

# NELLL

Netherlands Laboratory for Lifelong Learning

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## *Contents*

1. Why has NELLL been founded?
2. What is NELLL aiming at?
3. How is NELLL organized?
4. How does NELLL support its participants?
5. What does NELLL expect from its participants?
6. How further?

## 1. Why has NELLL been founded?

In its strategy for the coming years, the OUNL has chosen to present itself as a *university for lifelong learners*. Many of our students are lifelong learners, and our open and flexible educational system fits lifelong learning. Moreover new developments in higher distance education such as 'open educational resources', 'learning networks', and 'assessment of prior learning' stimulate the further innovation of the university's education along the lifelong learning profile.

This strategy also affects the research agenda which led to the decision to extend the research efforts on lifelong learning and concentrate them in NELLL, the NEtherlands Laboratory for Lifelong Learning. This is done by building upon two current R&D programs of the Educational Technology Expertise Center as well as including two new research areas relevant for lifelong learning.

NELLL has been founded to achieve two related aims, namely: (1) to create a research *focus* within the OUNL on lifelong learning linked to the various disciplines that are explored, and (2) to create *mass* in the research on lifelong learning both in terms of capacity and a broad but coherent scope. NELLL adopts a focus-and-mass approach to complement OUNL's reputation of a high quality teaching/education institution with a profile of a key actor and indispensable partner to cooperate with in the national and international research field of lifelong learning in the knowledge-based society.

## 2. What is NELLL aiming at?

### 2.1. Mission

NELLL provides a fertile context for starting and conducting high-quality research contributing to the development of theories, concepts, models, instruments and tools that help to understand, facilitate, and realize lifelong learning.

### 2.2. Research themes

To fulfill its mission, NELLL will conduct research on lifelong learning in its broadest sense, that is, on formal, non-formal, and informal learning across the lifespan. This provides opportunities to conduct interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, building on the expertise of the different schools<sup>1</sup> and expertise centers<sup>2</sup> of the OUNL.

In the short term, four program lines representing four different perspectives on lifelong learning are foreseen:

1. *Cognitive-educational perspective* – this program line is related to the current research program ‘instructional design for open tasks, environments, and communities’ that is conducted at the Educational Technology Expertise Center.
2. *Learning-technologies perspective* – this program line is related to the current development program ‘learning networks for lifelong learning’ that is conducted at the Educational Technology Expertise Center.
3. *Professional-learning perspective* – this program line focuses on—informal and non-formal—learning in the professions and builds on available expertise at the Ruud de Moor Center (professional learning by teachers), various schools (e.g., learning in the domains of Law, Management, etc.), and the Educational Technology Expertise Center.
4. *Socio-economic perspective* – this program line focuses on the social and economic aspects of lifelong learning (e.g., related to changes in the labor market and/or demography). At the OUNL, there is yet little expertise available for this program line.

Each program line will be developed by a Program Director, in close collaboration with representatives from all organizational units who show interest in contributing to this program line. All four program lines have a focus on lifelong learning and will be open for participation from all organizational units. The program lines will be developed in such a way that synergy exists with content-related research of the schools.

Clearly, (inter)national collaboration with other relevant research centers is key for a successful operation of NELLL. The description of the program lines is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. On a medium term, it is the expressed goal of NELLL to further strengthen its research by including additional program lines which might be initiated from one or more organizational units within the OUNL or come up in the collaborative partnerships.

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<sup>1</sup> CW, INF, MW, NW, PSY, RW

