Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2025

Call for proposals

Netherlands Initiative for Education Research (NRO) 2025
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1 Introduction

In this Call for proposals information is provided about the application procedure for the grant round ‘Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2025’. This Call for proposals falls under the responsibility of the Netherlands Initiative for Education Research (NRO). NRO is a unit of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), the Dutch research council. NRO coordinates and finances education research and promotes the connection between scientific research and the practice of education. By doing so, NRO stimulates educational innovation and improvements.

This grant round falls under responsibility of the NRO Programme Committee for Higher education. The programme committee has composed a programme of grant rounds for educational research and innovation for the period of 2023-2026. Financing is available through the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW). The full program for innovation of higher education consists of four rounds of grants: the Comenius programme, the Dutch Education Awards for secondary vocational and higher education, the Scale-up grant and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). More information about the full programme can be found on the NRO website.

In this Call for proposals you will find information about the aim of this programme (Chapter 2), the conditions for the grant application (Chapter 3) and how your proposal will be assessed (Chapter 4). This is the information you need to submit a grant application. Chapter 5 states the obligations for grant recipients in the event you are awarded funding, Chapter 6 contains the contact details.

1.1 Background

In 2015 the ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) published the Strategic Agenda for Higher Education and Research of 2015-2025, “De waarde(n) van weten” (the Value of Knowledge). In the agenda emphasis is given on room for professionals at Dutch institutions of higher education and it was announced that a subsidy programme would be created for teachers in the higher education. Based on this, in the autumn of 2016 the Comenius programme was set up by the ministry of OCW and the NRO.

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 educational innovations and improvements in their own teaching practice on a scale suited to their position and the duration of the project.

1.2 Available budget

The available budget for this call for proposals is €2,000,000 in total. Within this call for proposals a maximum of four applications will be awarded funding, divided equally between universities of applied sciences (Dutch acronym: hbo) and research universities (Dutch acronym: wo).¹

¹ In the case of a cooperation between a university of applied sciences and a university, the institution of the main applicant determines in which category the application will be processed.
1.3 Submission deadline(s)

The deadline for submitting statements of intent is Thursday September 5th, 2024, before 14:00:00 CEST.

The deadline for submitting full proposals is Thursday October 17th, 2024, before 14:00:00 CEST.

When you submit your application in ISAAC, you will also need to enter some details online. Therefore please start submitting your application at least one day before the deadline of this call for proposals. Applications that are submitted after the deadline will not be taken into consideration.

Timely submission of a letter of intent is a prerequisite for submitting an application. Before submitting a full application, applicants must have submitted a letter of intent.
2 Aim

This chapter describes the aim of the programme. Section 2.1 describes how Comenius projects contribute to the objectives of the Comenius programme. Section 2.2 describes the profile of a Leadership Fellow and the specifics of a Leadership Fellow project.

2.1 Projects in the Comenius programme

The aim of the Comenius programme is twofold. First, the Comenius programme funds education innovation projects that contribute directly to the 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 recognizing 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. The tiers of the Comenius programme in which teachers can further develop, are based on the Career Framework for University Teaching by Ruth Graham.²

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 where the project is implemented.³ Projects can 1) implement an educational scientific, technological or didactic innovation in education, or 2) implement an existing innovation in a specific educational context, as long as the distinctive character of the project and how it can be beneficial to other educational professionals is convincingly substantiated. In both contexts a Comenius project reaches beyond a regular curriculum revision.

Aim of the innovation is to improve education. The innovation must be implemented in the student’s (online) educational environment. In the project’s aim, the following aspects should be taken into account:

- 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.
- The improvement must directly benefit students at a publicly-funded Dutch institution of higher education, within the duration of the project. ⁴ The development of education (material) that will only be used or implemented in education after the end of the Comenius project cannot be financed with a Comenius grant.
- Projects whose primary objective is the professional development of teachers are 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.

² See: https://www.teachingframework.com/
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.
In their proposal, applicants must clarify the distinctiveness and added value of the project compared to other projects with a similar 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 proven to be 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 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. Consequently, the applicant can demonstrate familiarity with the relevant development 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.

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 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, in the proposal, how the results and experiences will be shared with teaching professionals within and outside their own institution.

Contribution 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.

