



## Survey Report 2014

May 27, 2014

We sent out this survey to PhD candidates at Utrecht University with the following purposes:

- To investigate to which extent PhD candidates at Utrecht University are aware of information that is important to them.
- To increase awareness of information that may be important, but that PhD candidates may not be aware of.
- To subsequently provide PhD candidates with a summary of this important information, and the links to where they can find more information.
- To inform Utrecht University about the extent to which its PhD candidates are aware of important information, and
- To suggest improvements to Utrecht University.

On April 16th, 2014, we sent this survey to 2490 recipients. We sent them a reminder on April 24th, 2014. We closed the survey and processed the data on May 2nd, 2014.

The most salient points in this survey are:

- Informal agreements about the completion of the PhD: Most PhD candidates know what is required for the for the completion of their dissertation (e.g., amount of articles/chapters). Only 8% of the respondents don't know this. However, only 14% of respondents have a written agreement with their supervisor about this.
- Supervision and Education Agreement: Almost three quarters of PhD candidates (73%) made a formal agreement with their supervisor about their supervision and education.
- Registration forms: 85% of the respondents think or are certain that they filled in all necessary registration forms.
- Knowledge of the Doctoral Degree regulations: 32% of the respondents don't know what these regulations are, and an extra 48% did not know they have been changed.

- The intranet: 37% of respondents had no knowledge of the existence of the new intranet and another 28% had not visited it.
- Finishing the PhD after your contract ends: 78% of respondents know that they have to finish their PhD in their own time after their contract ends. However, 44% of all respondents think that they can still get unemployment benefits during their work on their PhD in their own time, which is contrary to the rules.
- Lack of knowledge about the costs of thesis completion and promotion ceremony: 34% of respondents think that the university pays for most of the costs for the completion of their dissertation and ceremony (printing, etc.). 66% of the PhD candidates who do know that they have to pay most of this themselves cannot estimate the costs of their PhD completion.
- Non-Dutch PhD candidates, knowledge about the 30% rule: more than half of the non-Dutch PhD candidates have knowledge of the 30% rule and almost half of these respondents received help from the university applying for this.

Based on the results, we suggest the following improvements:

- Inform PhD candidates about the Doctoral degree regulations, and inform them when they are changed.
- Inform PhD candidates about the (potential) costs associated with the completion of the thesis.
- Inform PhD candidates about the unemployment benefits rules after their contract expires.
- Inform PhD candidates about the existence of the new intranet, and its added value.
- Suggestion: The university could offer half-yearly information days for PhDs (in different stages of their trajectory) or make a half-yearly information newsletters with the most important updates and changes in these regulations.

On the following pages, we describe the population of respondents and the frequencies and percentages of answers given to each question. Tables and background information about the survey can be found in the appendix.

## 1 Respondents (Table 1)

A total of 773 individuals filled in the survey, of which 700 respondents indicated that they were currently working on a PhD project at Utrecht University, and were included in this report. Not all respondents answered all the questions: 39 of them only partly completed the survey. Respondents had a mean age of 29.05 (SD = 5.22). 56% (n = 368) was female, 42% (n = 276) male, and 3% (n = 17) preferred not to indicate their gender. About a third of the respondents were non-Dutch PhD candidates (n = 216).

	Percent	n
Faculty of Geosciences	14%	90
Faculty of Humanities	9%	58
Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance	7%	47
Faculty of Medicine	19%	126
Faculty of Science	31%	208
Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences	11%	72
Faculty of Veterinary Medicine	8%	51
I don't know	1%	9
Total	100	661

**Table 1:** Number and percentage of respondents per Faculty.

## **2 Are you aware of the recently updated Doctoral degree regulations? (n = 690, Table 2)**

Most of the respondents were not aware of the fact that the Doctoral degree regulations were updated: 34% (n = 238) indicated that they had never read them and did not know that they were changed, and 32% (n = 224) even said that they did not know what the Doctoral degree regulations are. Another 16% (n = 112) had read them at some point, but did not know that they had been changed recently. Only 5% (n = 35) indicated that they had read the updated Doctoral degree regulations, and another 12% (n = 81) were aware that they had been changed, but had not read them.

## **3 Have you visited the new intranet? Do you know what you can find there? (n = 683, Table 3)**

A large number of respondents did not know that there was a new intranet (37%, n = 256), or knew that there was a new intranet, but had not visited it yet (28%, n = 188). 18% (n = 120) indicated that they sometimes visit the new intranet and that they can find useful information on it. Others who had visited the new intranet did not consider it useful (8%, n = 53), or found it unclear where they could find important items (8%, n = 54). Twelve people (2%) indicated that they had tried to visit the new intranet, but could not find it.

