

The Hague, 30 April 2020

Subject: Measures related to Corona

Dear grant recipient and other relations,

Over the last weeks we all have been greatly affected by the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact. First and foremost, we sincerely hope that you and your loved ones find yourself in good health.

You have received a grant under the Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP), the Netherlands Initiative for Capacity development in Higher Education (NICHE) or you are involved in the implementation of its activities.

Flexibility

Grant recipients are obliged to comply with the grant obligations. Of course, we fully realise that this crisis affects and in a lot of cases very much complicates the implementation of grant activities and the compliance with the applicable obligations. Nuffic is inspired by the resilience and dedication of organisations and individuals to continue the activities as much and in the best way possible in these challenging times. We appreciate and encourage all of you to continue these (online) efforts.

Acknowledging the constraints that you face, we have established several leniency measures. These measures can be used for granted activities that are directly affected by the consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak. Apart from the new leniency measures we also underline several existing possibilities within the current obligations. Please find a list of existing and new leniency measures in the annex to this letter. The new measures only apply to existing grants. For new grants the conditions will be adjusted if needed and published as soon as possible.

Our approach

Together with stakeholders of the programmes we have established these measures based on the following principles:

- A good and thorough understanding of what involved organisations and individuals are facing;
- A framework of generic measures and guidelines so that partners can set-up tailor-made solutions;
- Flexibility within the applicable legal framework;
- Keeping an eye on the workload of all parties involved
- Retaining programme budget needed for future programme activities

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Next steps

We expect that for now these measures give sufficient flexibility in the implementation of grant activities. If there is a need to adjust or update the leniency measures for our programmes, Nuffic will do that if possible. Because of the unpredictability of this crisis and the associated uncertainty, we will remain in contact with stakeholders and closely monitor the evolving impact of the crisis on our programmes. We have for example set up focus groups for several instruments and have a weekly online meeting with the Sounding Board to exchange experiences and focus on possible solutions.

Questions

Nuffic will set up a webinar for grant recipients to facilitate the answering of questions about these leniency measures. This way we strive to reduce the workload for you and our organisation. We also aim to foster the exchange of best practices between grant recipients with this set-up. Together with the Sounding Board we will discuss what is the best approach for this webinar. You will all receive an invitation as soon as possible. In the meantime, we kindly request you to save up your questions for this moment.

The way forward

We live in unprecedented times. We continue to manage our programmes the best way we can, focussing on you, grant recipients, partner organisations, scholarship holders and all others involved. We are committed to participate and foster the dialogue and to show as much flexibility as possible within the legal and financial framework of all the programmes we manage.

We are confident that by working together, we can face these challenges and make the most out of the programmes.

With kind regards,



Roos Hogenkamp

Manager Global Development

Annex: Leniency measures

Please note that leniency is only meant and to be used in case of direct consequence of the Covid-19 outbreak on grant activities. In addition, please note that the leniency measures apply to the grants that have already been awarded. For new grants existing conditions will be adjusted if needed and published as soon as possible.

OKP Individual Scholarships

Existing measures¹

- For the eligible amounts of subsistence allowances in the Netherlands and in an OKP country please refer to the overview of reimbursements in the Grant Obligations and Conditions (GOC).² Nuffic complies with the amounts and conditions as published in the GOC. This means that if a student decides to continue studying from an OKP country, the subsistence allowance, after a period of 3 months, will be adjusted to the allowance available for an OKP country.

Examples:

- a. Student A is studying in the Netherlands from 1 September until 1 April. From 1 April until 1 September the student is studying from his or her home country. The student is entitled to the Dutch subsistence allowance for the period 1 September – 30 June (the first 3 months in an OKP country, the Dutch allowance still applies). From 1 July until 1 September the local allowance applies.
- b. Student B will start with his or her course on 1 September. Due to Covid-19 the first couple of months the student follows classes via e-learning while staying in the home country. On 1 January the student arrives in the Netherlands to continue the course at the institution. The student is entitled to the Dutch allowance from the period 1 September - 30 November (the first 3 months in an OKP country, the Dutch allowance applies) and from 1 January onwards. For the period 1 December - 31 December, the local allowance applies.