In the professional statement of the proposal, the applicant should explain their vision on innovation in higher education. The applicant’s teaching experience and the intended project should also be explicitly positioned within this broader vision. There are various activities that the applicants can describe to illustrate their teaching experience. You can think of a selection of taught courses, curriculum development, student counselling, the development of teaching materials, peer-coaching and examples of previous executed education innovation. Participating in or the organisation of professionalisation activities such as workshops, seminars or conferences show that the applicants value personal and collegial development as a teacher. Participation in local and national committees, advice- or workgroups and networks that contribute to the teaching position are other ways to show this. Also, previously obtained forms of recognition such as local/national educational- and teaching prices can prove their success as a teacher. Finally, the applicant should explain how a Comenius grant can contribute to their teaching career, and what membership of the Comenius Network may mean for the applicant and for other teaching professionals.

Comenius Fellows will also be admitted as members of the Comenius Network. This is a network of education innovators in higher education and vocational education. Through the sharing of knowledge, discussion and the forming of opinions, they attempt to stimulate and support educational innovation both at universities and universities of applied sciences. The nationally nominated teachers of the Year (higher education and vocational education), prize-winning teams of the Dutch Higher Education Award (higher education and vocational education), and other motivated and experienced innovators also gain access to the network.
Within the network, education innovators exchange experiences and ideas during inspirational meetings, such as the annual Comenius Festival. They may also collaborate and learn through the circles of the network. These are learning communities in which members learn and work together on different topics, such as a sustainable teacher profession, forming of students, anchoring change, transdisciplinary collaboration and inclusion. Together with partners, the network also organises other events, such as meetings with students, policy officers and researchers, on education quality or the sharing of knowledge through webinars about wide ranging topics. The network challenges itself to explore new and effective forms of knowledge utilization. Read more at www.comeniusnetwerk.nl.

2.2 Profile and projects of the Leadership Fellow

The 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.

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 minimum €450,000 and maximum €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.5

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.

5 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.
Chapter 3: Conditions for applicants / Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2025

3 Conditions for applicants

This chapter contains the conditions that are applicable to your grant application. Firstly it describes who can apply for funding (Section 3.1) and what you can request funding for (Section 3.2). Subsequently, you will find the conditions for preparing and submitting the application (Sections 3.3 and 3.4) and the specific funding conditions (Section 3.5).

3.1 Who can apply

Applications can be submitted by teaching professionals as main- or co-applicant if they are working in one of the following institutions:
- A university, as mentioned in article 1.8 paragraph 1 of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (only available in Dutch);
- A university medical centre as mentioned in article 1.13 paragraph 1 of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (only available in Dutch);
- A university of applied sciences as mentioned in article 1.8 paragraph 1 of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (only available in Dutch);

A maximum of one application may be submitted by each faculty or similar organisational unit. The application is supported with a statement by the dean or faculty director. To promote the diversity of Leadership Fellow grants, organisational units that have been awarded a Leadership Fellows grant in 2024 are excluded from submitting an application in 2025.

An applicant must also satisfy the following conditions (applicable for main- and co-applicant):
- 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.
- 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 applications within this or previous funding rounds of the Comenius Leadership Fellows that have been withdrawn before the deadline of submitting a rebuttal.
- 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 the duration of the project and/or 0.5 FTE with the institution at the time of submitting the application, the statement of the executive board 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 of 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.
- In the case of a duo-application, a maximum of one ‘co-applicant’ can be specified.

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6 A similar organisational unit is used for a organisational unit that provides education and comes directly under the Executive Board in the organisational chart’. Examples are; institutes, academies, domains, departments and interdisciplinary education centres offering full curricula. Specific limits have been set for a number of institutions. See the appendix to this Call for proposals

7 The Comenius programme consists of four funding rounds: Teaching mbo, Teaching ho, Senior ho and Leadership ho Fellows.
The applicant must submit the letter of intent and full application in ISAAC (the online application system of NWO) and will, during the assessment procedure, receive all relevant communication from NWO. After the grant is awarded, the applicant will be the contact person for NWO. An applicant will act as project leader and may, in their application, specify a team of colleagues, advisers and students (the ‘project members’). They may be project members within the applicant’s organisation, within another higher education institution or at a collaborative partner. Project members have an active role in realizing the project. The project leader and beneficiary(ies) are jointly responsible for realizing the entire project.

Duo-application

When the application arises from a shared vision from two teaching professionals that will contribute in equal matters to the project, it is possible to submit a duo-application. Duo-applicants can work at the same or different education institutions, in which case the project will also have to be carried out in equal manner at both institutions. In case funding is awarded, both duo-applicants are seen as applicants and will become members of the Comenius Network.

