Dear Deans,

I would like to ask for your attention regarding a number of aspects of the doctoral degree procedures. In section 1, we cover the changes to the Doctoral Degree Regulations, and in section 2 we cover the changes that relate to the introduction of MyPhD as the PhD candidate tracking system. The other sections relate to issues which are not new but which we would like to bring to your attention as we frequently receive questions regarding them.

1. Changes to the Doctoral Degree Regulations

The revised Doctoral Degree Regulations become effective on 1 March 2020. The Regulations are available in Dutch and English at www.uu.nl/promoveren or www.uu.nl/phd.

Deviations from these Regulations may be permitted with regard to doctoral programmes started before 1 March 2020 providing that they follow the Doctoral Degree Regulations effective until 29 February 2020. We will honour the rights and obligations agreed to for doctoral programmes that are already under way, but where possible and desirable the rules of the new regulations will be applied.

The most important changes relate to the following:

1.a Admission to doctoral programme for holders of a PhD (Article 4 Section 3)
It is not possible for holders of a PhD from a university in the Netherlands or abroad to be admitted to a doctoral programme at Utrecht University. A doctoral programme is a proof of academic competence.

1.b The four-eyes principle (Article 5)
It has been decided that PhD candidates are always supervised by at least two supervisors: two supervisors or a supervisor and co-supervisor. This means that two supervisors must be stated in MyPhD upon registration.
1. c Composition of the Assessment Committee
A number of supplementary conditions have been set in respect of the members of the Assessment Committee:

i. In principle, they are not co-authors of any article that forms part of the doctoral thesis. (Article 14 Section 2). This rule may only be deviated from very rarely and a relevant request substantiated by the Dean must be submitted to the Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees.

ii. The five voting members of the Assessment Committee must include at least four members who have *ius promovendi*, of which at least three will be Full Professors (Article 15 Section 1).

iii. The members hold a doctoral degree and are experts either on parts of the doctoral thesis subject or the methodology used (Article 15 Section 1).

iv. The Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees ensures the diverse composition of the Assessment Committee (Article 15 Section 1). On the one hand, this relates to the male/female ratio and, on the other, to preventing the Assessment Committee from having a too standard composition. The Dean reviews the diversity of the committee before approving it.

v. At least one voting member of the Assessment Committee is a Professor from a university other than Utrecht University (Article 15 Section 1).

vi. The composition of the Assessment Committee is included in the doctoral thesis (Article 19 Section 3).

1. d Admission to the doctoral thesis defence (Article 16)
In principle, the decision to admit a candidate for the doctoral thesis defence is unanimous. If one or more members take a negative view to admission to the thesis defence, the Dean is consulted. The Dean decides whether to grant admission to the doctoral thesis defence, to request that the manuscript be revised, or to refuse admission.

1. e Cum laude (Article 17 Section 2)
If the Assessment Committee decides to propose to the Doctoral Examination Committee that the Doctoral Degree be conferred with the ‘cum laude’ designation, the Dean shall seek the advice of at least two external experts. These external experts will not have been involved in the research on which the thesis is based and, in addition to this, may not have co-published with the supervisor or PhD candidate within five years of receiving the request for advice from the Dean. The Dean shall check the expertise and impartiality of the external experts.

2. Doctoral degree process in MyPhD
It is of the greatest importance that the timetable is adhered to by the PhD candidates as well as their supervisors and co-supervisors. The introduction of MyPhD means that paper forms are no longer used as the registration and assessment process take place through MyPhD. The timetable remains unchanged though.

1. Request for exemption and admission to the doctoral programme. The PhD candidate is responsible for completing the form and having it signed in MyPhD by all parties involved.

2. Approval of manuscript by supervisor(s) and co-supervisors. The PhD candidate is responsible for uploading the manuscript, which is to be sent to the Committee no later than four months before the date set for the doctoral thesis defence ceremony. This approval must be signed by the supervisor(s) and co-supervisors before the Assessment Committee can be established.

3. Proposal for composition of Assessment Committee. The composition of the Assessment Committee must be completed no later than 3.5 months before the date set for the doctoral thesis defence ceremony and approved by all parties. In accordance with the Doctoral Degree Regulations, the members of the Assessment Committee are given four weeks to assess the manuscript.
4. Approval of the manuscript by the Assessment Committee. The assessment of the manuscript by the members of the Assessment Committee must be approved by all parties no later than two months before the date set for the doctoral thesis defence ceremony.

