

Dear new PhD Candidate,

Welcome to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Amsterdam. With this letter we would like to provide some practical information regarding your new position.

1. The Job

Research School

As a PhD candidate your primary affiliation is with the Research School. The Research School has selected and endorsed your project and is glad to offer you a position within their community. It is in the interest of the Research School that your work progresses smoothly and in a satisfactory way. Please make sure that you get to know the coordinator of your school, who can help you find your way around and assist you when necessary.

Two Categories of PhD Candidates: With a Contract and Without a Contract

PhD candidates at the Faculty of Humanities are part of a diverse group, especially in regard to their types of funding. We distinguish two main categories: PhDs who have a PhD contract with the Faculty of Humanities and PhDs who do not have a contract as a PhD with the Faculty of Humanities.

PhDs with a Contract are sometimes part of an ERC or NWO project; sometimes they have a NWO PhD in the Humanities position; and some have funding through a Marie Curie subsidy. These PhDs are employees: they receive a salary, are entitled to a workspace, and they receive a laptop and other ICT facilities from the faculty. Their contract is generally for four years. They are expected to complete their thesis within this period. Also, they have the obligation to do some teaching in their second and third year. Contracted PhDs have access to the Self-Service tool and are required to register their (sick)leaves and holidays.

PhDs without a Contract do not receive a salary, nor do they get a workspace, laptop, or any other (ICT) facilities from the faculty. What the faculty does offer is supervision by two staff members, membership of a research school, access to the programme of the research school, the PhD Skills programme, and membership of one of the National Research Schools. PhDs without a contract also receive some funding to support the production of their thesis and conference visits, a personal page on the university website, and full access to library facilities.

PhDs without a contract are also called ‘self-funded PhDs’ because they have their own sources of income. Some receive a stipend/fellowship from another institute. Others sustain themselves with a job elsewhere (or even a job at our Faculty that is unrelated to their PhD), a loan, or savings. This construction of doing the same work as employed PhDs without receiving the same salary from the University can seem unfair. However, many people see the advantages of doing a PhD without paying tuition fees, which is why the AIHR decided to continue to offer this option.

Beginning

At the beginning of your PhD trajectory it is essential to have a meeting with your supervisors to discuss how your supervision will take shape. In particular, you should clarify the division of tasks between your supervisors and make a plan for your project. This plan is obviously not set in stone, but will be continuously adapted along the way. Most importantly, you should agree on the topic of the pilot study and a plan to have it ready in time (see below).

New PhD candidates will be invited to a meeting by the Research School together with their supervisors in the first months of their contract period. At this meeting the above agreements will be discussed and noted in the *PhD Training and Supervision Plan*. Included in this plan is the date for the pilot study: the most important assessment in your first year.

Supervision

Make sure you report to your supervisors on the progress of your work at least once every six weeks. It is particularly important to contact your supervisors if you are feeling stuck or are facing issues that make it difficult to work on your PhD thesis. Your supervisors need to be aware of your problem before they can help you.

Generally, supervisory meetings last between thirty minutes and two hours. Make sure that you use your time well: hand in a written text or revised planning well in advance and make a list of the topics you want to discuss.

If a conflict with (or between) your supervisors occurs that you cannot resolve, the director or vice-director of your Research School can mediate. Contact them or the coordinator. You don’t have to solve such problems without help. Alternatively, you can also seek advice from the PhD council (see below), or a confidential advisor. Make sure to reach out in time: do not sit with it!

First year assessment and Pilot Study: go or no go

During the first year, all PhD candidates are assessed on the basis of a pilot study evaluated by the supervisors, an external reader (only in the case of a contracted PhD), and the director of the Research School. In case this assessment is positive, the contract (or in case of the non-contracted PhDs: the affiliation) will be extended for the remaining period. If not, your contract/affiliation will be terminated.

Because of this “go/no-go moment” it is important that you and your supervisors draft a plan for the completion of the pilot study – including deadlines and feedback moments – as soon as possible after the beginning of the project. The completion of the pilot study should be the absolute priority for both the PhD candidate and the supervisors in the first year. Please make sure that you receive good information on the requirements of the pilot study and the implications of this important assessment from the coordinator of your school and your supervisors.

For PhD candidates with a full-time employment contract (1.0 fte), the pilot study is usually due in the 9th month; for PhD candidates with a part-time employment contract (0.8 fte), the pilot study is usually due in the 10th month. The month in which the evaluation will take place is stipulated in your employment contract.