One main applicant must be appointed to submit the application through ISAAC and will be the contact person for NWO. The duo-applicant is specified as a ‘co-applicant’ in ISAAC and is added in the application form. When duo-applicants are from different faculties or institutions, the application must be submitted from the institution of the main applicant. It is possible for teaching professionals from different sectors to submit a duo-application. In this case the institution of the main applicant will determine the sector in which the application is assessed.

Cooperation partner

A cooperation partner is a party that is closely involved in the implementation of the project but is not an applicant. This may include a funded vocational secondary school or other institutions. For project members at a cooperation partner, reimbursement for salary or research costs can only be claimed via the material budget in the grant application.
3.2 What can be applied for

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. You can apply for a grant to cover the direct staff costs and material costs directly associated with the project. All costs must be substantiated.

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 full application when you submit it digitally.

Personal costs

Costs for the funding of personnel employed at a publicly-funded institution of higher education will be remunerated in accordance with Table 2.2, column ‘Hourly rate productive hours, excl. Dutch VAT’ from the Handleiding Overheidstarieven [HOT- Manual Dutch Government Rates]. (NWO Salary tables). The scale which is selected for staff is based on the actual salary expenses including the surcharges mentioned in the Manual Tariffs Dutch Government (HOT).

For the calculation you should use the number of productive hours stated in the valid volume of the Handleiding Overheidstarieven.

NWO will apply a mandatory one-off indexing of the salary costs with respect to HOT rates for proposals submitted before 1 January that are awarded funding after 1 January. The mandatory one-off indexing has no influence on the level of the grant ceiling or on the maximum amount of the grant awarded per proposal. The level of the grant ceiling and the maximum amount of the grant awarded will remain unchanged during the assessment procedure. The mandatory one-off indexing will be applied after the decision-taking about awarding or rejecting proposals has been completed.

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 select the applicable HOT rates for each staff category in the budget. Further instruction can be found in the budget format.

Wage costs for project staff of a cooperation partner or hiring third parties should be entered under material costs.

Material costs

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

In an application budget can be requested to cover material costs such as:

- remuneration for professionals who are not affiliated with a publicly-funded institution of secondary or higher education seated in the Netherlands (for example: external advisers, software developers, designers, teachers abroad, teachers in vocational education and so on)
- consumables
- travel and accommodation costs (e.g. to visit research institutions in the Netherlands and abroad that contribute substantively to the project)
- attending national and international conferences
- work visits
- training sessions or courses 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
Chapter 3: Conditions for applicants / Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2025

A budget can not be requested for:
- the costs of purchasing (licenses for) previously developed digital educational resources. The time spent on further development of these educational resources by the applicant or project staff, however, can be entered under staff costs
- normal facilities of an educational institution (for example laptop, office equipment, etc.)
- maintenance and insurance costs

Cofinanciering/matching

NRO values public and/or private co-financing and/or own contribution in the form of personal and material contributions, in cash or in kind. You will need to illustrate the role and guarantee of this public and/or private co-financing/own contribution clearly in the application form. The applicant must also add a ‘letter of commitment’. You can find an example form underneath the finance page of this round on www.nwo.nl. The co-financing/own contribution may not exceed the requested budget, as NRO must remain the main financier of the project. You can read the further conditions for private co-financing in article 1.5 of the NWO Grant Rules 2017. The NWO policy on intellectual property applies to this Call whereby the project leader has the direction in the distribution of IP rights to the project results (art. 4.2.4. third paragraph NWO Grant Rules 2017).

3.3 Preparing and submitting the letter of intent and full application

Letter of intents and full 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 full application through your own ISAAC account.

It is important to start with your application in ISAAC on time:
- if you do not yet have an ISAAC account, then you should create this on time to prevent any possible registration problems;
- any new organisations must also be added to ISAAC by NWO;
- you also need to submit other details online.

Letters of intent and applications submitted after the deadline will not be admitted to the procedure by NWO.

Should you have any technical questions about ISAAC, please contact the ISAAC-helpdesk (see Chapter 6).

Does a main and/or co-applicant work at an organisation that is not included in the ISAAC database? You can report this via relatiebeheer@nwo.nl so that the organisation can be added. This will take several days. It is therefore important that you report this at least one week before the deadline.

It is compulsory to fill in at least one research field that corresponds to the subject of your project in ISAAC. You can only refer to the descriptions and codes from the NWO research field list, which you can find on NWO research fields | NWO. You fill in the codes under “general information” at “research field”. If applicable, you can also select other research fields in ISAAC. It is not compulsory to refer to additional research fields.

