

Summary of the advice and implementation agenda from the Taskforce Contract and External PhD candidates

Background and assignment

Contract and external PhD candidates are an important group of researchers for Leiden University (excluding LUMC, this concerns 50% of all PhD candidates). Their position, rights and obligations differ from those with an employment contract. The Taskforce Contract and External PhD candidates was assigned by the rector and the Board for Deans to make an overview of the current rights and obligations of the contract and external PhD candidates and to make an inventory and analysis of issues experienced by these PhD candidates and their supervisors.

The university wants to offer all PhD candidates, regardless of which category they belong to, an environment that gives them the best starting position to successfully and timely complete their PhD trajectory and that offers them the best chances for a next career step in or outside the academic world. The implementation of the taskforce advice will contribute to this.

Working method

This has been done through interviews with PhD students, supervisors, deans and other stakeholders within the university. Also, the results of the PhD survey that was conducted in 2021 as part of the project 'Uniform evaluation Dutch PhD trajectories' were used. On the basis of this inventory and analysis, the task force drew up an advice and then an implementation agenda.

Governance process

The advice and the implementation agenda were interim discussed (several times) with the rector, with the coordinators of the graduate schools and with the Board of Deans and directors of the graduate schools. On 23 May, the advice and implementation agenda were discussed in the CvB/IBO meeting. PhDoc, LEO and LAP are informed and also received a draft version of the advice.

Recommendations and follow-up

The taskforce found a number of issues that need to be addressed and improved. It identified three main themes that should be worked on:

- Connection with the Leiden University community;
- Equality within PHD categories (equal treatment per type of PhD candidate);
- Transparency.

The following is a summary of the main advice and implementation tasks.

Connection with the Leiden university community

To provide all PhD candidates an environment where they feel welcome, safe, heard and connected, a particular focus on community building is needed.

There is a need for more connectedness among many contract PhD candidates, but especially among external PhD candidates. They feel a need for more connectivity to the university, the research group and other PhD candidates. It is therefore advised to involve them more in the institute's developments, to create flex workplaces for external PhD candidates and to organise PhD meetings within the institute. It is also advised to keep a close eye on contract and external PhD candidates via monitoring

interviews and surveys. It is also recommended to give them a greater role in councils. Legal Affairs will look at options for the latter.

Equality within PHD categories (equal treatment per type of PhD candidate)

The different position and context of contract and external PhD candidates makes it logical to differentiate with regard to rights and obligations. The taskforce does not recommend harmonisation on that point, but does recommend full transparency. And it is advised to be reluctant about differentiation within a category, especially within a faculty. The taskforce does recommend harmonisation within PhD categories within faculties. This concerns topics such as the content of supervision and supervision time, facilities, being able to follow courses and bench fees, but also the conditions under which you take new PhD candidates. In this context, a number of agreements have been made. Among them:

- A proposal will be developed regarding the minimum required number of supervision hours for employed, contract and external PhD candidates. It was decided not to set a maximum number of PhD candidates to be supervised by a supervisor;
- It was decided that taking new PhD candidates should no longer be the individual responsibility of the involved promotor;
- External PhD candidates will be given the opportunity to take two courses at the institute's expense in addition to the compulsory courses;
- Top-up possibilities for contract PhD candidates will be analysed;
- A proposal will be developed for the assessment and admission requirements for contract PhD and external PhD students.

Transparency

Various topics appear to be unclear to PhD candidates, their supervisors and/or (international) external stakeholders. These include, for example, the website not being clear enough and missing information, such as an overview of rights and obligations. It is also about the need for clarity on mutual expectations, clarity on the working methods, definitions and policies. Advice/agreements made include, among others, the following:

- Mutual expectations (for instance for supervision, teaching, courses, planning, etc.) should be clear beforehand and then laid down in the OBP;
- The website will be updated. It must become more and complete. Information must be available at one central location. This will be done with the input from PhD candidates themselves;
- The taskforce notices that the registration of PhD candidates does not always run smoothly. Therefore, at least the current manual will be adapted;
- Contract and external PhD candidates don't have a contract like employed PhD candidates. External PhD candidates, and usually also contract PhD candidates, receive a welcome letter from the HRM department. However, this currently does not include all important agreements. This can lead to lack of clarity and risks. Therefore, the welcome letter will be revised to include issues such as data management, open access and authorship.

Implementation

Implementation will be done by various parties. An important role is reserved for the faculties and, within them, the graduate schools. But the institutes, the Administration and the Service Units are also involved. Help and advice will also be asked from the PhD organisations.

Vision

The task force has formulated a number of principles with regard to scholarship and external PhDs:

1. Contract and external PhDs candidates contribute substantially to the research-intensive university Leiden University aspires to be.
2. External PhD candidates play an important role in the connection of science, Leiden University and society.
3. Contract PhD candidates, as well as external PhD candidates, play an important role in the international and inclusive character and accessibility of Leiden University.
4. Contract and external PhDs candidates are an integral and inclusive part of Leiden University's academic community.
5. Contract and external PhDs candidates are, as far as possible, treated equally as employed PhD students.
6. The rights and obligations with regard to supervision, training, education, compensation and other issues are clear and transparent to contract and external PhD candidates.