For PhD candidates without a contract with the Faculty, the deadline of the first-year evaluation is somewhat less strict, but they too are expected to write a pilot study in their first year. This will be read and assessed by the supervisors and the (vice)director of the school. Depending on their assessment, their affiliation with the university will either be terminated or continued for the remaining project period.

Evaluations

The Research School organizes evaluation meetings with all PhD candidates and their supervisors once a year (for PhDs without a contract the mode and frequency depend on their Research School). The candidates will report on their progress and their plan for the remainder of the trajectory. Besides that, your C.V. and non-research activities can be discussed, such as teaching opportunities, conference/summer school participation, or submitting publications. During the evaluation meeting, attention should be paid to the supervision itself by reflecting on the collaboration between PhD candidate and supervisors.

Health issues, parental leave, and all other possible causes of delay should also be discussed during the evaluation. If you want more information on your legal position and/or the support structures offered by the University of Amsterdam, please consult the A – Z list on the UvA website (see below).

Teaching

In principle, PhD candidates with an employment contract with the faculty are expected to teach in their second and third year for 0,2 fte. We recommend discussing teaching options at the start of the PhD trajectory, in relation to your Training and Supervision Plan. PhD candidates who start teaching are strongly recommended to participate in the didactic training Basic 1 of [the University Teaching Qualification \(UTQ - BKO\)](#). The first 2 meetings are especially intended for those with no teaching experience.

PhDs without a contract who want to teach are recommended to contact the persons in charge of teaching in the departments relevant to their skills. They can send their CV and signal their availability. However, there is no guarantee that they will be hired.

Difficulties and tips

This may sound a little alarming, but every PhD candidate will experience ups and downs, and sometimes the downs can be tenacious. Writing a thesis is a difficult and sometimes lonely undertaking. For many of you this will be your first job. A job with responsibilities, and without daily supervision. There is no one who will tell you exactly when to do what, and as an academic staff member, you do not have to be present at work on a daily basis. So you will have to manage your time yourself.

Besides writing your thesis, you are therefore also your own project manager. Make sure you define a clear set of rules for yourself and stick to them. Make a daily schedule and a work plan for

the longer term. And be a wise manager who takes time for self-care: make sure that you include periods of rest, relaxation, and physical exercise.

For many people it helps to start writing as soon as possible. It is normal to feel insecure at first, but you learn writing by doing it. And even if the first result will not be as good as you would like it to be, it will give you something to build on and a feeling of substantial progress.

Do not commit yourself to too many activities (such as teaching, organizing events, writing articles). Always put your thesis on the first place and try to make other activities feed directly into the PhD thesis. Protect your time.

If you suffer from writer's block, or something else that prevents you to make progress, do not panic; most of these problems are common and can be solved. It may be the case that you will encounter more serious work-related mental or physical health problems during your PhD. Make sure you seek help from your supervisors, the coordinator, or your colleagues. There is also a [psychological service available for free for PhD candidates](#), and the University of Amsterdam also offers several courses to reduce stress.

In case you are not able to work because of physical or mental problems, please inform your supervisors and reach out to the coordinator of your school. For PhDs with a contract it is important to officially report ill in the self-service tool, because this is the only ground for a possible extension of their contract.

The Faculty of Humanities is committed to providing a safe working environment. However, we are aware that the organization is hierarchical, and that as a PhD researcher you are in a precarious position. If you suffer any kind of bullying, intimidation, harassment, or discrimination, please make sure that you ask for help. Here you can find the relevant information: [Social safety](#).

2. Facilities

Research Funding

PhD candidates without a contract are entitled to a small research budget of up to € 4,500 (for the entire PhD trajectory, not per year) for conference visits, the production of the dissertation, or other research costs. To apply for this funding, please send a message to Astrit Blommestijn: extprom-fgw@uva.nl before incurring any costs.

Contracted PhDs who are part of a larger project, funded by ERC or NWO, have a project manager who is in charge of your research budget. Please contact them at onderzoek-fgw@uva.nl.

Self-Service Tool

Only PhDs with a contract have access to the [Self-Service tool](#). It allows you to submit reimbursement requests and report ill or pregnant. Here you may also view your personal information and salary specification.

UvAnet and Library Access

All PhD candidates receive an UvA-net ID which gives access to all the databases and electronic journals to which the UvA library subscribes. The UvA-net ID also gives access to e-mail facilities, both with an e-mail client and with webmail, and a login for UvA computers.

