



**Universiteit Utrecht**



**Universitair Medisch Centrum  
Utrecht**

Quality assurance plan  
of research, training and supervision of PhD candidates

Utrecht Graduate School of Life Sciences

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Approved by the deans of the

faculty of Veterinary Medicine

faculty of Science

faculty of Medicine

Utrecht University

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**Preface**

This is the quality assurance plan of the Utrecht Graduate School of Life Sciences. It describes the different aspects of PhD research, training and supervision. In particular, procedures for quality control and responsibilities of bodies and individuals involved in relation to these aspects have been clearly defined.

The plan has been conceived in close consultation with relevant representatives of the faculty of Science and faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Utrecht University and of University Medical Center Utrecht and pertains to all PhD candidates working in the realm of the Life Sciences under supervision of a professor of Utrecht University or University Medical Center Utrecht and aiming to obtain their PhD degree from Utrecht University.

Prof. S.J.L. van den Heuvel, PhD  
Chair to the Executive Board of Studies  
Utrecht Graduate School of Life Sciences  
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## **1 Introduction**

Future Life Sciences scientists require knowledge and expertise in a specific field of science as well as a critical academic attitude. At the same time, insight and experience in other disciplines are required to be able to work in an interdisciplinary setting. During the PhD track knowledge and skills are acquired through performance of experimental research, reading of relevant literature, attendance of courses, seminars, master classes and conferences and discussions with colleagues. Most of their time, PhD candidates are working in the lab, performing experiments for their research project, typically for a period of four years. The results of their research are led down in a doctoral thesis at the end of the PhD track. During the whole PhD track, PhD candidates receive training in (a) specific thematic area(s) and academic skills.

### **1.1 Scope of this document**

Final responsibility of all aspects pertaining to research, training and supervision of Life Sciences PhD candidates lies with the Utrecht Graduate School of Life Sciences (GS-LS). The GS-LS is the collective responsibility of the deans of the faculty of Science, faculty of Veterinary Medicine, and University Medical Center Utrecht (UMC Utrecht; faculty of Medicine), collectively the Life Sciences deans. Together, the Life Sciences deans constitute the Board of Studies of the GS-LS. However, responsibilities for most aspects have historically and/or legally been assigned to individual deans. In fact, only quality control of the training offered by the PhD programmes is the *collective responsibility* of the Life Sciences deans. Quality control of research and supervision are the individual responsibility of the dean of the faculty of affiliation of the supervisor.

The responsibilities and procedures securing quality control of research, training and supervision are described below. This document does **not** contain requirements for the content of the thesis, nor for the application procedure for the thesis defence. For this information the reader is referred to the institution of affiliation, Utrecht University and/or UMC Utrecht. Typically, it can be obtained from the research supervisor or the institute's dean's/director's office and the website of the GS-LS ([www.uu.nl/lifesciences](http://www.uu.nl/lifesciences)).

For an extensive description of the GS-LS and associated PhD programmes reader is referred to the School's website.

## 2 Utrecht Graduate School of Life Sciences

Training of scientists requires a solid foundation with internal guarantees to safeguard the quality of training and supervision of young scientists, both at Master's and PhD-level. Training refers to all theoretical and practical activities in which PhD candidates participate with the aim of increasing their professional knowledge and/or skills. At Utrecht University training at Master's and PhD level is organised in Graduate Schools. The GS-LS is responsible for the organisation and quality of Life Sciences Master's programmes and for the quality of research, training, and supervision of Life Sciences PhD candidates.

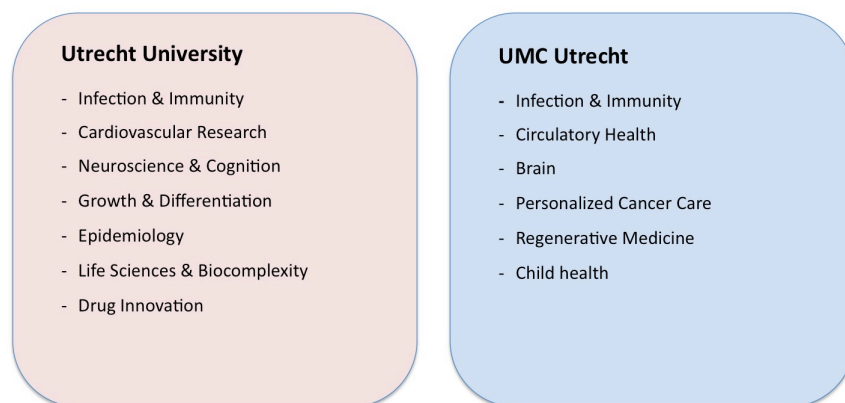
### 2.1 Mission of the GS-LS

The GS-LS aims to train future Life Sciences scientists who, with their acquired knowledge, insight and skills, are able to independently perform top research in an international environment and hence contribute to the resolution of important societal issues. The GS-LS also enables PhD candidates to qualify for positions in policymaking and management at government institutions and (pharmaceutical) industry.

