

# Suggestions and Recommendations

## Content

General PhD Information .....	2
Summary .....	2
Recommendations .....	2
Diversity and Inclusion .....	3
Summary .....	3
Recommendations .....	3
Mental Health and Well-Being .....	4
Summary .....	4
Recommendations .....	4
Supervisory Assessment .....	5
Summary .....	5
Recommendations .....	5
Teaching and Supervisory Responsibilities .....	7
Summary .....	7
Recommendations .....	7
PhD planning and Outcome .....	8
Summary .....	8
Recommendations .....	8
COVID-related questions .....	9
Summary .....	9
Recommendations .....	9

## General PhD Information

### Summary

- Of the 501 respondents to the 2020 GSLS survey, the majority (92%) belongs to one of the 14 programmes and 83% holds a fully funded position.
- Of the eighteen women who reported having been pregnant during their PhD, 22% reported difficulties in getting compensation for their maternity leave. 75% of these latter are affiliated to the UMCU.
- Of the 120 PhDs (24%) who have either a MD or a DVM, about one third combine their PhD with clinical duty/training. Of these, almost half state that they believe that their research would benefit by separating it from clinical duties or trainings.

### Recommendations

- Make sure from the start of their PhDs that they have a funded position for their entire PhD track.
- Ensure a compensation system for maternity leave for women who get pregnant during their PhD. This is of particular relevance for UMCU.
- Provide MD/DVM PhDs with the possibility to separate their research from clinical duties or trainings.
- More visibility of representatives and programme coordinators. (Examples: Add programme coordinators and representatives to a start document for new PhDs or to the programme website.)

## Diversity and Inclusion

### Summary

- 1 in 10 PhDs has personally witnessed discrimination and 1 in 25 PhDs has been the victim of discrimination.
- A large fraction of non-Dutch employees feels that support for non-Dutch employees is lacking. Especially in work places where care and research are combined.
- Most PhDs feel safe in their workspace, but there is an increase in the number who do not feel safe at all since 2019
- As this is the first year that we have directly assessed discrimination like this, it is difficult to interpret these findings because we cannot compare it to other data.

### Recommendations

- Institutes like the PMC and UMCU, have a diversity task force, to raise awareness and make the workplace more equal, diverse and inclusive place. It will be interesting to see if and how these data change over the next few years.
- For other institutes it might be beneficent to set up something similar. Furthermore, if possible, such taskforces should work together and share knowledge and experiences.
- All institutes and programmes should evaluate where discrimination may occur and how discrimination can be prevented. An active approach is needed to address this topic.
- Review the available information (e.g. news flashes) of your institutes and investigate if this information is available and sufficient enough in English.
- Safety in the workplace should be addressed and it should be investigated why the number of PhD's not feeling safe has doubled the past year.

## Mental Health and Well-Being

### Summary

- PhDs report working almost a full extra day per week than what was agreed upon in their contract
- PhDs have higher levels of perceived stress than the normal working population, comparable with results from 2019
- High levels of Emotional Exhaustion and Mental Distance from work were found in PhDs with a trend towards higher levels compared to 2019
- Differences in these scores are primarily associated with the programme that the PhD is in rather than the institute where they work
- Most PhDs are aware of services available to help them with mental health and well-being offered through the UU/UMCU, with daily supervisor or promotor being the most heard of and utilized option
- Continued attention to the mental health and well-being of PhDs is warranted based on these findings

### Recommendations

- Campaigns or processes to increase awareness of services available to PhDs are needed to ensure that PhDs know what is currently available to them and where to go for help. In addition, such information should be provided at the start of PhD in for example a start document.
- Additional programs that target specific problems like feelings of stress, emotional exhaustion, and mental distance should be added to the current services available.
- Programmes (coordinators), daily supervisors, and (co-)promotors need to gauge the emotional exhaustion and mental distance of their PhDs and find a way to engage PhDs with their work where needed.
- Inquiries into the mental health and well-being of daily supervisors and promotors should also be conducted in order to see if they are able to provide the support needed for PhDs.