UvA Staff Card

In the Netherlands, PhD candidates are considered to be 'employees' and not 'students'. Hence, you are entitled to an UvA staff card, which allows you to enter university buildings, and it offers free printing and free coffee and tea. [Apply here](#).

UvA Profile

It is important to make yourself visible as a member of the academic community, both within the faculty as beyond. PhD candidates can create an online profile on the UvA website. Make sure that you click on the visibility option when you activate your UvAnet ID. [Profile page](#)

Office Space

PhD candidates with a contract are assigned to the Department of their main supervisor, and these departments are responsible for providing office space to contracted PhD candidates.

PhDs without a contract have access to university buildings and the library, where they can find flexible workspaces.

Training

At the Faculty of Humanities, PhD candidates are not obliged to earn ECTS credits. Training is offered on a voluntary basis and we encourage you to make a fruitful selection of what is offered. There are four core courses in the PhD Skills Programme which we highly recommend: the Introduction, Research Data Management, Academic Integrity & Social Safety, and Advanced Academic Writing. In addition to the PhD Skills programme, your own research school and the national research schools offer training programmes. These are free and open to all PhD candidates. The national research schools also offer PhD courses, which are usually open to all PhD candidates. PhD candidates become a member of one national research, but can participate in all. Enrollment in the national school is arranged when the Training and Supervision Plan is handed in. If you wish to be registered earlier, please contact: PhDSkills-fgw@uva.nl.

3. Regulations

Admission to the Doctoral Programme

At the time of your registration at the research school, you will also need to request admission to the UvA doctoral programme. Without confirmed admission to the doctoral programme by the UvA Doctorate Board you cannot defend your thesis at the end of your project. Admission to the UvA doctoral programme is a separate administrative track handled by Kirsten Kapteijns who can be contacted at promoties-fgw@uva.nl.

PhD Regulations

All formal regulations for PhD candidates at the Faculty of Humanities can be found in the [PhD Doctorate Regulations document](#)

Ethics Committee & Research Data Management

Projects involving participation of other people (such as interviews) are becoming more frequent within this faculty. Your supervisors may not be aware that the prior approval of the ethics committee is required for these projects. Please contact the committee if you do something involving participants: commissie-ethiek-fgw@uva.nl.

There are also strict regulations regarding the storage of data. Please make sure to read the information on this page: [Research Data Management at AIHR](#).

Finishing

When you approach the completion of your PhD thesis, please read (at least twice) the PhD [Defense Guidelines](#).

4.Social

Since writing a PhD thesis is something you do virtually alone, it can be lonely affair. Fortunately, you will discover that you have many colleagues, in your school or department, with whom you may share your experiences. In addition to this, there are some other groups that may contribute to a pleasant social life.

International PhD candidates

There is a special section on the UvA website for international students and employees which will help them with practical matters and has many valuable tips: [Practical information for International employees](#)

PhD Council

The PhD council represents all PhD candidates at the Faculty in all matters that affect their interests. Each Research School has at least one representative who represents PhD researchers both with and without a contract. The PhD Council meets with the research director of Amsterdam Institute for Humanities Research, Julia Noordegraaf, and the heads of research of the Faculty of Humanities, Nanske Wilholt and Anne van Dam in order to inform them and think along with them on all matters of importance to PhD candidates. The PhD council welcomes your suggestions, concerns, and comments concerning your labor rights, as well as problems with supervision, and other matters that affect your research: [PhD Council](#).

Jong UvA

Jong UvA is a network for young employees (<36) of the University of Amsterdam. In spite of its ageist character, this may be worth checking out. They organize events where you can meet other young academics: [Jong UvA - University of Amsterdam](#)

All other practical matters

The University of Amsterdam is a huge and complex organization, offering practical assistance to its employees on many levels: medical and psychological services, sport facilities, assistance with visa applications, housing, language courses, career coaching etc. Sources of information are the website of your Research School and of the [Amsterdam Institute for Humanities Research website](#). If you cannot find the requested information, please do not hesitate to contact the coordinator of your school.

We expect that during your first months at the Faculty of Humanities, as well as later on, many more questions will arise. Try not to worry about it: the Faculty of Humanities is a complex organization, but eventually you will get some sense of how it works. Always keep in mind that, even though you are the person in charge of your project, we are in this together, and you can ask for help.

Best wishes,

On behalf of the Faculty of Humanities,

Julia Noordegraaf, Nanske Wilholt, and Anne van Dam