### 2.2 Strategy of the GS-LS

Utrecht University and UMC Utrecht aim to train new generations of top-level scientists. Since training of scientists requires a research environment they take place while PhD candidates actively participate in competitive research performed in renowned research institutes of Utrecht University, UMC Utrecht and/or partner institutions. The frame of reference is the international scientific forum.

Research at Utrecht University and UMC Utrecht is characterised by a great degree of interdisciplinarity, at the interfaces of physics, mathematics, (veterinary) medicine, chemistry, pharmacy and biology. Life Sciences research at Utrecht University and UMC Utrecht is organised in focus areas of research and thematic research programmes, respectively (Figure 1). The GS-LS aims to train Master students and PhD candidates capable of doing independent research in such a multidisciplinary setting. Therefore, the GS-LS bundles the research expertise and facilities of the UMC Utrecht (faculty of Medicine), the faculty of Veterinary Medicine and the faculty of Science for the benefit of this training.



**Figure 1.** Focus areas of research of Utrecht University (left) and research themes of UMC Utrecht (right).

The GS-LS strives to:

- Maintain PhD research and training at an international top level;
- Guarantee the quality of research, training and supervision of PhD candidates;
- Match training at the PhD level with the needs of future employers;
- Promote formation of a 'graduate community' of Master students and PhD candidates.

### **3 PhD track of the GS-LS**

The PhD track is defined as the combined activities of a PhD candidate in a defined period of time with the aim of writing and defending a doctoral thesis. The PhD track starts by submission of the request for admission to the doctoral programme (Form 1) to the Board for Conferral of Doctoral Degrees and of the Training & Supervision Agreement (TSA) to the dean of the faculty of affiliation of the supervisor, which automatically renders admission to the GS-LS. The PhD track ends with the thesis defence and subsequent conferral of a doctoral degree or the premature abortion of the research project. The PhD track includes activities such as the execution of a research project, reading and absorbing relevant scientific literature, following training to deepen and broaden knowledge and expertise in a particular scientific area and to acquire professional skills necessary to become an independent scientist.

#### **3.1 PhD candidates of the GS-LS**

Life Sciences PhD candidates are PhD candidates performing research in the realm of the Life Sciences with the aim of writing and defending a doctoral thesis under supervision of a professor (*promotor*) of UMC Utrecht (faculty of Medicine), faculty of Veterinary Medicine, or faculty of Science of Utrecht University.

Life Sciences PhD candidates may have one out of a myriad of possible positions. Most ('regular') PhD candidates have an appointment as PhD candidate ('werknemer-promovendus') for a period of four years at Utrecht University or UMC Utrecht. Others, including many clinicians, have other types of appointments at these institutions. They may be admitted to the GS-LS if their appointment allows them to perform research for a minimum of two years full time.

Other Life Sciences PhD candidates may be appointed at other institutes, either within or outside the Netherlands, but supervised by a professor of UMC Utrecht or Utrecht University ('buitenpromovendi' and 'contractpromovendi'). They too belong to the GS-LS.

##### **3.1.1 Selection and registration of PhD candidates in the GS-LS**

After accepting a PhD position in Life Sciences at one of the above-mentioned institutes, the following University-approved process for admission as a PhD candidate must be adhered to:

- The Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees checks the quality of the PhD candidate (i.e. their qualifications), of the PhD supervisor(s), and of the daily supervisor(s).
- At the start of the research that leads to a doctoral degree, the PhD candidate submits to the Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees a request for admission to the doctoral programme (Form 1). This request, which is subject to prior approval by the dean of the faculty of affiliation of the supervisor, is officially registered through METIS Hora Est.
- PhD candidates can register to the GS-LS when their research appointment entails a minimum of 2 years devoted to research and when the Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees has admitted them to the PhD track.
- The PhD supervisor(s) and the PhD candidate establish an individual Training & Supervision Agreement (TSA).
- The TSA must be submitted to the dean of the faculty of affiliation of the primary supervisor **within three months** after the start of the PhD track.