The applicant must inform the organisation where they work about the submission of the application, and the organisation must accept the granting conditions of this call for proposals.
Chapter 3: Conditions for applicants / Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2025

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 a full application. Letters of intent must be submitted no later than September 5th, 2024, before 14:00:00 CEST.

The person who applies for funding cannot be changed after the submission of the letter of intent.

The letter of intent must be completed directly in ISAAC. A letter of intent 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 full application. In the summary input field, enter the following:

- A brief summary of the project proposal of up to 250 words, written in English. This can still be changed when submitting the full application.
- The (provisional) 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.
- A maximum of 3 possible suggestions for non-referees. These referees will not be approached by NWO for reviewing the application.

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

The purpose of the letters of intent is to provide an idea of the (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 and the distribution over the different themes. The Assessment Committee does not assess the letters of intent.

Submitting an application
You can convert your letter of intent in ISAAC to an application. You can do this by clicking on the button ‘Convert to pre-application’. It is therefore not necessary to create a new application.

Run through the following steps when composing your application:

- Download the application form from the online application system ISAAC or from the grant page of the NWO website;
- Fill in the application form;
- Save the application form as a pdf and submit it with the annexes in ISAAC;
- Fill in the additional data in ISAAC.

Compulsory annex:
- budget

Optional annex:
- Letter of commitment and Declaration of Co-financing (in case of co-financing/matching)

In case NWO has made a template available, the attachment should be drafted conform the NWO-template. Attachments are to be uploaded along with the application as one merged PDF-file (without security) in ISAAC for submission. The budget needs to be submitted in ISAAC as Excel-file. Other attachments other than those mentioned in this Call are not allowed.

It is mandatory to write your full application in English. To submit an application, the applicant must use the application form that is available on the grant page of the NWO website. Applicants must adhere to the questions and associated explanatory notes in this form, as well as the guidelines for the maximum number of words and pages. No substantial changes should be made to the formatting of the form.
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Fully completed application forms must be submitted no later than **October 17th, 2024** before 14:00:00 CEST.

After submitting the application, the applicant will receive a confirmation of receipt. After the deadline for submitting applications, applicants will receive a notification of the total number of applications submitted.

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

Along with 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. 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 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.

### 3.4 Conditions for submission

NRO will assess your application against the conditions listed below. Your application will only be admitted to the assessment procedure if it meets these conditions. After submitting your application, NRO requests you to be available to implement any possible administrative corrections so that you can (still) meet the conditions for submission.

**Formal conditions for submission full application**

- the main applicant meets the conditions stated in Section 3.1;
- the main applicant submitted the letter of intent through ISAAC on time, after a possible request to make additions or changes, complete and filled out according to the instructions;
- the application form is, after a possible request to make additions or changes, complete and filled out according to the instructions. Usage of hyperlinks is only allowed at the section ‘references’;
- the application is accompanied by a signed statement of the Executive Board from where the full application is being submitted, and must satisfy the requirements of Section 3.3;
- the application is submitted via the main applicant’s ISAAC account;
- the application is received at or before the deadline set;
- the application is written in English;
- the application budget accompanying the full application is drawn up in accordance with the conditions for this call for proposals, including any ‘letter of commitment’ in the event of cofinancing/matching;
- the proposed project has a duration of at least 36 months and at most 42 months;
- all of the required annexes are, after a possible request to make additions or changes, complete and filled out according to the instructions and requirements of this call for proposals;

### 3.5 Conditions on granting

The [NWO Grant Rules 2017](#) and the Agreement on the Payment of Costs for Scientific Research are applicable to all applications.
Compliance with the National Knowledge Security Guidelines

World-class science can benefit from international cooperation. The National Knowledge Security Guidelines (hereafter: the Guidelines) helps knowledge institutions to ensure that international cooperation can take place securely. Knowledge security concerns the undesirable transfer of sensitive knowledge and technology that compromises national security; the covert influence of state actors on education and research, which jeopardises academic freedom and social safety; and ethical issues that may arise in cooperation with countries that do not respect fundamental rights.

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that their project complies and will continue to comply with the Guidelines. By submitting an application, the applicant commits to the recommendations stipulated in these Guidelines. In the event of a suspected breach of the Guidelines in an application submitted to NWO for project funding, or in a project funded by NWO, NWO may ask the applicant to provide a risk assessment demonstrating that the recommendations in the Guidelines have been taken into consideration. If the applicant fails to comply with NWO’s request, or if the risk assessment is in apparent breach of the Guidelines, this may affect NWO’s grant award or decision-making process. NWO may also include further conditions in the award letter if appropriate.