## Supervisory Assessment

### Summary

- PhDs rated the scientific contributions of their **daily supervisor** and personal relationships with their daily supervisor as relatively high. These rates are slightly lower for their **supervisors (promotor)**. Lower values were found for PhDs belonging to either the PhD programme Cancer, Stem Cells & Developmental Biology or Molecular Life Sciences.
- The amount of contact between PhDs and (daily) supervisors decreased with respect to the previous year, likely due the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 89% of the PhDs reported that their supervisor supported them in pursuing educational options including taking courses.
- 16% of the PhDs did not have the mandatory annual review meeting (beoordelingsgesprek - B&O) and did not indicate that one was planned. 10% of the PhDs do not know what Training and Supervisory Agreement is.
- Only 25% of PhDs had met their supervisory committee in the past year (in 2019 it was 42%), 30% reported of not having yet met the supervisory committee, however, it is not clear whether a meeting is planned or not. 11% still do not have a supervisory committee and 16% do not know what a supervisory committee is.

### Recommendations

- Effort needs to be made to improve the scientific contribution and personal relationship of supervisors with their PhDs, especially within the Cancer, Stem Cells & Developmental Biology and Molecular Life Sciences programmes. An inventory could be made what PhDs need in this regard and what they currently miss.
- Try to make sure that COVID-19 does not affect the contact between PhDs and daily supervisors or supervisors too much.
- Implement a system that makes sure that all PhDs have their mandatory annual review meeting.
- Make sure PhDs are aware of what the Training and Supervisory Agreement is by informing them properly during the introductory day.

- Educate supervisors and supervisory committees on the function and necessity of the Supervisory committee. Enforce the creation of a supervisory committee for each PhD and enable a planning system that ensures it is actively met annually. Make clear who is in charge of organizing them.

## Teaching and Supervisory Responsibilities

### Summary

- Of the PhDs who of having had teaching responsibilities in the past year (40%), the majority thought that the teaching load was acceptable.
- Regarding training in teaching, 44% of PhDs would like to receive it through one of the courses already available; however, 41% reported that they preferred not to get training in teaching.
- The average number of students that PhDs supervised last year was around 1, but 36% of PhDs (35.7%) did not supervise any student.

### Recommendations

- Provide training in teaching to PhDs who are interested in it.
- Actively ask PhDs whether they would like to supervise students during their PhD track.

## PhD planning and Outcome

### Summary

- PhDs reported that the frequency of discussions about the planning and duration of their PhD was more frequent with their daily supervisor compared to supervisor (promotor)
- 42% (34% in 2019) of PhDs were unsure if they would finish before the end of their original contract. Only 24% thought that they would finish on time. 18% reported already having a contract extension in place. These percentages are likely influenced by the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

### Recommendations

- Ensure proper extension/proper information regarding extension to PhDs who have been heavily impacted by COVID-19.



## COVID-related questions

### Summary

- A majority of respondents (56%) could not work on the tasks that they had planned, mostly data collection. For 78% of them this caused delay.
- The stalled research progress due to COVID resulted in 41% of the respondents being worried that they will not finish their PhD in time.
- A large majority of respondents (73%) indicated that not being able to interact on a face-to-face basis with their colleagues had a negative impact on their mental well-being.
- A majority of respondents (69%) answered that the lockdown lowered their level of motivation to work.
- For most respondents the communication about this was sufficient and clear. International PhD candidates (27%) had problems because the information was in Dutch, especially in the hospitals (55% in the UMCU, 46% in the Princess Máxima Center).
- A majority of respondents (57%) received less supervision and/or supervision of lower quality.
- Many PhD candidates had to - and still largely or exclusively do - work from home. 34% did not experience sufficient support from their department or supervisor to get the equipment (desk, chair, computer, screen, etc.) to create a comfortable home office.

### Recommendations

- The stalled research progress due to COVID resulted in 41% of the respondents being worried that they will not finish their PhD in time. These findings underline the need for contract extensions.
- Because it is expected that working (partly) from home will remain important after the pandemic, departments and supervisors should invest in creating comfortable workspaces for PhD candidates at home.
- The COVID restrictions had a considerable negative self-reported impact on a vast majority of PhD candidates, which is worrisome and demands close attention.
- PhD candidates should receive proper supervision on a regular basis, especially since there has been a delay in many projects making PhD candidates worry about not finishing in time.