#### **4 Do you know what the completion of your thesis and the promotion ceremony will cost approximately, and who will pay for it? (n = 678, Table 4)**

Approximately two thirds of the respondents knew that they have to pay for most of the costs for the completion of their thesis and promotion ceremony themselves (66%, n = 445). Of these 445 respondents, 66% (n = 293) did not know how much this might be. Of the respondents who thought that the university would pay most of the costs (34%, n = 233), 84% (n = 196) did not know how much this might cost.

#### **5 What happens if your contract ends, but your dissertation is not yet finished? (n = 677, Table 5)**

Several respondents indicated that this question did not apply to them, because they were not a Utrecht University employee (10%, n = 66). Of the remaining respondents (n = 611), PhD candidates mostly thought that they would have to finish their dissertation in their own time (78%, n = 476). Of these respondents, 62% (n = 296) thought that they could get unemployment benefits, and the rest (n = 180) thought that they could not. 17% (n = 106) of all respondents did not know what would happen, 5% (n = 28) thought the university would extend their contract, and 1 person thought that he or she would no longer be able to obtain a PhD.

#### **6 Do you know what you need to obtain your PhD (e.g., how many articles or chapters should you have written/published)? Have you made a written or oral agreement about this with your supervisor(s)? (n = 674, Table 6)**

More than two thirds of all respondents indicate that they know what they need to obtain a PhD (69%, n = 466). Another 24% (n = 163) say that they think they know, but that they have never spoken to their supervisor(s) about this, and 45 respondents (7%) indicate that they do not know. 36% (n = 36%) has made an oral agreement about it with their supervisor, and 14% (n = 91) a written agreement.

#### **7 Are you certain that you have filled in and submitted all the registration forms you need to fill in as a PhD candidate? (n = 672, Table 7)**

More than half of the respondents think that they filled in and submitted all the necessary registration forms (54%, n = 365). 31% (n = 207) is certain that they did; 16% (n = 60)

does not know; and 6% (n = 40) is certain that they have not filled in all the necessary registration forms.

**8 At the start of your PhD, did you make a formal agreement about your supervision and education? This agreement can be either an Education and Supervision Agreement (ESA), a Training and Supervision Agreement (TSA), or an Opleidings- and Begeleidingsplan (OBP). (n = 669, Table 8)**

Almost three quarters of respondents indicate that a formal ESA, TSA, or OBP was made with their promoter and daily supervisor(s), which was signed and registered (73%, n = 486). Of the respondents who indicate that they do not have a formal ESA, TSA, or OBP (n = 183), 44% (n = 80) indicates that an informal agreement was made about supervision and education with their supervisor(s).

**9 Have you received any of the following career assistance (for after your PhD) from your supervisors, graduate school or university? (Multiple answers are possible, Table 9)**

Almost a quarter of respondents indicate that they have attended or plan to attend the PhD Activating Career Event (PhACE; 24%, n = 165). Besides PhACE, PhD candidates indicate to have received career assistance in the form of informal advice or introductions from their supervisor or others in their department (22%, n = 152); in the form of workshops or career days other than PhACE that were organized by the university (13%, n = 89), faculty (10%, n = 70), or outside of the university (11%, n = 78). 31% of respondents (n = 220) says not to have received any career assistance, but would like to. 19% (n = 131) has not received career assistance, and is not interested in receiving any.

**10 Do you know whether the 30% ruling applies to you? (n = 216, Table 10)**

More than half of the non-Dutch PhD candidates that filled in the survey knew what the 30% ruling was (61%, n = 132). 43% (n = 58) of them had received help from Utrecht University with applying for it, and 8% (n = 11) had not. The other respondents who knew about the 30% ruling knew that it did not apply to them (37%, n = 49), or did not know whether it applied to them (11%, n = 14).

**11 Are you aware of the tax ruling “Regeling middeling sterk wisselende inkomens” (which translates to “Averaging of strongly fluctuating income”)? (n = 662, Table 11)**

Most respondents had not heard of this tax ruling (62%, n = 413), or did not know what it entails (9%, n = 60). Of the respondents who knew what this tax ruling was (19%, n = 189), 64% (n = 121) had not applied for a tax refund. 10% of all respondents (n = 68) had applied.