#### **3.2 Research at the GS-LS**

Research by PhD candidates is carried out in the context of defined research programmes of the institutes of affiliation. It falls under the responsibility of the (daily) supervisor and, ultimately, the dean of the faculty of affiliation of the supervisor.

### **3.3 Training at the GS-LS**

Training at the GS-LS can be divided in thematic and general training. Thematic training refers to the acquisition of knowledge in (a) specific scientific discipline(s). General training refers to the development of academic and professional skills and competences.

Thematic training is organised by defined PhD programmes of the GS-LS. Each PhD candidate is required to be registered to one PhD programme, but he /she has access to training activities of all other PhD programmes, free of charge, if space permits. PhD candidates are encouraged to attend a variety of theoretical lectures, courses, seminars etc. to increase knowledge and extend skills in both their specific area of research and general professional attitude.

### **3.4 Supervision at the GS-LS**

Supervision during the entire PhD track is provided by maximally 3 supervisors (*promotors*). Responsibilities of the supervisor(s) may be delegated to a (daily) supervisor. Supervisors are professors of Utrecht University or UMC Utrecht.

### **3.5 Training & Supervision Agreement**

The Training & Supervision Agreement (TSA) is a standard agreement, approved by the Life Sciences deans, between PhD candidate and relevant representatives of the GS-LS to ensure proper training and supervision of the PhD candidate during the PhD track. It contains the name of PhD programme to which the PhD candidate has been admitted, the names and signatures of the supervisor(s) and daily supervisor(s), the name(s) of the member(s) of the Supervisory Committee and the intended training programme. The signed TSA must be submitted to the dean's office within three months after the start of the PhD track. This is often done together with the submission of Form 1.

### **3.6 PhD Training Portfolio**

During the PhD track PhD candidates will collect official evidence (certificates of attendance) of the training activities they have followed in a *PhD Training Portfolio*. The PhD Training Portfolio maybe either in hardcopy or electronic format. Based on the contents of this PhD Training Portfolio the programme coordinator, on behalf of the Board of Studies, will decide whether the PhD candidate qualifies for the Training Certificate of the GS-LS at the end of the PhD track.

### **3.7 Training Certificate of the GS-LS**

PhD candidates who have met the requirements of the GS-LS qualify for the Training Certificate of the GS-LS at the end of the PhD track. The responsibility to assess qualification has been delegated to the programme director. Requirements to receive the Training Certificate are the following:

- Training should comprise a minimum of 5 credits<sup>1</sup> for each year of research appointment, which will be at least 2 years and no more than 4 years (10-20 credits in total).
- A minimum of 40% of the total credits should be spent on programme-specific courses (of the PhD programme to which the PhD candidate has been admitted).
- A maximum of 20% of the total credits may be spent on symposia/conferences.
- A minimum of 20% of the total credits should be spent on general courses.

### **3.8 The Research and Training Community**

PhD candidates are offered the opportunity to attend meetings (courses, seminars, master classes, journal clubs, PhD retreats) organised by the PhD programmes and/or research institutes or the national and/or international research networks/schools. Candidates also have the opportunity to attend guest lectures and to participate in international symposia and conferences.

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<sup>1</sup> according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) 1 credit = 28 hr and 1.5 credit = 1 week



It is the responsibility of the PhD programmes to organise these meetings and to regularly invite guest lecturers. The Board of Studies of the GS-LS oversees the promotion and maintenance of an active research community of PhD candidates.

## **4 The PhD training programme**

The PhD training programme refers to the collected training activities to which PhD candidates of the GS-LS have access. Thematic training is provided by the PhD programmes of the GS-LS. General training in professional competences and skills are provided by a number of institutions. Each PhD candidate has access to a defined annual budget, provided by the faculty of affiliation, for general training.

### **4.1 Objective of the PhD training programme**

The aim of the PhD training is to provide the PhD candidate with:

- Practical and methodological knowledge and skills to collect, analyse, present and discuss research data for an independent and original contribution to science in the domain of the research project;
- Discipline-specific knowledge to read, discuss and contribute to the scientific literature in the domain of the research project;
- Experience (e.g. with regard to teaching, management, writing, presenting, working in a team, applying for grants) to continue an academic or other professional career.
- Awareness of the responsibilities of scientists towards society and in particular the obligation to conduct scientific practice in an integer manner.