The National Knowledge Security Guidelines can be found on the central government website at: Home | National Contact Point for Knowledge Security (loketkennisveiligheid.nl).

Scientific integrity

In accordance with the NWO Grant Rules 2017, the project that NWO funds must be carried out in accordance with the nationally and internationally accepted standards for scientific conduct as stated in the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2018). By submitting the proposal, the applicant commits to this code. In the case of a (possible) violation of these standards during a project funded by NWO, the applicant should immediately inform NWO of this and should submit all relevant documents to NWO. More information about the code of conduct and the policy regarding research integrity can be found on the website: Scientific integrity | NWO.

Ethical statement or licence

The applicant is responsible for determining whether an ethical statement or licence is needed for the realisation of the proposed project. The applicant should ensure that this is obtained from the relevant institution or ethics committee on time. Having or not having an ethical statement at the start of the application procedure does not influence the assessment of the proposal. If the project is awarded funding, then the grant is issued under the condition that the necessary ethical statement or licence is obtained before the latest start date for the project. The project cannot start until NWO has received a copy of the ethical statement or licence.
Chapter 4: Assessment procedure / Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2025

4 Assessment procedure

This chapter first describes the course of the assessment procedure (Section 4.1). Second, it states the criteria that the assessment committee will use to assess your application (Section 4.2).

The NWO Code for Dealing with Personal Interests applies to all persons and NWO employees involved in the assessment and/or decision-taking process (Code for Dealing with Personal Interests | NWO).

NWO strives to achieve an inclusive culture in which there is no place for conscious or unconscious barriers due to cultural, ethnic or religious background, gender, sexual orientation, health or age (www.nwo.nl/en/diversity-and-inclusion). NWO encourages members of an Assessment Committee or jury to be actively aware of implicit associations and to try to minimise these. NWO will provide them with information about concrete ways of improving the assessment of an application.

4.1 Procedure

The application procedure consists of the following steps:

- Submission of the letter of intent;
- Submission of the full application;
- Processing the full application;
- Pre-selection (optional);
- Peer review by referees;
- Preliminary assessment of the full application;
- Rebuttal;
- Selection for the interview phase by the Assessment Committee;
- Interviews and assessment by the Assessment Committee;
- Decision-making.

For this Call for proposals an external, independent assessment committee will be set up. If the number of applications within a sector is too large to be assessed by one committee, NRO may decide to have applications by research universities separated from those by universities of applied sciences. The assessment committee will assess the submitted applications on its coherence and on its own merits based on the given assessment criteria from this Call for proposals (paragraph 4.2).

The Assessment Committee consists of members that currently work, or have recently worked, in higher education such as education researchers, (former) directors, educational professionals with experience in designing and implementing innovation projects, and 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.

4.1.1 Submission of the letter of intent

With a letter of intent, you indicate that you intend to submit an application for this call for proposals. Submitting a statement of intent is compulsory if you want to submit an application in a later phase. The letter of intent allows NWO to establish the expected number of applications. You must submit your letter of intent before the deadline via ISAAC (see Section 1.3).
After submitting the letter of intent, the applicant will receive a confirmation of receipt. You may also withdraw a letter of intent. If you have submitted the letter of intent through ISAAC, you are requested to withdraw your letter of intent in ISAAC.

4.1.2 Submission of the full application

For the submission of the proposal, a standard form is available on the funding page of this call for proposals on the NWO website. When you write your proposal, you must adhere to the questions stated on this form and the procedure given in the explanatory notes. You must also adhere to the conditions for the maximum number of words and pages.

Your complete application form must have been received before the deadline via ISAAC (see Section 1.3). After this deadline, you can no longer submit a proposal. After submitting the proposal, the main applicant will receive a confirmation of receipt.

4.1.3 Processing the full application

As soon as possible after you have submitted your proposal, you will hear from NWO whether or not your proposal will be taken into consideration. NWO will determine this based on several administrative-technical criteria (see the formal conditions for submission, Section 3.4). NWO can only take your proposal into consideration if it meets these conditions. Please bear in mind that within two weeks after the submission deadline, NWO may approach you with any possible administrative corrections that need to be made so that your proposal can (still) meet the conditions for submission. You will be given one opportunity to make the corrections, and you will be given five working days to do this.