## A Appendix: Tables

	Percent	n
I don't know what the Doctoral degree regulations are.	32%	224
I know that the Doctoral degree regulations exist, but I have never read them. I did not know that they had been updated.	34%	238
I have read the Doctoral degree regulations, but I did not know that they had been updated.	16%	112
I have not read the Doctoral degree regulations, but I know that they have been updated.	12%	81
I have read the updated Doctoral degree regulations.	5%	35
Total	100%	690

**Table 2:** Are you aware of the recently updated Doctoral degree regulations?

	Percent	n
I did not know there was a new intranet.	37%	256
I know there is a new intranet, but I have not yet visited it.	28%	188
I have tried to visit the new intranet, but I don't know how to find it.	2%	12
I have visited the new intranet, but it did not seem useful to me.	8%	53
I visit the new intranet sometimes, and it seems useful, but it is not clear to me where I can find important items.	8%	54
I visit the new intranet sometimes, and can find useful information on it.	18%	120
Total	100%	683

**Table 3:** Have you visited the new intranet? Do you know what you can find there?

	Percent	n
I don't know how much it will cost. I think that the university pays for (most of) it.	29%	196
I know how much it will cost. I think that the university pays for (most of) it.	5%	37
I don't know how much it will cost. I think that I have to pay for (most of) it.	43%	293
I know how much it will cost. I think that I have to pay for (most of) it.	22%	152
Total	100%	678

**Table 4:** Do you know what the completion of your thesis and the promotion ceremony will cost approximately, and who will pay for it?

	Percent	n
I don't know.	16%	106
I cannot obtain a PhD anymore.	0.1%	1
I have to finish my dissertation in my own time. I cannot get unemployment benefits.	27%	180
I have to finish my dissertation in my own time. I can get unemployment benefits.	44%	296
The university will extend my contract.	4%	28
None of these answers apply to me, because I am not an employee at Utrecht University.	10%	66
Total	100%	677

**Table 5:** What happens if your contract ends, but your dissertation is not yet finished?

	Percent	n
Yes, I know, and I have made a written agreement with my supervisor(s) about this.	14%	91
Yes, I know, and I have made an oral, but not written, agreement with my supervisor(s) about this.	36%	242
Yes, I know, but I have never made an agreement with my supervisor(s) about this.	20%	133
I think I know, but I have never spoken to my supervisor(s) about this or made an agreement about it.	24%	163
I don't know.	7%	45
Total	100%	674

**Table 6:** Do you know what you need to obtain your PhD (e.g., how many articles or chapters should you have written/published)? Have you made a written or oral agreement about this with your supervisor(s)?

	Percent	n
Yes, I am certain.	31%	207
I think so, but I am not entirely certain.	54%	365
I don't know.	16%	60
I am certain that I have not filled in all the necessary registration forms.	6%	40
Total	100%	672

**Table 7:** Are you certain that you have filled in and submitted all the registration forms you need to fill in as a PhD candidate?

	Percent	n
A formal ESA/TSA/OBP was made with my promoter and daily supervisor(s), which was signed and registered.	73%	486
An informal agreement was made with my supervisor(s), but I did not sign an ESA/TSA/OBP.	12%	80
No formal ESA/TSA/OBP or informal agreement was made with my supervisor(s).	15%	103
Total	100%	669

**Table 8:** At the start of your PhD, did you make a formal agreement about your supervision and education? This agreement can be either an Education and Supervision Agreement (ESA), a Training and Supervision Agreement (TSA), or an Opleidings- and Begeleidingsplan.

	Percent	n
I have attended/plan to attend the PhD Activating Career Event (PhACE).	24%	165
I have received career assistance, in the form of other workshops/career days arranged by the university.	13%	89
I have received career assistance, in the form of workshops/career days arranged by the Faculty.	10%	70
I have received career assistance, in the form of informal advice/introductions from my supervisors or others in my department.	22%	152
I have received career assistance outside of the university.	11%	78
I have received no career assistance, but would (have) like(d) to receive it.	31%	220
I am not interested in any career assistance.	19%	131

**Table 9:** Have your received any of the following career assistance (for after your PhD) from your supervisors, graduate school or university? (Multiple answers are possible)

	Percent	n
I don't know what the 30% ruling is.	39%	84
I know what the 30% ruling is, but I do not know whether the ruling applies to me.	6%	14
I know what the ruling is, and that it does not apply to me.	23%	49
I know that the ruling applies to me. Utrecht University did not help me to apply.	5%	11
I know that the ruling applies to me, and Utrecht University helped me to apply.	27%	58
Total	100%	216

**Table 10:** Do you know whether the 30% ruling applies to you? (non-Dutch PhD candidates only)

	Percent	n
No, I have not heard of this.	62%	413
I have heard of it, but I don't know what it entails.	9%	60
Yes, I am aware of this, but I did not apply for a tax refund.	18%	121
Yes, I am aware of this, and I applied for a tax refund.	10%	68
Total	100%	662

**Table 11:** Are you aware of the tax ruling "Regeling middeling sterk wisselende inkomens" (which translates to "Averaging of strongly fluctuating income")?