### **4.2 Learning outcomes for PhD candidates**

On successful completion of the PhD track, PhD candidates of the GS-LS should demonstrate achievement of the following learning outcomes:

- The candidate makes an original contribution to academic research that can withstand the scrutiny of national and international peer review;
- The candidate is able to independently use scientific methods of inquiry in creating, interpreting and applying new knowledge in one of the areas of the life sciences;
- The candidate is able to develop and implement an extensive knowledge-creation project;
- The candidate has become acquainted and worked with a substantial body of knowledge which at least encompasses the principles and methods of international scientific inquiry as well as the theory development process, methods and studies in the relevant area;
- The candidate is able to adequately communicate the knowledge and methods in the relevant specialisation and/or field;
- The candidate is able to carry the social responsibility for the conduct, application and use of his or her own research.

### **4.3 Characteristics of the PhD training programme of PhD candidates**

- PhD candidates engage in training during the entire PhD track, particularly during the first few years.
- The training programme may be composed of a mixture of e.g. courses, seminars, journal clubs, retreats, and symposia. These are offered by the various PhD programme of the GS-LS as well as by institutes outside the GS-LS (general courses). The entire collection of courses on offer can be found on the website of the GS-LS ([www.uu.nl/lifesciences](http://www.uu.nl/lifesciences)).
- All training activities have appropriate procedures to assess the performance of individual PhD candidates and to evaluate the quality of training provided.

### **4.4 General training**

Throughout the PhD track, each PhD candidate has the opportunity to attend courses and workshops designed to help candidates to gain the general skills they need to design and complete their programmes effectively and to help prepare themselves for their subsequent career. The nature of the courses taken by the PhD candidate will depend on the PhD candidate's needs and prior learning. A small budget is provided to each PhD candidate by the faculty of affiliation to attend such courses.

Training of professional competences and personal skills is offered by a number of institutions, both within and outside Utrecht University and UMC Utrecht.

#### 4.5 Thematic PhD programmes

Like the training at Master level, thematic training at PhD level is organised in programmes that are rooted in the strategic research themes of Utrecht University and the thematic research programmes of UMC Utrecht (Figure 2).

Master's Programme	PhD Programme
Infection & Immunity	Infection & Immunity
Biology of Disease	Cardiovascular Research
Drug Innovation	Drug Innovation
Environmental Biology	Environmental Biology
Toxicology & Environmental Health	Toxicology & Environmental Health
Epidemiology	Epidemiology
Cancer Genomics & Developmental Biology*	Cancer Genomics & Developmental Biology*
	Clinical & Translational Oncology
Regenerative Medicine & Technology	Regenerative Medicine
Molecular & Cellular Life Sciences	Molecular Life Sciences
	Biomembranes
	Computational Life Sciences
Biomedical Image Sciences	Medical Imaging
Experimental & Clinical Neuroscience	Clinical & Experimental Neuroscience
Cognitive Neuroscience	Cognition & Behaviour

**Figure 2.** Research Master's programmes and corresponding PhD programmes of the GS-LS.

\* As of academic year 2013-2014 the name of this programme will be Cancer, Stem Cells & Developmental Biology.

##### 4.5.1 Characteristics of the PhD programmes

- Each PhD programme is thematically associated with at least one of the research focus areas or research master programmes of Utrecht University and covers a specific discipline within the domain of the Life Sciences.
- Each PhD programme is sufficiently distinct from other programmes and meets a clear demand. As a rule, each programme contains 40-100 PhD candidates. In specific instances the Life Sciences deans may allow smaller or larger programmes.
- Each programme provides at least 2 credits per year in thematic courses.
- Each PhD programme has a programme director, a programme coordinator and a programme committee.
- Each PhD programme has clear admission criteria and specific objectives and offers well-defined, high quality, thematic training.
- Training offered by the PhD programmes may include courses, seminars, oral or poster presentations at international conferences, PhD candidate retreats, journal clubs, and training in supervision and teaching of Master students.

## **5 Responsibilities for the different aspects of the PhD track**

The GS-LS is headed by a Board of Studies, composed of the deans of the faculty of Medicine, faculty of Science and faculty of Veterinary Medicine and a student. The Board of Studies is responsible for evaluation of all aspects of research, training and supervision of all Life Sciences PhD candidates. This collective responsibility seems at odds with the legally defined responsibility of an individual dean for research and training of his/her faculty. Likewise, in his role of employer, a dean carries responsibilities with regard to the position of a PhD candidate as an employee of that dean's faculty. As a consequence, some responsibilities of the collective Life Sciences deans with regard to the PhD track are shared, while others have been split and assigned to individual deans.