¹ OKP Grant Obligations and Conditions

² Version 1 Feb 2018 – see Annex 1 Fixed reimbursements
Version 1 May 2018 – see Annex 1 Fixed reimbursements
Version 2.0 - see Annex 1 Fixed reimbursements
Version 3.0– see Annex 1 Fixed reimbursements

- For Master degree programmes and short courses a reimbursement for e-learning facilities applies. If a previously face-to-face course is now being offered online due to Covid-19, the reimbursement will be according to the cost categories applicable to the 'E-learning' modality as stipulated in the Grant Obligations & Conditions'.
- A reduction of the reimbursement of the tuition fee will only occur at a request of the grant recipient. This means, for example, that Nuffic will not adjust the reimbursement of the tuition fee when part of the course will be offered via e-learning. In case of a withdrawal, the tuition fee will be adjusted according to GOC art. 46 (version 1 Feb 2018 and 1 May 2018), art. 3.16 (version 2.0), art. 3.17 (version 3.0).

New measures

- Nuffic gives the grant recipients the freedom to cover unforeseen expenses to a max of 5% within the available grant amount that has been granted to the grant recipient per deadline. Extra costs for accommodation, travel, insurance or visa that are made due to Covid-19, can be declared under this category.
- Non-refundable costs that are being made for tickets, visa and/or tuition can be covered by the initial grant amounts of the students on the condition that they will do their utmost to complete their course, whether online or face to face. In case of a withdrawal, please refer to the GOC art. 46b (version 1 February 2018 and version 1 May 2018), art. 3.16 (version 2.0) or art. 3.17 (version 3.0).
- Given the circumstances we also aim to be flexible towards changes in course dates, as long as they fit within the programme's official end dates for scholarships. This means courses can be postponed to a later date, even if the adjusted course period does not fall within the timeframe corresponding to the application round the course was originally registered for.

Example

A course registered for the November 2019 application round (timeframe start courses: 23 Feb 2020 – 27 July 2020) and originally scheduled for April 2020, may now be postponed to start in September 2020.

Previously taken measures

- Nuffic encourages the development of online alternatives for the courses affected by the current situation. We approve the (partial) replacement of face-to-face courses by online courses for all courses scheduled between mid-March and 1 September 2020 under the condition that:
 - The content of the course remains similar;
 - The total duration of the course stays the same. To clarify: this means that the total duration of the course offered online cannot be shorter than the duration of the face-to-face course. It can occur however that the online course takes longer than the face-to-face course. In this case Nuffic will approve a longer duration of the course, but no longer than the prescribed end date of the programme.

- As many offices and organisations in partner countries are also closed, it proves to be difficult for scholarship applicants to acquire the government and employer statements they need. We have decided to make the following changes in requirements for the current Round 1 scholarships:
 - We will accept Employer Statements that have been signed digitally and/or have not been stamped, provided there are no doubts regarding their authenticity, and it meets all other requirements as mentioned on the Nuffic website.
 - Applicants got 4 extra weeks to arrange a Government Statement, beyond the application deadline of 24 March. We have temporarily accepted applications without a Government Statement. Instead of uploading the statement during the application process, we asked applicants to upload a document with their own explanation on why they couldn't obtain a statement. Applicants had to send the official signed Government Statement to the education institution before 21 April 2020 16.00 CEST.

OKP Group Training (TMT, TMT+, RC)

Existing measures³

- Art. 4.5.9 of the Grant Obligations and Conditions for Group Trainings states “The statement of expenditures is in accordance with the approved budget. Any deviations of more than 20% of the budget must be explained”. This means that project partners have the liberty to rearrange the budget within this limit as they see fit, without owing a justification to Nuffic.
- Art. 4.1.5 of the Grant Obligations and Conditions for Group Trainings states “The grant recipient is obliged to inform Nuffic about any changes with regard to the grant or grant activities as soon as it is likely that: the group training is cancelled; the outputs or outcomes mentioned in the grant will not be achieved, will not be achieved in time, or will not be achieved in full; the group training will not start within 1 year after the relevant deadline”. This means that project partners are free to rearrange the workplan and activities as long as the realisation of the outputs is not affected.

