



Minimum requirements for the quality assurance system for doctoral programmes

Introduction

Utrecht University has an internal quality assurance system for research and education. The most important principles of this are:

- the deans have primary responsibility for the quality of the research and education within their faculty and the system used to safeguard this;
- the assurance of quality flourishes best in the environment close to the research and education; within certain prerequisites, implementing the quality assurance reflects the nature, scope and culture of the organisational unit in question.

The deans have delegated the responsibility for the study programme and the supervision of PhD candidates to the Board of Studies (BoS) of the Graduate Schools. To safeguard the quality of the doctoral programme, it is important that each graduate school has a cyclical quality assurance system in place that enables the BoS to monitor and continually improve the quality of the doctoral programme. To ensure a relatively uniform way of safeguarding quality, the Executive Board has set minimum requirements for the quality assurance system.

Learning outcomes

The Utrecht University Doctoral Degree Regulations contain the learning outcomes for the doctoral programme:

Article 9 Research conditions

1. The PhD candidate is responsible for ensuring that the research that will serve as the basis for the doctoral thesis shall fulfil the following conditions:
 - a. The PhD candidate makes an original contribution to academic research of a quality which stands up to peer review at the level usual in the Netherlands;
 - b. The PhD candidate has demonstrated their ability to independently apply the academic methods used in the discipline concerned for developing, interpreting and putting into
 - a. practice new knowledge;
 - c. The PhD candidate has acquired and worked with a substantial body of knowledge which, at the very least, embraces the principles and methods of international academic practice and of theorisation, methodology and study in the discipline concerned;
 - d. The PhD candidate possesses the ability to design and implement a substantial project for the purpose of developing new knowledge;
 - e. The PhD candidate is able to pass on knowledge and methods pertaining to their discipline or specialism in an effective way;
 - f. The PhD candidate is able to exercise social responsibility in the conducting, applying and making use of their own research.

Minimum requirements for the quality assurance system for doctoral programmes

A. Admission/Selection

- Each Graduate School sets down the general admission requirements for its doctoral programme, plus any specific admission requirements per specialisation.
- Upon admission of a PhD candidate to the doctoral programme, the Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees checks the quality of the candidate (existing qualifications), the doctoral thesis supervisor and co-supervisors.



B. Registration

There is a reliable registration of PhD candidates in MyPhD. At minimum the following information is registered at the start of the programme:

- The starting date of the programme
 - If there is an employment agreement or other form of contract with the university: the starting date of the contract or agreement.
 - If this is not the case: the date of registration. The PhD candidate is registered at the start of the programme and at least three years before the defence of the PhD thesis, that is to say at the start of the supervision (supervision meetings), the start of data collection and the FEC review (if relevant).
- The type of PhD candidate according to the VSNU (Association of Universities in the Netherlands)
- The Faculty and Graduate School
- The supervision team

C. Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015-2021

Since 2009 the doctoral programme has been part of the SEP protocol that is used for the external research reviews. The aspects of the doctoral programme that are reviewed as part of the SEP evaluation serve as general minimum requirements for the quality of the doctoral programme. The focus is on:

- organisational embedding
- quality assurance of doctoral programmes and the monitoring of this
- participation in a graduate school or national research school
- selection and admission procedures
- supervision of PhD candidates
- coaching to the labour market
- exit marks
- success rates

D. Training and Supervision Agreement (TSA)

- Every Graduate School provides a Training and Supervision Agreement (TSA) that must be filled in by PhD candidates and their thesis supervisors and co-supervisors within three months of the start of the doctoral programme.¹ This applies to all PhD candidates, regardless of the type. The plan includes agreements made on courses to be taken and on the supervision. In principle, PhD candidates spend 80% of their time in the doctoral programme on research.² This document can be used as the basis for the progress interviews. For PhD candidates with an appointment at Utrecht University or University Medical Center Utrecht, completing this agreement is linked to effecting the appointment by HR.
- The TSA contains at least the following elements:
 - Description of the project
 - A brief summary of the research topic.
 - Supervision
 - A record of who the doctoral thesis supervisor(s) and daily supervisor(s) of the PhD candidate are, and the manner and scope of the supervision. If applicable,

¹ Collective Labour Agreement for Dutch Universities Article 6.8 (1)

² In total, spread across the entire doctoral programme. In certain periods this may be treated flexibly, for example to take account of teaching obligations.



agreements on reporting obligations and evaluations are also included. The PhD candidate is supervised by at least two people.

- Maximum teaching obligations

A PhD candidate with a full-time appointment (employee status) may be expected to take on teaching tasks. The TSA contains a record of the maximum percentage of time to be spent on teaching and, where relevant, what training and/or supervision the PhD candidate is given with regard to teaching. The teaching duties are calculated using the usual method within the local context.

- Training

The TSA contains a record of the scope and content of training/courses to be taken, including a note of whether these are obligatory or by choice. PhD candidates are obliged to take a course on academic integrity.

- Academic community

PhD candidates must be given the opportunity to regularly attend internal and external academic meetings (seminars, conferences etc.). Agreements on this are recorded in the TSA.

- Career development

As a large proportion of PhD candidates will go on to find jobs outside academia, it is important to spend time during the doctoral programme focusing on career planning, via training courses and individual coaching. The TSA contains a record of concrete activities to do with career coaching.

- Access to facilities and services

The TSA states that the PhD candidate has access to the facilities and services needed to complete the doctoral programme. These include online facilities and services and membership of the Graduate School.

- The final year of the doctoral programme

At the start of the planned final year, the doctoral thesis supervisor(s) and co-supervisor(s) and the PhD candidate set down a plan for the final year, including finalising the manuscript.

E. Evaluation of courses by the Graduate School

- Each year the content and scope of the course offering for PhD candidates in the Graduate School are evaluated.

F. Progress/Evaluation meetings

- The doctoral thesis supervisor/daily supervisor plans an evaluation meeting with the PhD candidate at least once a year, to discuss the PhD candidate's progress in the doctoral programme. The supervision also forms part of the annual meeting. During this meeting an independent person is present on behalf of the Graduate School, for example a Director of Research or an experienced doctoral thesis supervisor from another research group.
- At the end of the first year of a full-time programme, the results of this meeting form the basis for a decision concerning whether or not the doctoral programme should continue.³ The date of this meeting is recorded in the TSA. During this meeting also, an independent person is present on behalf of the Graduate School.

³ For part-time doctoral programmes, this meeting takes place a quarter of the way through the programme.



G. Evaluation of supervision of doctoral programmes

- Each year the dean or a representative of the dean speaks with all doctoral thesis supervisors and co-supervisors about the progress, duration and success rates of the doctoral programmes they are supervising.
- Each year PhD candidates are involved in the evaluation of the supervision in their doctoral programme.

H. Duration of the doctoral programme

- The maximum time of a full-time doctoral programme up until the moment the manuscript is submitted to the Assessment Committee is four years.⁴
- In exceptional circumstances the length of an appointment of an employee PhD candidate may be extended, in accordance with Article 2.3 (5) and (6) of the Collective Labour Agreement for Dutch Universities.

⁴ This requirement is adjusted for part-time doctoral programmes.