4.1.4 Pre-selection (optional)

If NWO receives so many proposals that the total amount of funding requested is four times or more the available budget for this call for proposals (as stated in Section 1.2), then a pre-selection of the proposals will take place. In this case, the Assessment Committee will globally assess all proposals based on the assessment criteria (see Section 4.2). You will subsequently be given the opportunity to respond to the provisional assessment of the assessment committee. Taking this information into account, the assessment committee will advise NWO to reject the proposals that have the least chance of being awarded funding. The other proposals will be considered further.

4.1.5 Peer review 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. A maximum of three non-referees can be registered. Applicants can register these non-referees in ISAAC when submitting the pre-proposal/proposal. NWO will not approach these non-referees to assess the proposal as external referees.

4.1.6 Preliminary assessment of the full application

All full applications and referee reports are submitted for comments to some 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. They formulate these comments on the basis of the assessment criteria (see Section 4.2). The preliminary assessors also assign a score for each major criterion.
4.1.7 Rebuttal

The written preliminary assessments are then anonymised and presented to the applicant. The applicant only receives the substantive comments, not the provisional scores. NRO aims to send the preliminary assessments to the applicants at the beginning of February 2025. Applicants are advised to be available during this time to prepare a response.

The applicant has five working days to write a rebuttal of up to 1500 words by means of a standard form. This form can be sent to comenius@nro.nl. 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 application from further assessment.

If you decide to withdraw your application, you will have to notify the bureau per e-mail and withdraw your application in ISAAC. If NWO receives your rebuttal after the deadline, this will not be taken into consideration throughout the rest of the procedure.

4.1.8 Selection for the interview phase by the Assessment Committee

The assessment committee makes its own assessment based on the available material. The referees’ reports and preliminary assessments provide important guidance for the final assessment, but are not necessarily adopted in full by the Assessment Committee. The committee weighs the arguments of the referees’ reports and preliminary assessments (also among themselves) and checks whether the rebuttal provides a good response to the critical comments.

Following the discussion, the Assessment Committee prepares a written advice for the programme committee Higher education about the quality and prioritisation of the application, with the recommendation to invite at most four applicants (of the highest-scoring proposals) per education sector for an interview with a delegation of the Assessment Committee, and not to award 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

The proposal must receive an overall qualification of at least ‘good’ to be eligible for the funding. The proposal must also receive at least the qualification ‘good’ for each of the separate assessment criteria. For more information about the qualifications, see: www.nwo.nl/en/apply-funding-how-does-it-work.

If, after the discussion of the proposals, it transpires that two or more of the proposals based on their weighted total score cannot be distinguished from each other, then there is an ex aequo situation (see the section about ex aequo).
4.1.9 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 application.

All applications are scored again by the Assessment Committee and 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 applications qualification and its score. The Assessment Committee prioritises the applications and advises the programme committee Higher education on the applications to be granted. 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.

4.1.10 Ex aequo

NWO understands ex aequo to be a situation in which two or more proposals based on their weighted score cannot be distinguished from each other. An ex aequo situation is relevant with respect to the borders of the available budget or the selection borders. The existence of an ex aequo situation is determined as follows.

The starting point is the ranking drawn up by the assessment committee, with the final scores rounded down to two decimal points. The reference score is the score of the lowest-ranked proposal within the borders of the available budget or the selection borders. All proposals with a score that is within 0.05 or less of the reference score will be considered. In this way, the proposals that are equal within a score of 0.1 will be selected. If an ex aequo situation occurs at the borders of available budget or the selection borders, then the proposal with a higher score pertaining to the criterion ‘Innovative nature of the project’ will end as the highest. If the ex aequo situation is not resolved with this, then the proposal with the highest score for the criterion ‘Educational profile of the applicant(s)’ will end highest. If the proposals subsequently still remain in a tie, the assessment committee, with the help of an (anonymous) majority vote, will determine the ranking (in accordance with Article 2.2.7, third paragraph, sub a, part iv of the NWO Grant Rules 2017). If this vote provides no resolution either, or if it is not desirable to vote, the ex aequo situation will be send on to the decision-making body.

4.1.11 Decisionmaking

Finally, the programme committee Higher education will assess the procedure followed and the advice from the assessment committee. It will subsequently determine the final qualifications and take a decision about awarding or rejecting the proposals.

If any budget remains for a theme within this call for proposals, the programme committee Higher education may decide to add the remaining budget to one of the other themes in the same education sector for which this budget was intended (research university or university of applied sciences) within this call for proposals, or to add this budget to a concurrent call for proposals within the Comenius programme.

