive board shall take a decision in all cases not provided for in the compensation scheme.

## 3 Basic principle behind the scheme

In principle, it is possible for applicants taking parental leave to participate without restrictions in the evaluation procedure laid down in the call for proposals until the period of leave begins. After this time, NWO may not expect applicants who are on parental leave to provide input in accordance with the evaluation procedure during the period of leave. However, the applicant is, of course, still free to do so. NWO is aware that the decision whether or not to

provide input during parental leave is very personal, with aspects such as how the pregnancy is going, the health of the applicant and the applicant's current employment situation playing a role. Only the respective applicant can properly estimate whether the leave will affect the quality of any input provided during the period of leave. The applicant is therefore always responsible for the choice between giving input or withdrawing the application offered with the compensation schemes.

## 4 Parental leave during written input

**4.1** In the event that an applicant is on parental leave at the moment that he/she is required to provide written input during the evaluation procedure, the applicant may choose from the following alternatives:

- request that NWO moves the period in which written input must be provided by the applicant to such a time that the period in which written input must be provided falls outside of the period of parental leave, provided that it is still possible for NWO to include this in the evaluation procedure concerned;<sup>2</sup>
- provide written input in accordance with the evaluation procedure laid down in the call for proposals;
- waive the opportunity to provide written input and have the application evaluated without written input;
- withdraw the application and submit a new application in the next grants round, thereby retaining the opportunity to submit.

**4.2** If an applicant chooses option (ii) as referred to in paragraph 1 of this article, and therefore provides written input during the period of parental leave, the period for providing written input as laid down in the call for proposals shall be extended by three additional working days.

<sup>1</sup>Please note: In the case of grant applications made by research groups (i.e. that consist of multiple applicants), non-participation in the evaluation round by one of the applicants as a result of pregnancy (of this applicant) can usually be taken care of by other members of the research group.

<sup>2</sup>Please note: In some cases, a shift of the written input period to a moment outside of the period of parental leave is virtually impossible for NWO. This depends on the moment when the original moment for providing written input falls within the period of parental leave, as well as the moment when NWO has received all referee reports and the existing scope within the evaluation procedure.

**4.3** If an applicant has chosen options (i) or (ii) as referred to in paragraph 1 of this article, but unexpectedly proves incapable of submitting written input, it is possible to convert the choice to option (iii) or (iv).

If the choice is converted to option (iv), any referee reports and/or preliminary recommendations that have been sent shall no longer apply and cannot be included in the subsequent grants round.

**4.4** It is not possible to choose option (iv) referred to in paragraph 1 of this article, if:

- the applicant initially chose option (i) or (ii) and the applicant has already submitted the written input;
- the applicant initially chose option (iii) and the application has been rejected.

## 5 Parental leave during verbal input

**5.1** If an applicant is on parental leave at a time that he/she is required to provide verbal input for the evaluation procedure, the applicant may choose from the following alternatives:

- i. request that NWO moves the moment at which the applicant is required to provide verbal input to such a moment that the provision of input falls outside of the parental leave, provided that NWO can practically include this in the evaluation procedure concerned<sup>3</sup>;
- ii. provide verbal input in accordance with the evaluation procedure laid down in the call for proposals;
- iii. provide verbal input by means of video conferencing (Skype);
- iv. withdraw the application and submit a new application in the subsequent grants round, thereby retaining the opportunity to submit.

**5.2** If an applicant has opted for options (i), (ii) or (iii) referred to in paragraph 1 of this article, this choice can no longer be converted into option (iv) if the applicant has already submitted the verbal input.

<sup>3</sup> Please note: Interviews usually only take place on one or several consecutive days. For this reason, it is often impossible to move an interview to a time that falls outside of the period of parental leave without this resulting in a significant delay in the grants round.

## 6 Withdrawing the application whilst retaining the opportunity to submit

**6.1** If an applicant chooses to withdraw the application in accordance with Article 4.1 (iv) or Article 5.1 (iv) and to submit a new application in the subsequent grants round, the applicant may do this whilst retaining the opportunity to submit.

**6.2** If a **pre-application** was used in the evaluation procedure and NWO has taken a positive decision on the pre-application or has given a non-binding recommendation, the applicant may skip the pre-application phase in the subsequent grants round and proceed immediately to submitting a full application. This full application must concern the same subject as the original pre-application (as is usual with pre-applications).

**6.3** If a **pre-selection** is used in the evaluation procedure and NWO has selected the application for further evaluation, the applicant may skip the pre-selection in the subsequent grants round. In that case, it is not possible to adjust the content of the application.

## 7 Notifying NWO in time

**7.1** On the basis of the timeframe for the evaluation procedure laid down in the call for proposals, an applicant can usually estimate in advance whether NWO will be expecting input during the period of parental leave. It is only possible for NWO to move the input moment to a moment before or after the period of parental leave if NWO is notified of this in time by the applicant. It is therefore important that an applicant contacts NWO's contact person listed in the call for proposals as soon as possible.

**7.2** NWO will treat all information provided to NWO by the applicant in connection with this compensation scheme confidentially.

## 8 Request for using the compensation scheme

An applicant must submit a reasoned request in writing to NWO via the secretary of the relevant grants round in order to make use of this scheme. With this request, the applicant shall provide all necessary information on the basis of which NWO can take a decision. This also includes information showing that the applicant will be prevented from providing input due to parental leave.

## 9 Language

The text of compensation scheme has been published in both Dutch and English. Only the Dutch version is deemed authentic. For legal interpretation the text of the Dutch version will be decisive.