<sup>2</sup> OTEC and RdMC

### 3. How is NELLL organized?

#### 3.1 NELLL as a Research Institute

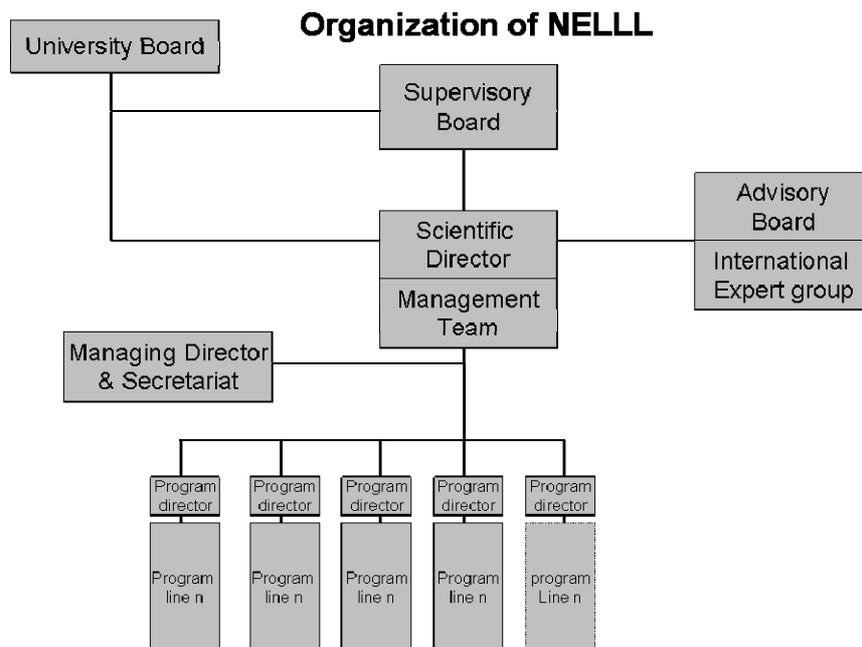
NELLL is an independent research institute between various faculties as formally defined in articles 9.21 and 9.22 of the Dutch Law on Higher Education and Scientific Research<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, the University Board<sup>4</sup>:

1. Arranges the administration, management, and organization of NELLL (article 9.21.1);
2. Makes, for a period of five years, the scientific director of NELLL responsible for the management tasks (article 9.22.2), and
3. Provides the financial means for NELLL on an annual basis (article 9.22.3).

The position of NELLL within the university will be described in the administrative and management regulations<sup>5</sup> of the OUNL. Deans and directors of the participating organizational units need to agree with the creation of NELLL.

#### 3.2 Organization chart of NELLL

NELLL is headed by a Scientific Director<sup>6</sup> who has both full and final responsibility for its administration and management. The scientific director is appointed by the University Board for a period of 5 years. The organizational structure of NELLL is depicted below:



*Supervisory Board*<sup>7</sup> - The Supervisory Board approves the NELLL program lines and the annual budget and decides on strategic policies. It consists of the Deans and Directors of all participating organizational units. The Rector Magnificus chairs the Supervisory Board.

<sup>3</sup> Wet op het Hoger Onderwijs en Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek

<sup>4</sup> College van Bestuur

<sup>5</sup> Bestuurs- en beheersreglement Open Universiteit Nederland

<sup>6</sup> Wetenschappelijk directeur

<sup>7</sup> Raad van Toezicht

*Management Team*<sup>8</sup> - The Scientific Director chairs a Management Team consisting of the Program Directors and the Managing Director (see below). In addition, one PhD student is a “non-voting” member of the Management Team.

*Advisory Board*<sup>9</sup> - The Advisory Board provides advice on the internal organisation of NELLL and its program lines. It consists of all full professors who are involved with NELLL. The Scientific Director acts as the chair of this board.

*International Expert Group*<sup>10</sup> – This group consists of five external members who provide advice on the embedment of NELLL in the societal, technological, and scientific national and international context. The Scientific Director acts as the chair of this board. Group members have ample experience in research policy and management; at least three members are from institutions outside the Netherlands. They are appointed by the University Board on recommendation of the Scientific Director and receive a stipend.

*Managing Director*<sup>11</sup> - The Managing Director provides business support (i.e., administrative, financial, juridical) to the Scientific Director and the Management Team and is head of NELLL's secretariat.

*Program Directors*<sup>12</sup> - Each of the Program lines is headed by a Program Director who has the authority and responsibility to define and give shape to her/his Program line within the constraints of the NELLL umbrella program.

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<sup>8</sup> Bestuur

<sup>9</sup> Adviesraad

<sup>10</sup> Internationale expertgroep

<sup>11</sup> Zakelijk directeur

<sup>12</sup> Programmaleider

## 4. How does NELLL support its participants?

In order to develop strategies and plans to support participating organizational units, the Scientific Director of NELLL will start on the shortest possible term with a consultation of Deans, Directors and key researchers in the OUNL. Based on gathered input and ideas, the management team of NELLL will develop a detailed Strategic Plan<sup>13</sup> 2008-2012, in which the plans and actions are further worked out. Below, this starting document merely provides points of departure and first steps, which need future specification and elaboration.