5. Assessment Committee’s proposal regarding conferral of a doctoral degree with the designation ‘cum laude’. The secretary’s office of the Dean is responsible for completing the form and having it approved by all the parties by no later than one month before the date set for the doctoral thesis defence ceremony. It is important for the procedures relating to the ‘cum laude’ designation to be adopted accurately. This means that as soon as the Assessment Committee has decided unanimously that the doctoral defence thesis deserves the ‘cum laude’ designation, the Dean shall inform the Rector Magnificus of his intention to seek the advice of at least two external experts. Once approved by the Dean, the names of these experts are forwarded to the Rector Magnificus.

6. Approval of the composition of the Doctoral Examination Committee. The supervisor is responsible for entering this in MyPhD and having it approved by the parties involved at the latest one week before the date set for the doctoral thesis defence ceremony. The Dean and the Beadle’s Office must be informed of any changes after approval and prior to the date set for the doctoral thesis defence ceremony.

If the processing in MyPhD is not completed in time according to the timetable for approval by the Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees, it may happen that the date for the doctoral thesis defence ceremony cannot be agreed or that the date set for the doctoral thesis defence ceremony has to be postponed.

3. Before the doctoral thesis defence ceremony

3.a Maximum number of supervisors and co-supervisors

A maximum of two supervisors and two co-supervisors will be appointed. If a co-supervisor is appointed a professor during the process, this person may be designated as a third supervisor. Other exceptions to this rule may be discussed with the Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees.

3.b Composition of the Doctoral Examination Committee

Before the doctoral thesis defence ceremony, the supervisor shall inform the Beadle and the Chair about the following:

   a. The name, positions of the opponents and the institutions they are affiliated with;
   b. The order of the opposition;
   c. The reserve question.

During ‘regular’ doctoral thesis defence ceremonies, the Rector Magnificus and the supervisor(s) are joined at the table by three Utrecht University professors. During a ‘cum laude’ ceremony, the Rector Magnificus and the supervisor(s) are joined by five Utrecht University professors. At least three voting members of the Assessment Committee are members of the Doctoral Examination Committee. The extension of the scope of the ius promovendi has no consequences for the composition of the Doctoral Examination Committee. This means that the requisite number of professors remains the same. The members of the Doctoral Examination Committee may act as opponents at the invitation of the Rector Magnificus. The Doctoral Examination Committee will decide on conferral of the degree and on the ‘cum laude’ designation.

3.c Profile pages of professors and associate professors

In order for the composition of the Assessment Committee and the Doctoral Examination Committee to proceed in accordance with the Doctoral Degree Regulations, and to ensure that the members are correctly addressed during the doctoral thesis defence ceremony, it is of great importance that professors and associate professor publish correct and up-to-date information on their profile pages.
3.d Ius promovendi

With effect from 1 January 2018, Deans may, after consulting the professor in question, nominate associate professors to the Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees to be granted the right to confer doctoral degrees if there is a PhD candidate the associate professor wishes to supervise. This has been laid down in the Utrecht University regulations on the granting of the ius promovendi to associate professors, and the Doctoral Degree Regulations have been revised in line with this. Both documents can be downloaded from https://www.uu.nl/en/organisation/phd-programmes/practical-matters/regulations-and-forms.

3.e International diplomas

In the event of a PhD candidate holding an international diploma, the supervisor may ask either the Admissions Office or Nuffic for advice on the candidate’s entitlement to admission to the doctoral programme at Utrecht University.

3.f Diplomas that do not directly entitle the holder to admission to the doctoral programme

If there is no clear decision as to the entitlement to admission to the doctoral programme, the diploma will be submitted to the Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees for obtaining a final decision, prior to the start of the doctoral programme. A dossier will be prepared which will contain a substantiation by the prospective supervisor and an opinion by the Board of Examiners regarding the level of education of the candidate.

3.g Conflicts of interest

Supervisors, co-supervisors and members of the Doctoral Examination Committee may not be related to the PhD candidate such as to render it unreasonable for them to be asked to give their opinion. The mere appearance of a conflict of interest will be sufficient reason to revise the composition of the supervisory team or of the Doctoral Examination Committee.