## B Background information

### B.1 The Doctoral Degree Regulations

The Doctoral Degree Regulations incorporate a number of statutory provisions conform the Higher Education and Research Act (in Dutch: WHW), and a number of conditions laid down by the Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees of Utrecht University. Among other things, the Doctoral Degree Regulations stipulate who will be allowed admission to the doctoral program and how the supervisors and co-supervisors are appointed, how the thesis shall come into being, and how the Assessment Committee shall be composed. They were amended on June 13, 2013. They can be found [here](#), and a summary of the changes can be found [here](#).

### B.2 The intranet

Since January 2014 there a university-wide [intranet](#). It contains all the information relevant to UU employees. [PrOUt](#) can also be found on the intranet. Have a look around!

### B.3 Costs of thesis completion and promotion ceremony

The promotion costs a lot, and you will have to pay for most of it yourself. Some costs are tax-deductible. The total cost of your promotion depends on a number of factors, including the amount of dissertations, the number of pages in your thesis, the number of people you invite to the reception, party or dinner etc. To give you an indication, [PhD Network Netherlands \(PNN\)](#) has made the following estimation:

Dissertation	€ 2.000 to € 3.500
Clothing	€ 150 to € 450
Reception	€ 350 to € 700
Dinner / buffet	€ 20 to € 40 per person
Party	€ 1.200 to € 4.500

### B.4 Contracts ending

The university will usually not extend your contract. At the time that your appointment expires, you'll naturally want that your thesis is finished. Sometimes, however, this is not the case. Are you entitled to benefits? And can you continue working on your thesis? If your contract expires or if you get fired, you would be eligible for [unemployment benefits](#) or BW (in addition to statutory unemployment benefit). However, in order for a payment to qualify, you are not allowed to continue to work on your dissertation while you are unemployed. You must be available for other work, registered with the employment service (CWI) and actively apply for jobs. If you continue working on your thesis, it is assumed that you do work and a reward is expected, regardless of whether the work is

paid or not. You do not qualify under the criteria in order to receive a benefit. If after your discharge, you spent a portion of your time on unpaid work, you may qualify for partial unemployment benefits. You should be unemployed for at least five hours. You'll need to register every month whether you have done paid or unpaid work performed and for how many hours. This includes time spent writing on your thesis. If you do not specify working on your thesis, this is treated as fraud. The finishing of your dissertation during your period in the WW is not as obvious as many supervisors and counselors would have you think. For more information, read the [source](#) of this message. You may also want to read [this](#).

## **B.5 What is required to obtain your PhD**

Once the thesis is complete, your supervisor determines if it is ready for submission and defense. A committee of professors is appointed to read and approve the thesis and to examine the candidate during an oral defense. The thesis will be made public (parts of it may have already been published as articles in international journals during the PhD). Dissertations from Dutch universities generally meet the highest academic standards and are therefore held in high regard. The [Doctoral Degree Regulations](#) give some indication of what is required to obtain a PhD, but they are far from clear on the exact specifications. Do you have to have published in international journals? If so, how many publications should you have? It seems that it is not always clear to PhD candidates exactly what they are to produce during their project. This is something that may be clarified by your promoter.

## **B.6 Registration forms**

You have to be properly registered in the [Hora Est!](#) program (only form 1 until your manuscript is finished), and you have to have a / Education and Supervision Agreement (ESA) / Opleidings en Begeleidingsplan (OBP). For more information on the TSA/ESA/OBP, also read [this](#), and see point 7.

## **B.7 TSA/ESA/OBP**

Prior to beginning work, you will draw up a formal, written [agreement](#) with your Utrecht University PhD supervisor (a full professor) and your daily supervisor. The agreement, which must be approved by the Dean of your Faculty, contains information about who your promoter and daily supervisor are, plans for your education, and an agreement about the amount of supervision you will receive. It is therefore a very important document for PhD candidates, as it is your "safety net" in case the agreements are not met. The TSA/ESA/OBP is part of your [CAO](#).

## **B.8 Career events**

Utrecht University regularly organizes the **PhD Activating Career event (PhACE)**. For other career events aimed at PhD candidates, check the **news** on our website.

## **B.9 30% tax ruling**

The **30% ruling** is a tax advantage for foreign employees working within the Netherlands. This ruling allows for a significant reduction of your tax rate, whenever it applies. Check the UU **website** regarding this ruling. If you are a foreign PhD candidate, do look into this!

## **B.10 Regeling middeling sterk wisselende inkomens (“averaging of strongly fluctuating income”)**

If you have had a fluctuating income over the last years (which you probably have had), then you have probably paid too much taxes. The Regeling middeling sterk wisselende inkomens (which translates as “averaging of strongly fluctuating income”) calculates your average income over the last three years. Based on that income, it is decided how much tax you should have paid, and if you get money back. Check the website of the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration (**Belastingdienst**) and **see** if this applies to you.