

Comenius Grant Scheme, Ministry of Education, Netherlands

National bursary scheme to support innovation in university teaching

Up to 2015, university students in the Netherlands received government grants to cover their tuition fees and living costs. In 2015, these grants were replaced with government loans, which students were required to repay following graduation. The Dutch government made a commitment to use the income generated from these loan repayments to advance the quality of university teaching and learning across the country, including support for research and innovation in university education. A component of this investment is the newly-established Comenius Grant Scheme, which aims to:

“...enable professionals in higher education to implement their ideals and ideas in practice. By facilitating a wide range of educational innovations each year, the programme contributes to the improvement of higher education in the Netherlands. Furthermore, by demonstrably valuing excellent and inspired teaching, the Ministry of Education is keen to contribute to more variety in the careers of teachers and researchers at universities and universities of applied sciences”.

The Comenius Grant Scheme is structured in three ‘tiers’:

- 1. Teaching Fellow:** awards are €50,000 in value and support a one-year project focused on a small-scale teaching innovation. Successful applicants must have at least two years of university teaching experience. The sphere of impact of the innovation project is the students participating in the course/activity taught by the awardee.
- 2. Senior Teaching Fellow:** awards are €100,000 in value and support a two-year project focused on a teaching innovation that spans an entire degree programme. Successful applicants will hold an educational coordination role and have at least five years of university teaching experience, including delivery of at least one successful course-level innovation. The sphere of impact of the innovation encompasses the students enrolled on the degree programme as well as the teaching staff engaged in its design and delivery.

- 3. Leadership Fellow:** awards are €250,000 in value and support a three-year teaching innovation project that brings together multiple faculties or the entire university. Successful applicants are described as those that demonstrate *“educational leadership and are able to inspire and give impetus to their vision on education”*. They must also have a track record of delivering successful innovations in teaching and learning. The sphere of impact of the innovation encompasses staff, students and teaching support services across part or all of the university.

The Career Framework for University Teaching was used to define these three fellowship levels and the attributes of successful candidates in each case. As illustrated in the Figure, each of these three fellowship awards lies on the interface between the Framework’s four levels.

A pilot version of the Comenius Grant Scheme was launched in 2017, with the award of 10 Teaching Fellowships. Already, two of these successful candidates have been able to use their award to support a successful case for promotion within their institutions. The full Comenius Grant Scheme was launched in 2018, and awarded 74 Fellowships to academics across the Dutch university system (46 Teaching Fellows, 22 Senior Fellows and six Leadership Fellows).

All recipients of a Comenius Grant also join the Comenius Network, a community of support for university teaching and learning hosted by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. Each awardee will be offered a four-year membership of this community, which is designed to offer peer-support, ideas exchange and inspiration for this group of the country’s leading innovators in university teaching and learning.

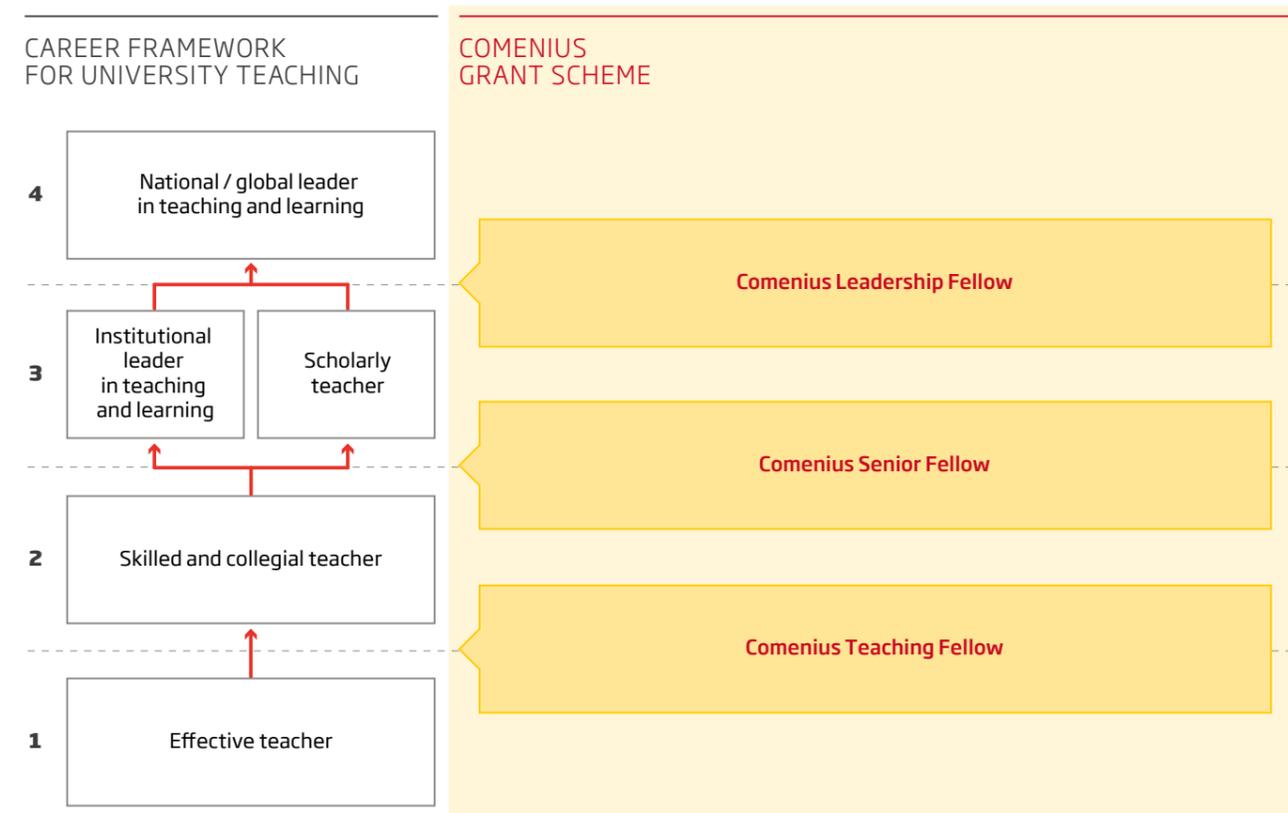


Figure: The relationship between the levels of the Career Framework for University Teaching and the levels of the Comenius Grant Scheme