New measures

- Nuffic gives the grant recipients the freedom to cover unforeseen expenses to a max of 5% within the available grant amount that has been granted to the grant recipient per deadline. This cost category is composed by release of costs that arises within the grant amount. This is in addition to the possibility of rearranging the budget between categories, which is already permitted by the Grant Obligations and Conditions for Group Training. If these costs do not belong to the existing cost categories, partners can declare them under ‘other costs’. Please note that in any case the total project budget cannot be exceeded.
- Nuffic informs project partners that a standard Budget Neutral Extension (BNE) for three months, for reasons related to the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis is hereby granted for all projects that were still under implementation from April 2020 onward. Considering these extra 3 months of implementation, Nuffic urges partners to take act of the situation where face to face trainings will be very unlikely due to limitation on travelling. Nuffic highly recommends the projects to switch to virtual alternatives if possible. If the partners then conclude that a 3-months extension is still not enough, they can introduce a justified request for an extra extension. The formats and conditions to introduce such an extra request will be published on the Nuffic website. Please note that the final project date can in no way be later than 31 March 2022. Please also note that the reporting requirements are determined by the original length of the project (see Art 4.5.4 of the GOC).

³ Grant Obligations and Conditions (Version 1.0, 2.0, 3.0)

OKP Institutional cooperation

Existing measures⁴

- Art. 4.5.16 of the Grant Obligations and Conditions for Institutional Collaboration Projects states that “The expenditures must be in accordance with the approved project work plan. Any deviations of more than 20% of the annual budget per output, per project management budget line and per cost category must be clarified in the annual report”. This means that project partners have the liberty to rearrange the budget within this limit as they see fit, without owing a justification to Nuffic. Only for deviations of more than 20%, project partners do have to provide a clarification in the following annual report.
- Art. 4.1.3 of the GOC for Institutional Collaboration Projects states that “The grant recipient is obliged to inform Nuffic immediately in writing as soon as it becomes clear the output(s) and/or outcome(s) for which the grant was awarded will not be achieved, will not be achieved in time or not be achieved in full or the grant obligations will not be met”. This means that project partners are free to rearrange the workplan and activities as long as the realisation of the outputs and outcomes within the project period is not affected.

New measures

- Art. 5.9.3 of the GOC for Institutional Collaboration Projects, on contingencies, states that “When more than EUR 5,000 is to be used in one project year, prior approval of Nuffic has to be obtained”. Prior approval for the use of contingencies is no longer necessary, as long as project partners have agreed upon its use and it is justified in the next annual report.
- In addition, the contingencies can also be used to exceed the maxima put on project management, long-term studies, and investments, as long as these costs are a direct consequence of the Covid-19 outbreak. The other articles of the GOC regarding contingencies remain unchanged.

⁴ Grant Obligations and Conditions (Version 2.0 and 3.0)

NICHE Institutional cooperation

Existing measures⁵

- Art. 3.5.4 of the NICHE Handbook states that “The expenditures must be in accordance with the approved project work plan. Any deviations of more than 20% of the annual budget per output, project management budget lines and any deviations of more than 20% of the annual budget per cost category must be clarified in the annual report”. This means that project partners have the liberty to rearrange the budget within this limit as they see fit, without owing a justification to Nuffic. Only for deviations of more than 20%, project partners do have to provide a clarification in the following annual report.
- Art. 3.3 of the NICHE Handbook states that “Throughout the project period, the parties are obliged to inform Nuffic in writing as soon as it is likely that: a) the outputs mentioned in the grant will not be achieved, will not be achieved in time, or will not be achieved in full; [...] Project implementers are not expected to report on changes in activities or inputs. [...] Though the NICHE programme is flexible in adopting changes in project planning, the aim must always be to achieve the outcome(s) and output(s) within the project period as stated in the grant”.

New measures

- Nuffic informs project partners that a standard Budget Neutral Extension (BNE) for three months, for reasons related to the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis is hereby granted. Please note however that the final project date can in no way be later than 31 December 2020.
- Art. 4.9 of the NICHE Handbook states the rules regarding the use of contingencies. In addition to what is stated in this article, Nuffic informs the project partners that the contingencies can also be used to exceed the maxima put on management costs for the requesting organisation, long-term studies and investments, as long as these costs are a direct consequence of the Covid-19 outbreak. The other provisions of the NICHE Handbook regarding the use of contingencies remain unchanged.
- Art. 3.7 of the Financial Rules and Regulations⁶ (FRR) for NICHE grants states that contingencies are not part of the operational budget and may only be used after written approval from EP-Nuffic. Prior written approval from EP-Nuffic for the use of contingencies is no longer necessary, as long as project partners have agreed upon its use and it is justified in the next annual report.

⁵ NICHE Handbook (Version 2.7)

⁶ Financial Rules and Regulations for NICHE grants (Version 1.6)