Timetable

Below, you will find the timetable for this call for proposals. During the current procedure, NWO might find it necessary to make further changes to the timetable for this call for proposals. You will be informed about this in time.

| Online information meeting | June 11 and June 13 2024 | Online information meeting (not mandatory) |
Chapter 4: Assessment procedure / Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2025

4.2 Criteria

Substantive assessment criteria full applications

The full applications submitted within this call for proposals will be substantially assessed on the basis of the following 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(s) (30%)

1. Innovative nature of the project (30%)
   a. To what extent does the project seek to implement either an innovative solution, or an existing innovation in a new educational context that meets an ambitious improvement?
   b. To what extent does the proposed solution differ from initiatives in other institutions with a similar objective? Does the applicant show they have studied what is the current situation in higher education concerning the envisioned innovation?

2. Expected results of the project (20%)
   a. Is it convincingly explained in the problem analysis that the project meets a need in higher education? Does the applicant demonstrate that the proposed innovation can lead to an improvement?
   b. Are the intended outputs, such as learning outcomes and specific products, clearly defined? Are they of added value for students and possibly others?
c. Is the scale and context of the project consistent with a Leadership Fellow project as described in Chapter 2?

d. To what extent is it made clear how the project aligns with the institution’s strategic (education) plan?

e. Has the applicant convincingly substantiated how the project could be of value for other education professionals?

3. Quality of the project plan (20%)

a. Is the project plan, including the activities, methods used, planning, concise risk analysis and budget clearly defined and appropriate for the intended project?

b. Does the project plan 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 (the plans on distributing the results) suitable and sufficiently ambitious?

4. Educational profile of the applicant(s) (30%)

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

b. To what extent does the professional statement testify to excellent teaching and an inspired vision of innovation in education? Is this being demonstrated based on relevant literature and/or concrete examples?

c. Does the applicant make it clear that the project stems from a personal educational vision?

d. 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?

The proposal must receive an overall qualification of at least ‘good’ to be eligible for the funding. The proposal must also receive at least the qualification ‘good’ for each of the separate assessment criteria.
5 Obligations for grant recipients

This chapter details the various obligations that - in addition to the conditions stated in Section 3.5 - apply after funds have been awarded.

Latest start date
A project that has been awarded funding must start within four months after notice of award, else the grant decision may be revoked.

Before the start of the project, please send the following documents to NRO through ISAAC:
- A completed and signed startform.

Membership Comenius Network
After the grant has been awarded, the applicant(s) are appointed as Comenius Fellow and they will be part of the Comenius Network. Other project members will not be members of the Comenius Network, but can still participate in various activities and meetings. Applicants will receive more information on the membership from the Comenius Network after notification of the outcome. Comenius Fellows are expected to be active participants in the Comenius Network.

Reporting interim changes
The project leader whose project has been awarded is obliged, in accordance with the grant conditions, to immediately notify the NRO bureau in writing of any deviations in the planning or implementation of the research, stating the reasons.

In the case of budget shifts between staff and material costs and within staff costs must always be submitted in advance to NRO for approval. A shift within the budget for material costs need only be submitted for approval if:
- the shift has consequences for the content, schedule and/or intended research results;
- the budget shift exceeds 20% of the total material budget.

Progress research
Halfway through the term of the research the main applicant must submit a report of the research conducted so far.

NRO monitors progress and evaluates the results of the funded research based on the planning and intended research results specified in the application. If a deviation is found which was not immediately reported to and approved by NRO, and it is not a case of force majeure, NRO has the right to (temporarily) stop the payment of the tranches, partially or completely revoke the funding and reclaim it where necessary.

In addition, NRO requires that you register every publication or other form of output in ISAAC during the project and up to two years after the term of the project, following the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP). On www.isaac.nwo.nl you will find a detailed description of the steps you take to register products in ISAAC.

Educational knowledge
In the framework of knowledge dissemination and utilisation, the researchers may be invited to contribute to a theme page on the national knowledge hub, onderwijskennis.nl, during the term of the project. This platform is powered by NRO and displays scientifically substantiated sources from various partners with the
aim of making knowledge accessible and connecting education research and educational practice. The hub offers thematic pages on relevant educational topics, including thematic overviews, practical tools and in-depth resources.

A contribution can be requested in the form of provision of a suitable source, but also in the form of reviewing a thematic overview or sources relating to the research topic of the proposal that had already been selected. So regardless of the educational sector or the perspective of the research, a contribution is possible. If a contribution in relation to the theme of the proposal for Educational Knowledge is desired, the bureau will contact the research team member, via the main applicant, who is in charge of knowledge utilisation within the project.