With regard to the quality control of the concise PhD track, three topics can be defined:

- 1) Quality of research: progress of the research project, quality of the thesis, compliance with rights and duties as an employee;
- 2) Quality of training: progress of the Training Programme; and quality of the PhD Programmes;
- 3) Quality of supervision.

### **5.1 Research and supervision**

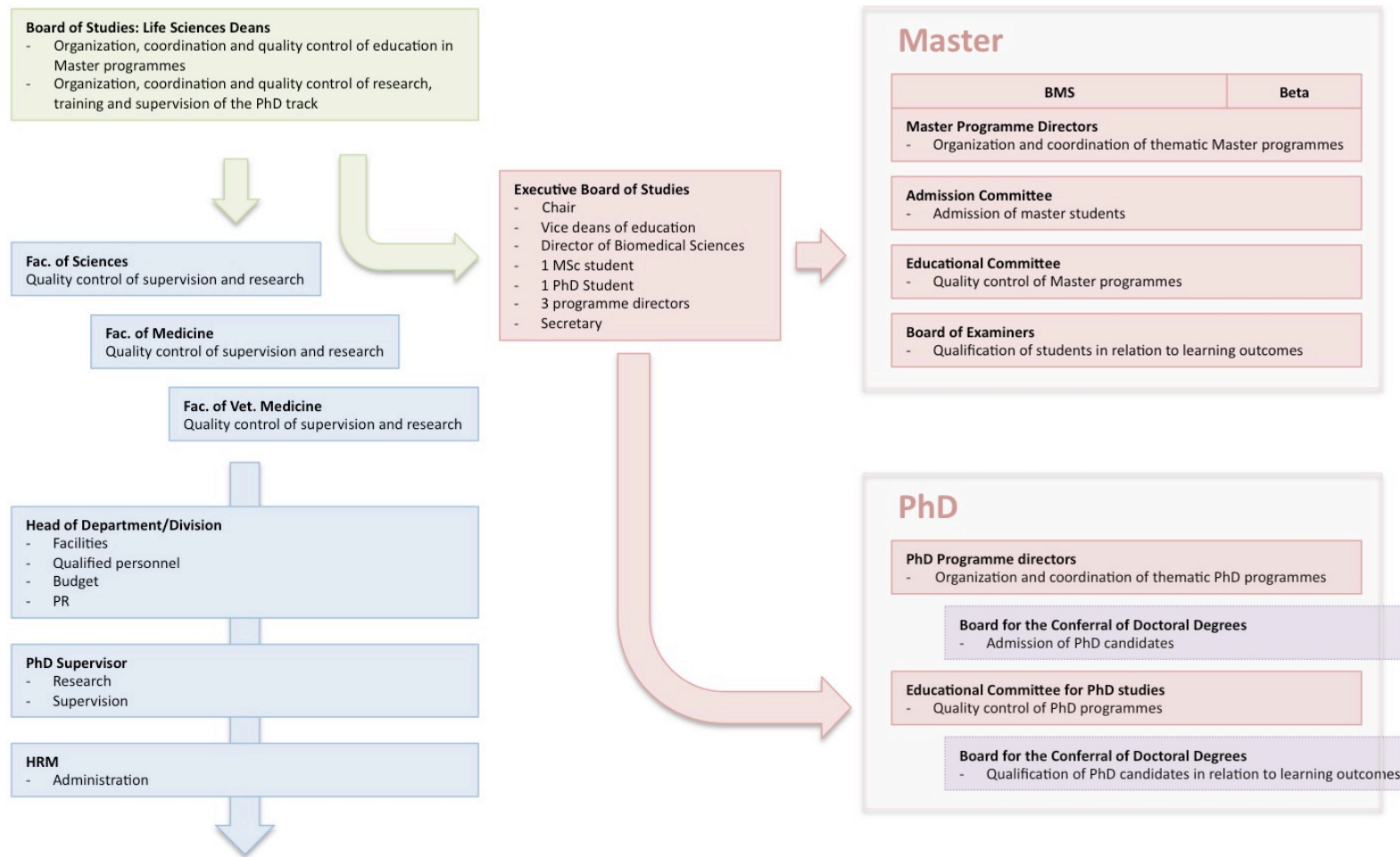
The Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees of Utrecht University, which oversees the implementation of the doctoral regulations on behalf of the Executive Board of Utrecht University, defines the general standards for a thesis at Utrecht University. The dean of the faculty at which the doctoral degree is to be obtained may lay down additional faculty-specific rules and criteria for the thesis.