The same applies to the relationship between members of the Doctoral Examination Committee and the supervisors or co-supervisors.

Second-degree relatives can sit at the table, but they are not allowed to be present during the preliminary consultations or the deliberations. They will have to wait outside and are not permitted to ask any questions.

4. Doctoral theses

4.a Demarcation of the responsibility of the supervisor

From the title page to the word of thanks, the doctoral thesis falls under the responsibility of the promotor. The PhD candidate is responsible for the word of thanks.

4.b Logo

The printing of logos in or on the doctoral thesis is not allowed. Sponsors can be addressed in writing on the back of the title page. In rare cases, exceptions can be made for existing series. Such exceptions will first have to be discussed with the Rector Magnificus.

In line with the Instructions to the PhD candidates, artworks may of course be used in the doctoral thesis, more particularly on the cover, on the condition that copyright is clearly referenced. If the commercial character of the artworks dominates, this is not permitted.
4.c Aphorisms and mottos

Placing aphorisms and mottos is permitted as long as they do not form part of the academic treatise and as long as they are not at odds with the values of Utrecht University.

4.d CV and summary

Each thesis shall include a CV and a summary in conformity with Article 19 Sections 1 and 2 of the Doctoral Degree Regulations.

5. The doctoral thesis defence ceremony

5.a Addressing the Rector Magnificus

During the doctoral thesis defence ceremony, the Rector Magnificus or his deputy is addressed as ‘Honourable Rector’.

5.b Taking the oath or making a solemn affirmation

Prior to the degree certificate being presented, the PhD candidate swears under oath or solemnly affirms that they will perform their academic activities according to the principles of proper academic research and education. MyPhD refers the PhD candidate to the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

5.c Presentation of the degree certificate

The degree certificate is presented on the authority of Utrecht University; it is therefore always presented by a supervisor from Utrecht University.

5.d Congratulatory address

The congratulatory address shall be delivered by a single person and, due to limited capacity of the University Hall, shall not exceed five or six minutes. The address is aimed at the PhD candidate only and shall not have the form of a short lecture about their thesis. The address is not intended for thanking the committee members. Supervisors can thank external guests outside the ceremonial hall during the preliminary consultations or the deliberations. If the supervisor is an associate professor who has been granted ius promovendi, the associate professor will be entitled to deliver the congratulatory address.

5.e Deliberations

The deliberations of the Doctoral Examination Board shall not exceed seven minutes in a regular thesis ceremony or nine minutes in a ‘cum laude’ ceremony. Longer deliberations will cause the Beadle logistic problems. The deliberations are not meant to include a renewed discussion of the defence.

5.f Decorations

No decorations, such as royal decorations or honorary doctorates, are worn during the doctoral thesis defence ceremony.

5.g Dress code

Cap, bands and gown is the dress code for professors. When they take their seats, the male professors remove their cap; women professors may choose whether to keep on or remove the cap. Supervisors of Utrecht University shall wear the Utrecht gown, even when they hold a position at another university as well. Only professors are permitted to wear gowns. Associate professors who hold ius promovendi may not wear gowns.
For those who are not professors: a dark suit and tie for men and the equivalent for women. Guests will also have to be carefully informed of the nature of the ceremony and the rules for the opposition, including the set time frame for their intervention.

6. Other procedures

6.a Joint doctorates
All information about joint doctorates can be found on the Utrecht University website:

https://www.uu.nl/en/node/4811/doctoral-degree-regulations-universiteit-utrecht

Applications shall be submitted to the Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees. A joint doctorate programme is understood to mean a long-term doctoral degree collaboration between more than one cohort of PhD candidates and the concrete participation of at least two PhD candidates. The partner organisations obtain the approval of their respective Boards for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees. If agreements have been made regarding a joint degree certificate containing the logos of both partners, the Beadle’s Office must be informed of this in time and up-to-date logos must be submitted.

I would very urgently ask you to share all the information mentioned in this letter with all the professors at your faculty. This letter will soon be published on the Utrecht University website. All other information about the doctoral degrees can also be found here.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Kind regards,
The Executive Board,

Prof Henk Kummeling
Rector Magnificus