



Promovendi Overleg Utrecht

Charter Bursary PhD students

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PrOUT, the network of PhD candidates Utrecht is concerned by the recent debate on the implementation of a bursary PhD student system in the Netherlands. In contrast to previous political views, the current government seeks to legally enable Dutch universities to facilitate Dutch bursary PhD students. Although this could possibly lead to an increase in cost efficiency for universities and hence to a larger number of PhD students, PrOUT believes the introduction of bursary PhD students is a bad idea.

The European University Association (EUA) recently set the current Dutch system of PhD candidates as an example for all universities ^[1], explicitly mentioning the guaranteed provision for pension and social security rights for young scientists. The introduction of bursary PhD students would not only eliminate those important labor conditions, but would also deteriorate the financial position of PhD candidates - even if the stipend were equal to the current salary. Acquiring a mortgage, for example, is almost impossible without a labor contract.

Due to the aforementioned decrease in labor conditions, the potential PhD student excelling in his or her subject will even more be tempted by job offers from employers (industry, research, public sector), instead of pursuing a PhD as a student. The bursary PhD student positions run the risk of attracting the graduates who just want to extend their student days instead of the highly motivated, ambitious and well qualified graduates the university would like to see as PhD candidates. This is illustrated by an article in the *Observant* ^[2], describing the fiasco of the introduction of bursary PhD students in the Netherlands in the nineties.

In the current Dutch PhD system PhD candidates have the opportunity to develop themselves as academics with skills in research, teaching, supervision and involvement in the academic community. Looking at bursary systems abroad, where PhD students are often less involved in other parts of academia besides research, this advantage of the all-round academic development of Dutch PhD candidates most probably deteriorates by the introduction of a bursary PhD system. Not only would a lack of teaching and supervision experience be a deficiency for PhD candidates who wish to pursue an academic career, it would also diminish a part of the 'savings' of the bursary system: junior lecturers will have to be appointed to take over the teaching and supervision of bachelor and master students.

All in all, PrOUT opposes the implementation of bursary PhD students. The savings that come with the bursary system are not an even match with the damage done to the position of PhD candidates, the competition with employers to acquire excellent students as PhD candidates, and the standing of the Dutch doctorate in general.

^[1] European University Association, Prague declaration 2009 (pp 4), www.eua.eu

^[2] *Observant*, September 1998; <http://www.observant.unimaas.nl/jrg19/obs2/art10.htm>