The quality of research and supervision is the responsibility of the dean of the faculty of appointment of the PhD candidate and/or the (primary) supervisor. In general, this responsibility is delegated to the supervisor. Progress is monitored informally throughout the year and formally in an annual *Assessment Interview* (UMC Utrecht) or *Assessment & Development Interview* (Utrecht University). These interviews should also include the content and progression of the Training Programme as described in the TSA and evidenced by the Training Portfolio. In addition, these interviews address compliance of the PhD candidate with his/her rights and duties as an employee. The requirements, nature and confidential reporting of these interviews is subject to the relevant rules and regulations of the individual faculties.

In addition to this formal interview between PhD candidate and (daily) supervisor progress of both training and research and adequacy of supervision is monitored informally by an independent Supervisory Committee. At least once per year research, training and supervision is discussed between the PhD candidate and his/her Supervisory Committee. This interview is guided by a progress report written by the PhD candidate according to the guidelines described in the TSA. Since the supervisory committee has a less formal, advisory, role (see below) results of this meeting do not have to be laid down in a written report.

### **5.2 Training**

The organisation of high quality courses and other training activities offered to PhD candidates by the PhD programmes is the responsibility of the programme directors, who answer to the Board of Studies of the GS-LS. Training activities are monitored by the PhD programmes through written or oral evaluations by PhD candidates. The control of these monitoring activities is the responsibility of the Board of Studies. Progress of training is monitored in the annual interviews with (daily) supervisor and Supervisory Committee.



**Figure 3.** Responsibilities with regard to quality control (QC) of distinct aspects of research, training and supervision within the GS-LS.

## **6 Responsibilities and roles regarding research, training and supervision of PhD candidates**

In this paragraph the roles and responsibilities of individuals and formal bodies are being described with regard to the different aspects of the PhD track (see figure 3).

### **6.1 Board of Studies**

The Board of Studies consists of the collective Life Sciences deans and a Master- or PhD-student and is responsible for the quality of the PhD programmes. The individual Life Sciences deans are responsible for the quality of supervision, the quality of the research project, the quality of the thesis, the compliance of the PhD candidate with his/her rights and duties as an employee, and progress of the Training Programme. Reader is referred to the quality assurance plans of the individual faculties for details.

In addition, the Life Sciences deans are responsible for administration of their PhD candidates and submitted TSA's. They will annually provide relevant data regarding the number of PhD candidates, their distribution among the PhD programmes, scientific output and other data related to PhD candidates as requested in the most recent version of the Standard Evaluation Protocol of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences and according to the format provided by the administrative secretary to the Board of Studies upon request. The Board of Studies meets with the Executive Board of Studies at least once per year.

### **6.2 Supervisor**

The supervisor is the primary person responsible for all aspects of the PhD track. He/she:

- Is a professor of Utrecht University or UMC Utrecht.
- Makes a proposition to hire a PhD-candidate and initiates the selection procedure.
- Arranges adequate supervision for the PhD candidate.
- Arranges a quick registration with Hora Est within three months after employment.
- Arranges that a TSA is filled in and signed by the appropriate individuals within three months after employment.
- Informs the PhD candidate on the expectations of the supervisor on the PhD candidate and what the PhD candidate can expect from the supervisor, daily supervisor, Supervisory Committee and confidant.
- Supervises the PhD candidate.
- Arranges a research plan for the entire PhD track.
- Stimulates the PhD candidate to carry out creative research.
- Monitors research progression of the PhD candidate and supervises the timely conception of manuscripts.
- Improves and discusses manuscripts presented by the PhD candidate for publication.
- Takes care the PhD candidate can present the results of his/her research regularly.
- Gives feedback in preparation of oral or poster presentations and scientific publications.
- Informs the PhD candidate on relevant seminars, master classes, symposia, conferences and summer schools in which the PhD-candidate can participate.
- Stimulates a critical scientific attitude.
- Imparts scientific integrity.
- Monitors participation of the PhD candidate in training, as laid out in the TSA.
- Arranges the date of the annual assessment interview maximally 12 months after employment and from then on once a year.

- Participates in the annual assessment interviews and provides the written report thereof.
- Supplies information with respect to financial arrangements with respect to training and courses.
- Advises the PhD candidate on career perspectives.
- Acts as mental coach.
- Informs the PhD candidate on the contents of this quality assurance plan.

### **6.3 Daily supervisor**

The daily supervisor is responsible for the supervision of the PhD candidate on a daily basis. He/she carries out responsibilities of the supervisor.

