

AHM – Pilot Study Guidelines

General information

All AHM funded PhD candidates are expected to hand in a pilot study for a 'go/no-go' evaluation at the end of the first year, together with a table of contents for the dissertation and a time schedule for its completion. The month in which the evaluation will take place is normally stipulated in the PhD candidate's employment contract but in general for PhD candidates with a full-time employment contract (1.0 fte), the evaluation is due in the 8th month while for PhD candidates with a part-time employment contract (0.8 fte) the pilot study is due in the 9th month of their contract. The evaluation can only be postponed with the permission of AHM's vice-director who oversees the evaluation process.

The pilot study is evaluated by the supervisors, an external reader (preferably an AHM staff member with expertise in the area of the dissertation who is not directly involved in the PhD candidate's project) and AHM's vice-director. On the basis of the evaluations, AHM's vice-director decides whether or not the pilot study is of the required quality. If AHM's vice-director decides the pilot study is not up to standard, the PhD candidate will be informed during the evaluation meeting and will be given 4 weeks to revise the pilot study. After the revised pilot is submitted, it is evaluated again by the supervisors, external reader and AHM's vice-director. The PhD candidate will receive an assessment report in which the pilot study is either deemed satisfactory (in this case, the employment contract will be extended for the full period of the PhD), or unsatisfactory (in this case, the candidate's contract will not be extended) and a second evaluation meeting will take place in which the PhD candidate can respond to the assessment report. If the meeting does not change the vice-director's decision, the procedure to not extend the PhD candidate's contract will start by faculty administration. The PhD candidate will be informed before the end of the contract that his or her contract will not be extended.

It should be emphasized that the assessment takes place solely on the basis of the pilot study, the table of contents and the time schedule and any other activities – including those undertaken in the context of a larger project of which the PhD candidate forms part – are not part of the official assessment. The main supervisor (promotor) is responsible for ensuring the PhD candidate has enough time to complete the pilot study. The PhD candidate should not teach in the period in which the pilot study has to be written and other activities should be kept to a minimum or should be directly related to the pilot study. The PhD candidate and the supervisors should make a planning for the completion of the pilot study – including deadlines and feedback moments – as soon as possible after the beginning of the contract. The completion of the pilot study should be the absolute priority for both the PhD candidate and the supervisors.

Arrangement of evaluation meeting and submission of pilot study

The AHM office contacts the supervisors, the PhD candidate and AHM's vice-director at least one month in advance to set a date and time for the evaluation meeting and to ask the candidate to complete the AHM evaluation form. Ideally, all supervisors are present at the evaluation meeting; if this is not possible, the absent supervisors are expected to send a written assessment by email.

The PhD candidate submits the pilot study, together with a table of contents for the dissertation, a time schedule for its completion and the completed AHM evaluation form to the supervisors, the external reader, AHM's vice-director and the AHM office at least two weeks before the evaluation meeting by email with all the addressees visible, so the AHM office can check it has been sent to all those involved in the evaluation.

External reader

When the AHM office contacts the supervisors about the date and time of the evaluation meeting, AHM's vice director will also assign a suitable external reader. The external reader is asked to read the pilot study and (if he/she can't attend the meeting) to send a short assessment report to AHM's vice-director and the AHM office at least two days before the evaluation meeting. The external reader assessment report should outline the scientific quality of the pilot study and whether the PhD candidate will be able to produce a defensible dissertation within the contract period. The supervisors are responsible for communicating the content of the external reader's assessment to the PhD candidate after the evaluation meeting.

Content and Form of the Pilot Study

The pilot study should be designed to form an integral part of the dissertation, either as the introduction or as a chapter. Experience has shown that pilot studies designed as chapters tend to work better than pilot studies designed as introductions. The pilot study should not take the form of a research proposal; it needs to be a coherent, independently readable, non-fragmentary text including the theoretical framework, methods and objects used to address this problem and research questions in an innovative manner. The pilot study should demonstrate the PhD candidate's ability to engage critically with existing scholarship as well as the candidate's ability to lucidly present and analyse one or more case studies in relation to the central research question(s) of the dissertation project.

In formal terms, the pilot study should be:

- between 7,000 and 10,000 words long;
- a coherent, independently readable text with a beginning/introduction, middle/body and end/conclusion and a clearly developed argument;
- professionally presented (spell-checked, with a consistently used reference system and a full bibliography);

Any questions about the pilot study and the evaluation on the part of the PhD candidate, the supervisors or the external reader should be addressed – as soon as they arise – to the AHM office (AHM-fgw@uva.nl), and AHM vice-director Dr. Ihab Saloul (isaloul@uva.nl).

Annual AHM Evaluations after the Pilot Study

If the pilot study is deemed satisfactory, the PhD candidate's contract is renewed for the rest of the four- or three-year period. Throughout the contract period (and after it, if the dissertation has not yet been defended), PhD candidates and their supervisors are invited for annual AHM evaluations so that any problems with the candidate's progress can be signaled and resolved. For these evaluations, the PhD candidate submits an evaluation form detailing their progress and planning, and a recent piece of writing (e.g. a chapter, an article submitted for publication) chosen in consultation with the supervisors. No external reader is involved in these evaluations and they do not constitute a go/no-go moment like the pilot study evaluation.