

Things have calmed down a bit after the opening for the people involved in the commissioning phase of NeCEN. The offices and control room have been furnished and most equipment for the preparation lab has arrived. Meanwhile the commissioning team and FEI staff are still working on the microscopes to make sure they perform at their best before we offer access.

NeCEN opened by deputy Liesbeth Spies

By creating a live connection with the microscope 70 m from its location, deputy Liesbeth Spies officially opened NeCEN on October 27th. Once connected, all visitors in the lecture hall witnessed how the operator took an image of viruses by remote control. In her speech, the deputy of economic affairs for the province of Zuid-Holland valued the collaboration that led to setting up NeCEN in only three years. The microscopes cost 6 million euro each, but she mentioned that science is worth the investment by referring to a recent analysis by BiGGAR Economics. This survey shows that every euro invested in Leiden research generates four times its value for society. According to Liesbeth Spies, this is "a return that pension funds can only dream about".



Visitors look at the screen that shows how Gijs van Duinen (FEI Company) takes an image of viruses with microscope 'Krios 1'.

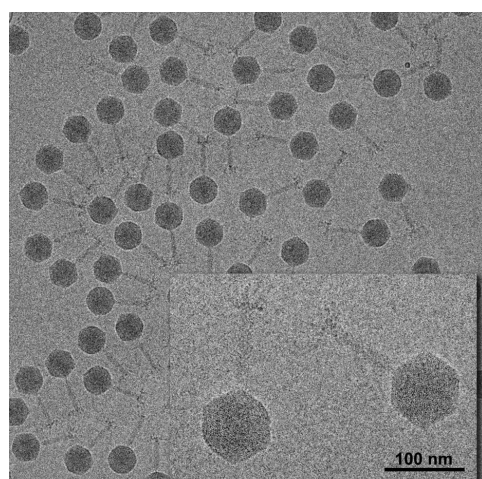


Image of Phi-92 viruses, taken with a NeCEN microscope. The inset is taken at low electron dose and shows DNA packaging inside the heads as well as the tail structure and some fibers. Image by dr. Sacha de Carlo, FEI Company

Science day

NeCEN opened its doors to the public on the science day on October 30th. Everyone could catch a glimpse of (and inside!) the microscopes by joining a tour. Although the science day is mainly aimed at children, adults curious to see "the microscopes from the newspaper" especially came to see the 3.5 m tall giants. Images and animations showed how you can reconstruct how a virus infects a cell from thousands of images. Among the images shown were those taken at the official opening three days earlier.

Opening symposium

An afternoon symposium preceded the official opening on October 27th. Holger Stark (Max Planck Institute, Göttingen) provided insight into the wonderful world of electron microscopy during a guest lecture. He explained basic principles of cryo-electron microscopy and gave insight into the importance of NeCEN for science. Stark acknowledged the unique approach of the centre to give a broad range of scientists access to the most advanced equipment "Apart from the expected scientific advances, the NeCEN concept has the potential to become an interesting export model to be copied by other countries to minimize the costs and to maximize the scientific output."

After the guest lecture, the participants discussed the conditions for setting up a large research infrastructure like NeCEN during three workshops. Chairs of these workshops were Bram Koster (LUMC), Peter Peters (NKI-AVL), Olivier Heyning (FEI company) and Jeanette Ridder-Numan (Ministry OCW). Over 110 people from science, governments and industry attended the afternoon program. Notes of the discussions are being collected and will be processed into a report that will be sent by e-mail and published on the website.