Code of Supervision
for PhD supervisors

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The Code of Supervision was reviewed by the research directors Paula Fikkert (Centre for Language Studies), André Lardinois (Institute for Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies) and Marc Slors (Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies), as well as a reading committee of PhD supervisors from the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies.

Furthermore, the manuscript was presented and discussed during a workshop for PhD supervisors and their feedback is also reflected in the Code of Supervision.
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Supervising PhD candidates is a complex process in which a supervisor fulfils different roles. On the one hand a supervisor interacts with his or her PhD candidates personally as a mentor and teacher. On the other hand a supervisor is the assessor of the PhD project, which has to live up to academic standards.

As PhD projects are usually supervised by a supervision team, the communication flow, clarification of expertise among the supervisors, agreements on deliverables as well as reliable and on time feedback are all crucial.

You help demarcating zones of intellectual property, both with your own work and with that of other researchers working on the same or a similar project as the PhD candidate. It is important to communicate how you will refer to each other’s work in future publications, as well as authorship issues if you are a co-author on publications of your PhD candidates.

Under your supervision PhD candidates become part of the scientific community. At the end of their project PhD candidates should be independent junior scholars or scientists, who have gained national and international experience, are aware of the relevant scholarly or scientific networks and able to apply for personal funding to further their academic career.

However, not all PhD candidates will continue to pursue a scientific career. Hence, as supervisor, you will also stimulate your PhD candidates to communicate their research to a general public, to introduce themselves to different sectors outside academia, and to consider alternative career options.

The code of supervision offers recommendations for the process of PhD supervision.
1.

Basics of Supervision
1.1 Commitment

As supervisor you might face dilemmas when fulfilling the role of academic assessor of the PhD manuscript on the one hand and the role of personal mentor and teacher of the PhD candidate on the other. This may occur, for instance, when personal problems arise that will cause a delay in progress. In such a situation you need to find the right balance between being a mentor who cares for and supports the PhD candidate, and being an academic assessor who is interested in a PhD manuscript that meets academic standards and is ready on time. Moreover, as a grant holder, the need to report on the progress of your research project should not lead you to encourage your PhD candidate to publish material prematurely.
As academic assessor of the PhD manuscript, you are committed to:

- meeting your PhD candidates regularly (at least twice a month) in line with the Training and Supervision Plan, which requires a minimum contact of four hours per month;
- arranging meetings with the entire supervision team at least once every three months;
- being available also in times of sabbatical or international research stays;
- giving feedback on a chapter of a thesis/manuscript of an article no later than 15 working days after submission;
- being prepared to adapt the planning if necessary.

As mentor/teacher of your PhD candidates, you are committed to:

- advising additional training and/or support in case your PhD candidates are unable to complete objectives within the time schedule;
- reflecting on the quality of PhD supervision in your annual assessment;
- helping your PhD candidates to become independent researchers;
- showing an active interest in the PhD projects and integrating them into your research environment;
- helping the candidates to finish their projects on time.

Supervisors are responsible for a realistic planning of PhD projects within the time frame of the PhD contract.

They make sure they do not supervise too many PhD projects at the same time, unless they have taken appropriate measures to guarantee that the candidates can be offered sufficient support.
1.2 Competencies

As academic assessor of the PhD project, you help your PhD candidates develop competencies in:

- the theoretical and methodological background of their research project;
- elaborating research questions and formulating hypotheses;
- analysing data;
- academic writing;
- presenting ongoing research at conferences;
- project and process management;
- time management;
- monitoring the feasibility of the planned project;
- adequate research data management;
- valorisation.

As mentor/teacher of your PhD candidates you:

- introduce them into scientific and social networks;
- set up a fruitful and respectful feedback procedure;
- invite them to give feedback on the supervision process;
- offer individual coaching;
- handle and mediate conflicts;
- discuss career perspectives, both academic and non-academic.

As supervisor and mentor you reflect on and improve your own competence by participating in trainings, workshops, coaching, supervision, intervision.
1.3 Defining responsibilities

As assessor of the PhD project, you aim for a doctoral thesis, which exemplifies the expertise and qualitative standards of doctoral research in your field, by:

- communicating the academic standards of your research field at the beginning of the PhD project;
- helping the candidate to set up a yearly (micro- and macro-) planning for the PhD project;
- aiming for a preliminary table of contents of the manuscript within the first six months;
- demarcating zones of intellectual property, both in regard to your own work and to that of other researchers working on the same or a similar project as the PhD candidate. Communicate how you will refer to each other’s work in future publications.
- setting up agreements on co-authorship before the PhD project starts if you (and/or others) are contributing to a co-authored article.