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 include them on the new national digital higher education knowledge hub onderwijskennis.nl.

Process report and financial accountability
Within three months of completing the research, the main applicant must submit a process report and a financial accountability through ISAAC.

The main applicant must register all output obtained thus far (in the context of the project and specified in the application) separately in ISAAC. After approval of the process report the grant period is closed and the final grant is determined.

Project presentations
NRO will regularly hold meetings at which research projects that have been awarded funding are presented. With these meetings, NRO aims to contribute to improvements and innovations in education. Project researchers can be invited by NRO to contribute to these meetings. They will also be asked to present their research at other meetings on education innovation.

Intellectual property
With respect to intellectual property (IP), the NWO IP policy applies. This can be found in Chapter 4 of the NWO Grant Rules 2017.

Applicants must carry out a project funded by NWO during the time that they work for the knowledge institution. If an applicant or a researcher funded by NWO is appointed by more than one employer, then the other employer should relinquish any possible IP rights that emerge from the project of the applicant.
Socially responsible licensing
The knowledge that emerges from the project could be suitable for use in society. When agreements about licensing and/or the transfer of research results developed under this Call for proposals are made, due consideration should be given to the ten principles for socially responsible licensing, as stated in the NFU factsheet “Socially Responsible Licensing Toolkit for knowledge institutions”.

Open Access
As a signatory to the Berlin Declaration (2003) and a member of cOAlition S (2018), NWO is committed to making the results of the research it funds openly accessible via the internet (Open Access). By doing this, NWO gives substance to the ambitions of the Dutch government to make all publicly funded research available in Open Access form. Scientific publications arising from projects awarded on the basis of this Call for proposals must therefore be made available in Open Access form in accordance with the Open Access Policy.

Scientific articles
Scientific articles must be made available in Open Access form immediately at the time of publication (without embargo) via one of the following routes:
- publication in a fully Open Access journal or platform registered in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ);
- publication in a subscription journal and the immediate deposition of at least the author accepted manuscript of the article in an Open Access repository registered in Open DOAR;
- publication in a journal for which a transformative Open Access agreement exists between UNL and a publisher. For further information, see www.openaccess.nl/en.

Books

Other types of publications
NWO encourages to also make non-academic publications available as open access as early as possible and under an open license. These publications include, for example, reports, working papers, posters, protocols, prototypes, presentations and project websites. In order to guarantee findability, reuse and long-term availability the advice is to minimally:
- apply a DOI (Digital Object Identifier) or other persistent identifier,
- share under an open license, preferably a Creative Commons License,
- store the material in a trusted repository that guarantees long-term availability.
NWO recommends using Zenodo which offers free storage and automated services in these three areas.

CC BY licence
To ensure the widest possible dissemination of publications, at least a Creative Commons (CC BY) licence must be applied. Alternatively – in case of substantial interest – the author may request to publish under a CC BY-ND licence. For books, book chapters and collected volumes, all CC BY licence options are allowed.

Costs
Costs for publication in fully Open Access journals can be budgeted in the application using the budget module for “material costs”. Costs for publications in hybrid journals are not eligible for reimbursement by NWO. For Open Access books, a separate NWO Open Access Books Fund is available.

For more detailed information about NWO’s Open Access policy, see www.nwo.nl/en/open-access-publishing
6 Contact and other information

6.1 Contact

6.1.1 Specific questions

For specific questions about this call for proposals, please contact:
Nadine de Reuver (programme secretary)
Phone: 070 070 344 0551
E-mail: comenius@nro.nl

6.1.2 Technical questions about the web application ISAAC

For technical questions about the use of ISAAC, please contact the ISAAC helpdesk. Please read the manual first before consulting the helpdesk. The ISAAC helpdesk can be contacted from Monday to Friday between 10:00 and 17:00 hours on +31 70 34 40 600. However, you can also submit your question by email to isaac.helpdesk@nwo.nl. You will then receive an answer within two working days.

6.2 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.

NWO processes the data of applicants in accordance with the NWO privacy statement, www.nwo.nl/privacyverklaring.

NWO can approach applicants for an evaluation of the procedure and/or the research programme.
Chapter 6: Contact and other information / Comenius programme Leadership Fellows 2025

Uitgave: mei 2024

Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek

Bezoekadres:
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3526 KV Utrecht

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