### 4.1 Education

- PhD students<sup>14</sup> in NELLL take part in the educational program of a KNAW accredited research school. If organizational units do not subscribe a PhD student in a particular research school of which they are a member, NELLL will subscribe the student by default in the Interuniversity Center for Educational Research - ICO<sup>15</sup>. NELLL closely collaborates with ICO, a national KNAW-accredited research school with 10 partner institutes (see [www.utwente.nl/ico](http://www.utwente.nl/ico)). This school has strong thematic groups on the edge between educational science and content-related research, such as *Teaching and Teacher Training* and *Domain-specific Instruction*. From January 1, 2008, the OUNL will be the host institute for ICO and will supply the Scientific Director to ICO.
- NELLL will offer courses to its PhD students and staff members which are not part of the educational program of associated research schools. Topics include scientific writing/presenting in English, refresher courses on the use of statistical packages and techniques, specific courses in the domain of lifelong learning, courses with a specific interdisciplinary character, and so forth. If necessary, exemption rules will be negotiated with ICO and other research schools.
- NELLL will set up collaboration agreements with European doctoral schools and networks offering courses of interest for PhD students participating in NELLL.
- Especially for supervising staff, NELLL will organize courses and meetings related to the supervision and coaching of PhD students, project management, preparation and writing of project proposals for funding organizations, and so forth.

### 4.2 Administration

- The NELLL secretariat can provide support for the preparation and submission of project proposals.
- NELLL will provide a project management system for all of its projects. In order to prevent double work, the project management system will overlap with the project management in participating organizational units.
- NELLL will gather and report output of projects that participate in its program lines on a regular basis. This provides the necessary information for:
  - o The NELLL yearly report (the first 2008 Report will appear in March 2009).
  - o Self-evaluation reports for the 3-year midterm review of each program line.
  - o Self-evaluation reports for the 6-year national research evaluation.

### 4.3 Financial Incentives

High-quality research through direct OUNL-funding<sup>16</sup> is a *conditio sine qua non* for attracting funding from other funding streams. NELLL provides financial support to participating researchers, aimed at improving the quality of directly funded research as well as attracting externally funded projects:

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<sup>13</sup> Instituutsplan

<sup>14</sup> Reguliere promovendi

<sup>15</sup> Interuniversitair Centrum voor Onderwijsonderzoek.

<sup>16</sup> Eerste geldstroom

- For new projects under the NELLL umbrella that are *partially* funded by external sources, NELLL provides *matching* funds to the organizational unit(s) receiving the funding. These matching funds make it easier for organizational units to acquire and conduct such projects without completely exploiting ongoing research in the first stream of money.
- For new projects under the NELLL umbrella that are *fully* funded by external sources (e.g., NWO, ERC), NELLL provides a premium to the organizational unit(s) that initiated the project. This amount will at least cover the costs for project acquisition, project supervision, and project management.
- For a limited number of fully-funded projects under the NELLL umbrella that were judged to be fundable (i.e., given an A-judgment by the external funding organization), but that were not prioritized, NELLL may fund the organizational unit(s) to conduct the project. If the number of projects exceeds the available budget, priority will be given to projects that have been awarded to the “new” program lines (i.e., program lines 3 and 4).
- For each completed PhD project which finds its defense and diploma under the NELLL umbrella within the OUNL, NELLL provides a premium to the organizational unit(s) that supervised the project.
- For high-quality output NELLL provides an incentive to the organizational unit(s) that realized the output. Program directors may propose definitions of high-quality output, specific to their program line, to the NELLL management team (MT-NELLL).

According to its Strategic Plan, the OUNL wants to stimulate lifelong-learning research under the umbrella of NELLL. Therefore, in the coming five years the financial incentives for lifelong-learning research as described above will only be made available to NELLL, which will then divert the means to the organizational units. If organizational units choose to conduct lifelong-learning research outside NELLL, no additional financial support will be made available to them.

#### 4.4 Infrastructure

NELLL will stimulate participating organizational units to build a common research infrastructure for its researchers, consisting of laboratory facilities (i.e., multimedia lab, eye movement lab, recording equipment, et cetera) and software for data gathering, data analysis, and data presentation. Where necessary, NELLL will provide training and instruction related to the use of this research infrastructure.