### **6.4 Executive Board of Studies**

The Executive Board of Studies runs the daily affairs of the GS-LS and advises the Board of Studies on the quality of master- and PhD-programmes. It meets minimally once per month. The Executive Board of Studies is headed by a Chair, who is a professor in one of the Life Sciences areas at Utrecht University or UMC Utrecht. The Executive Board of Studies further consists of two vice-chairs: the Director of Education of Biomedical Sciences, and the vice dean of Education of the faculty of Science. Other members include the vice-dean of Education of the faculty of Medicine, three directors of the research master and/or PhD programmes of the GS-LS, the Chair of the Life Sciences Representatives (LSR), and the Chair of the PhD council, and the administrative secretary of the GS-LS. Other members may be appointed based on their specific qualities/interests. The Life Sciences deans appoint members of the Executive Board of Studies for the term of six years.

### **6.5 Administrative secretary**

The administrative secretary is a staff member of Utrecht University or UMC Utrecht and is appointed by the Life Sciences deans.

He/she

- Is responsible for preparation and reporting of the regular meetings of the Board of Studies and the Executive Board of Studies.
- Coordinates activities with the Board of Studies and dedicated representatives of the faculties.
- Is responsible for communication of the Board of Studies and the Executive Board of Studies with relevant committees and other stakeholders.
- Coordinates the education for PhD candidates: carries responsibility for the organisation and quality control of the PhD programmes.
- Justifies at least once per year progress and quality of the PhD tracks to the Board of Studies.
- Is responsible for national and international promotion of the PhD programmes.
- Is responsible for communication of PhD-related matters to programme directors, coordinators, (daily) supervisors and PhD candidates.
- is responsible for the organisation of PhD programme-exceeding activities for PhD candidates;
- Is responsible for the organisation of periodic evaluations of the PhD programmes;

### **6.6 PhD programme director**

Each PhD programme has a programme director. The director is a professor of Utrecht University or UMC Utrecht and is appointed by the Deans for the term of maximally six years.

The PhD programme director:

- Is responsible for an original and high quality PhD programme within the limits of the budget assigned by the Life Sciences deans.
- Proposes a PhD programme committee for approval by the Life Sciences deans.
- Reviews and discusses the content of the PhD programme on a yearly basis with the PhD programme committee.
- Grants admission of candidates to the PhD programme based on the programme's admission criteria.
  - Informs the PhD candidate on the nature of the programme;
  - Informs the PhD candidate on the requirements for the Training Certificate of the GS-LS;
  - Informs the PhD candidate about activities organised by the PhD programme;
  - Organises the training activities of the PhD programme;
  - Evaluates all training activities of the PhD programme;
  - Assesses the eligibility of the PhD candidate at the end of the PhD track to receive the School's Training Certificate, based on proven attendance, on behalf of the Board of Studies;
  - Provides the Board of Studies in time and upon request with the course schedule of the next academic year;
  - Distributes information and news among the associated PhD candidates upon request of the Board of Studies.
- Provides an annual report to the Board of Studies, describing activities of the programme and justification of the budget spent.
- Provides an extensive evaluation of the programme to the Board of Studies for the periodic certification of the programme.

### **6.7 PhD programme coordinator**

The PhD programme coordinator supports the programme director in the organisation of the PhD programme.

### **6.8 PhD programme committee**

Each PhD programme has a PhD programme committee. The PhD programme committee is appointed by the PhD programme director and consists of relevant stakeholders, representative research leaders participating in Utrecht University research focus areas and at least one PhD candidate. The PhD programme committee supports the PhD programme director in maintaining a high quality PhD programme.

### **6.9 The Supervisory Committee**

A supervisory committee is assigned to each PhD candidate at the beginning of the research track. The role of the Supervisory Committee is to provide independent advice to both (daily) supervisor(s) and PhD candidate with respect to the progress (rate, direction) of the PhD track. The Supervisory Committee consists of 1-2 members, each of them being a researcher in a field related to that of the PhD candidate, and not involved in the PhD candidate's research project. The minimum contribution of the Supervisory Committee is to discuss the annual progress report of the PhD candidate with the PhD candidate and his/her supervisors. Especially **before** one year after start of the PhD track, before the go-no go decision, the contribution of the Supervisory Committee is very important.

In general, the discussion must focus on achievements, progress and planning of research and training, feasibility of the project, quality of meetings between PhD candidate and supervisors, and quality of the infrastructure. Questions that may be addressed by the Supervisory Committee include:



- Which are the results of the previous year?
- Is the project, and subprojects, realistic and feasible within the timeframe planned?
- Has a clear planning with regard to research and training been agreed between PhD candidate and (daily) supervisor(s) for the following year?
- Which are the expected bottlenecks? How will they be managed?
- Which results need to be obtained for future publications?
- Are the research facilities adequate?
- Is the quality (length, frequency) of meetings between PhD candidate and (daily) supervisor adequate?
- Is the PhD candidate apt to continue the project?
- Which skills and knowledge of the PhD candidate require improvement?
- How will this be achieved?

#### **6.10 PhD council**

The PhD council consists of representative PhD candidates of all PhD programmes. The Life Sciences deans appoint them for a period of maximally four years. The PhD council advises the Board of Studies on the quality of PhD training. It meets once a month in the presence of the administrative secretary.

#### **6.11 Confidants**

Each faculty has assigned dedicated confidants ('vertrouwenspersonen') for PhD candidates. The confidant is a staff member of the faculty. He/she can mediate upon request of the PhD candidate in case of a personal or professional dispute between PhD candidate and his/her supervisor(s) or daily supervisor(s). Their identity can be found on the School's website.

## **7 Monitoring and reporting**

It is vital that the relevant responsible individuals and formal bodies monitor all aspects of the PhD track, and that written proof thereof is provided. These include: an annual progress report of the PhD candidate, discussion of the progress report with the supervisory committee, administration of TSA and annual Assessment (& Development) Interviews by the faculties, annual reports of the PhD programmes of the training programme and justification of the budget spent.

### **7.1 The PhD candidate**

Each year the PhD candidate provides a written progress report, to be discussed with the supervisory Committee. The report contains a standardized evaluation of all aspects of the work of the past period, insight in the progress of the project and re-evaluation by PhD student and supervisor concerning the expectations of the PhD project. The progress report forces the PhD student to:

- look back: 'did I meet the goals I set for the past period?'
- look ahead: 'which goals do I want to reach in the period to come?'
- look aside: 'is my project on scheme, did I publish enough, did I attend enough courses?'

#### **7.1.1 Format of the progress report**

The progress report is sent to the supervisory committee at least two weeks prior to the meeting. Items addressed in the progress report include:

- Results obtained since the start of the PhD track;
- A list of cumulative results obtained in the past period;
  - Papers submitted, in press, and published so far;
  - Abstracts;
  - Prizes/awards
  - Planning of research of the remainder of the PhD track;
  - Training followed since the start of the PhD track, consisting of a cumulative list of:
    - PhD courses attended and completed;
    - (Inter)national activities such as participation in PhD activities; scientific meeting attendance and scientific collaborations;
    - Changes to the PhD Training Programme and other changes in the TSA;
    - A (cumulative) list of teaching tasks carried out by the PhD candidate and of teaching skills attained.
- Planning of training of the remainder of the PhD track;
- Quality of supervision;
- Professional behaviour of the PhD candidate;

### **7.2 The Supervisor**

The supervisor has an annual Assessment Interview (UMC Utrecht) or Assessment & Development Interview (UU) with the PhD candidate, according to the rules and guidelines of the institution. A written report of the interview is provided to the HRM department of the relevant faculty.

### **7.3 The PhD programme director**

Each year the PhD programme director provides a written report, according to the format provided by the Board of Studies, upon request of the administrative secretary. The report includes the identity, affiliation and start year of participating PhD candidates, the training programme of the PhD programme and justification of the budget spent of the previous year

upon request. This report is discussed by the Board of Studies who advises the Life Sciences deans. The annual reports will guide the periodic evaluation of the PhD programme by the Board of Studies.

#### **7.4 The Life Sciences deans**

The Life Sciences deans provide an annual report on their PhD candidates according to the format provided by the PhD coordinator upon request. The report includes details on compliance of annual interviews and submitted TSA, distribution of PhD candidates across PhD programmes and details relating to PhD candidates as defined in the Standard Evaluation Protocol of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences KNAW.

#### **7.5 Dispute**

- Section 7 on the "Settlement of Disputes" of the "Doctoral Degree Regulations Utrecht University" of the Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees of Utrecht University applies in case of a dispute concerning the doctoral thesis.
- In the case of a dispute or a controversy that cannot be handled according to the Doctoral Degree Regulations Utrecht University, all stakeholders may consult the Board of Studies through the administrative secretary of the GS-LS. The Board of Studies will react within four weeks and will propose a procedure to resolve the dispute.