#### 4.5 Communication and collaboration

- NELLL will offer its own Colloquium Series with national and international guest speakers who report on research relevant to lifelong learning.
- NELLL will organize a limited number of yearly social events for all PhD students and staff members involved in its activities.
- NELLL will set up a website with information on program lines, projects, people involved, output, opportunities for collaboration, and so forth. This will be part of the OUNL-website that can also be approached through [www.nelll.nl](http://www.nelll.nl) or [www.nel3.nl](http://www.nel3.nl). In order to prevent double work, this website will be ‘interweaved’ with websites of participating organizational units.
- NELLL will publish an annual scientific report with major developments and an overview of realized output.
- NELLL will set up a Fellowship Program for visiting professors who may contribute to the further scientific development of NELLL. In addition, a program for short-term visitors will be developed.
- NELLL will prepare collaboration agreements with partner institutes in the field of lifelong learning and will build networks with funding agencies and field partners. For each program line, strategies for collaboration will be developed and described in the NELLL strategic plan. For program lines 1 and 2, NELLL will claim a leading role with both national and international partners; for program lines 3 and 4, NELLL will initially aspire a secondary role with national partners.

## 5. What does NELLL expect from its participants?

### 5.1 Program lines

- Participating researchers work on the basis of a description of their program line, which covers a period of 6-years. Program lines need to be formally approved by the NELLL Supervisory Board.
- Each NELLL program line is headed by a Program Director with management tasks (0.5 fte) and research tasks (0.5 fte). Program Directors have a strong research reputation as demonstrated by a track record with respect to project acquisition, high-quality publications within their area of expertise and validated through external measures, and a broad international network demonstrated by membership in editorial and association boards.
- The minimum size of a full-grown program line is, in the OUNL funded stream, 6.0 fte PhD students, and 2.0 fte scientific staff. At least the same volume is expected from external funding, yielding a minimum of 12.0 PhD students and 4.0 fte scientific staff. The Program Director is expected to present a 'model of growth' for reaching this state.

### 5.2 PhD Projects

One of the main aims of NELLL is to provide an optimal working and learning context for PhD students. Therefore, PhD projects are very important building blocks of the NELLL program lines. PhD projects fulfill the following requirements:

- PhD students work on the basis of a project proposal<sup>17</sup> fitting the program line it belongs to and formally approved by the responsible Program Director.
- PhD students participate in the educational program of a KNAW-accredited research school of which their organizational unit and/or the OUNL is a member.
- PhD projects are conducted under the (daily) supervision of researchers holding a PhD degree and who are productive researchers, as proven by their membership of a KNAW-accredited research school. In NELLL, the number of potential PhD supervisors is high enough to warrant membership of a research school for all its PhD students.
- PhD students have at least 0.8 fte per week available, for a minimum period of 4 years, to complete their project (i.e., they have at least 3.2 years *netto*<sup>18</sup> available time). The maximum duration of PhD projects is 6 years (i.e., the project can also have an execution time of 5 years with a 0.65 fte investment, or one of 6 years with a 0.55 fte investment, etc.).

### 5.3 Other Projects

In addition to PhD projects, NELLL recognizes non-PhD projects as well as special PhD projects conducted by OUNL scientific staff or external PhD researchers<sup>19</sup>. Non-PhD projects are seen as important because they provide the opportunity to OUNL scientific staff to conduct research and profit from the environment NELLL aims to offer. The duration of internally funded non-PhD projects is minimally 6 months and maximally 24 months. Such projects can only be conducted by staff members who already hold a PhD degree<sup>20</sup>. Externally funded non-PhD projects should comply with the requirements of the funding organization giving the subsidy. Both internally and externally funded non-PhD projects must fit in the program line they belong to and must be formally approved by the responsible Program Director.

NELLL will stimulate OUNL scientific staff not yet holding a PhD degree to start a PhD project. Project proposals for PhD projects of OUNL staff must fit into the program line they belong to and must have formal approval of the Program Director. These internal PhD candidates have a guarantee of having at

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<sup>17</sup> NELLL will develop a format for project proposals based on the NWO format. All proposals will be written in English, unless this is not accepted by the external funding organization.

<sup>18</sup> Excluding education required by the research school

<sup>19</sup> i.e., 'buitenpromovendi'

<sup>20</sup> Thus, OUNL staff who does not hold a PhD degree can only participate in NELLL within the framework of a PhD project contributing to their further professionalization.

least 0.4 fte per week available for carrying out the research, for a minimum period of 4 years, to complete their project.

Finally, NELLL will develop additional policies and appropriate operational models for external PhD researchers.

## 5.4 Targets

The main performance indicators in NELLL are completed PhD projects, scientific output as defined by the respective KNAW-accredited research schools, and external funding. For targets, NELLL applies a 'reference model' for its program lines:

- *Completed PhD projects.* For each research-fte at the full professor level, a minimum of 3.75 completed PhD projects per year is realized.
- *Scientific output.* For each research-fte (staff and PhD), a minimum of 3 scientific journal publications per year is realized. The rules of the associated research school are used to determine which publications are acceptable.
- *External funding.* External funding is at least 50%.

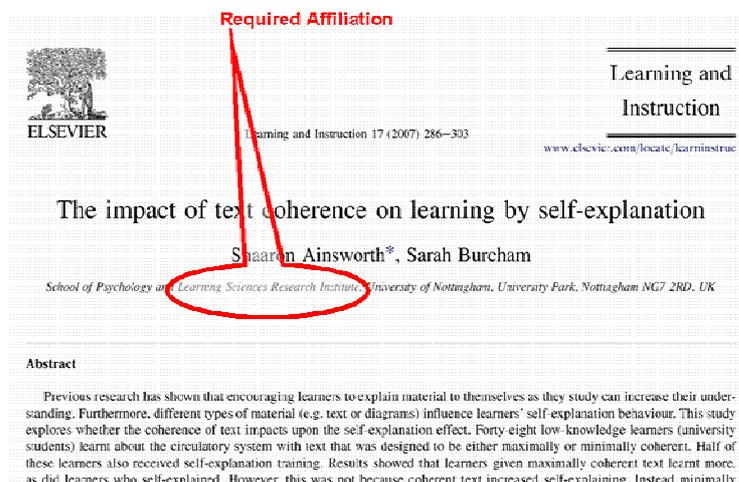
With regard to quality assurance, NELLL program lines are subject to a 3-yearly midterm review (in accordance with the Law on Higher Education and Scientific Research) and a 6-yearly national evaluation (according to the Standard Evaluation Protocol of the KNAW). Alternative systems of quality assurance may be developed in the future.

New program lines are expected to present a "model of growth", indicating how the yearly output will develop toward the targets. If program lines recognize types of output other than scientific journal publications (e.g., software prototypes, standards, patents etc.), they are specified and unequivocally related to the reference model.

## 5.5 Affiliation

An important aim of NELLL is to strengthen the presentation of the OUNL as a lifelong-learning university. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to bring NELLL to the notice of funding organizations, sister institutes, and users of research findings – and to build a strong reputation. For externally funded projects that organizational units want to bring into NELLL (e.g., projects funded by NWO, ERC, ESF, etc.), NELLL and the OUNL are listed as the applicant's affiliation.

With regard to publications and other products, realized output also indicates NELLL and the OUNL as affiliation. If desired, the organizational unit in which the researcher is appointed may also be listed (see example below, where the Learning Sciences Research Institute is comparable to NELLL, and the School of Psychology is comparable to one of the organizational units of the OUNL).



## 6. How further?

### 2007

- University Board approves start document, based on the advice of the Scientific Committee
- Gather input and ideas for NELLL strategic plan among Deans and Directors of organizational units and other stakeholders.
- Invite organizational units to bring projects into NELLL, before end of 2007. Subsequently, organizational units can bring in projects on a continuous basis.
- Installation of the Supervisory Board
- Include NELLL in rules and regulations of the OUNL; approval by Deans and Directors.
- Write 'umbrella program' for the research lines of NELLL
- Start program line 3 - LLL in the professions (acquisition of Program Director, start first projects etc.)
- Prepare NELLL starting event in the beginning of 2008

### 2008

- NELLL Strategic Plan 2008-2012, with detailed activity plan, for approval in Supervisory Board and University Board
- Program line 2 / Learning Technologies 2008-2013 for approval in Supervisory Board
- Program line 3 / LLL in the professions 2008-2013 for approval in Supervisory Board
- Start program line socio-economic aspects of LLL

*For further years, provisional activities pending the NELLL Strategic Plan 2008-2012 are:*

### 2009

- Program line 1 / Instructional Design 2009-2014 for approval in Supervisory Board
- Program line 4 / Socio-economic aspects of LLL for approval in Supervisory Board, depending upon additional funding
- Publish (first) Scientific Report for 2008

### 2010

- Publish Scientific Report for 2009

### 2011

- Midterm review Program line 2 - Learning Technologies for LLL
- Midterm review Program line 3 - LLL in the Professions
- Publish Scientific Report for 2010

### 2012

- Midterm review Program line 1 - Instructional Design
- Midterm review Program line 4 - Socio-Economic Aspects of LLL
- Publish Scientific Report for 2011
- Decision on continuation of NELLL, based on four midterm reviews of programs

### 2013

- External evaluation of institute (after 6 years, in accordance with SEP)
- NELLL strategic plan 2013-2017
- Publish scientific report for 2012