You communicate and reflect on responsibilities, both of the supervisor and the PhD candidates by:

- defining roles and responsibilities before the PhD project starts (and review those roles regularly);
- defining objectives, deliverables, and feasible deadlines;
- encouraging your PhD candidates to keep records of meetings with you and to establish a feedback process, which help both you as supervisor and the PhD candidate to keep track of deliverables for each meeting;
- pointing out to the candidates that writing a PhD thesis is a job for which they are paid and to which they should devote the appropriate commitment, time and energy;
• advising your candidates on how to spend their research fund, if they have one. (They have to ask your permission before they can spend money from such a fund.)

Your PhD candidates are dealing with different dimensions while working on their PhD manuscript:

• Process- vs. Content-orientation
• Teamwork vs. Individual expertise
• Action vs. Reflection
• Security vs. Risk
• Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic motivation

In your role as mentor/teacher, you should focus on the relationship with your PhD candidates and support their personal development by:

• letting them identify with their PhD project;
• assessing learning needs to run the PhD project at the beginning and agreeing on appropriate training, which is reported in the Training- and Supervision Plan;
• exploiting complementary skills, knowledge and networks for your PhD candidates;
• being prepared to discuss any tensions openly with the aim to resolve them;
• regularly reflecting on your success in supervising PhD candidates.
1.4 Monitoring of PhD Projects

Exchange mutual expectations – Clarify roles – Assess ethical issues – Define reliable and frequent feedback process – Evaluate progress regularly

As assessor of the PhD project, you will agree with your PhD candidates regarding procedures of monitoring their PhD projects by:

- defining the frequency of meetings with all supervisors;
- communicating what deliverables you expect before each meeting from your PhD candidates;
- setting up reliable feedback loops among the members of the supervision team with a clear time frame – feedback on a chapter/article should not take longer than 15 working days and preferably less;
- preparing regular progress reports and evaluating the progress of the PhD project;
- taking the No Go option after 14 months seriously if the progress of your PhD candidate is insufficient;
- reflecting on the process of supervision regularly;
- helping the candidate to set up a data management plan (if applicable) at the beginning of the project and informing him or her on possibilities to store data.

As mentor/teacher of your PhD student you will focus on:

- clarifying which role the supervisors in the supervision team will have and which questions can be addressed to whom;
- explaining the Go/No Go assessment after 14 months;
- detecting delays early on, evaluating the reasons for delays and adapting the planning — and if needed the project — to guarantee a completion of the PhD project in time;
- planning presentations at national and international conferences, workshops or symposia.
To build a fruitful and reliable relationship with your PhD candidates, it is necessary to allow for smooth communications by:

- exchanging mutual expectations regarding the supervision process;
- clarifying what the supervision team expects from the PhD;
- asking the PhD candidates what they of are expecting from their supervision team;
- explaining how you offer constructive criticism;
- providing room for intellectual discussions.

Ethical issues of PhD projects will be assessed at the beginning and your expertise as PhD supervisor is crucial to:

- inform your PhD candidates — when applicable — on the procedures and timelines of the ethical committee and the deliverables required for approval;
- take the timing/time frame of ethical approval (and possible delays) into account before approving the planning of a PhD project.

Next to the regular PhD candidates, you may also monitor the progress of external PhD candidates.

- Ask external PhD students to write a detailed research proposal, which needs to be approved by the research director.
- Set up a Training and Supervision Plan with your external PhD students and agree on a date for a Go/No Go assessment date, which can be 14 months until, at the latest, 3 years after the beginning of the research project and will be chaired by the research director.
- Agree on regular meetings and deliverables at the beginning of the PhD project.
- Assess the progress of your external PhD student in a yearly meeting and communicate the outcome to the research director.
- Make use of the No Go option if the progress of the PhD project is insufficient.
1.5 Communication

Constructive feedback – Open, trustful and clear communication

A crucial element of supervision is an open, trustful and clear style of communicating with your PhD candidates, so:

- demonstrate commitment and interest in the PhD project;
- appreciate the effort and progress from your PhD candidates;
- be aware of cultural differences;
- discuss ways to handle negative aspects of feedback with your PhD candidates at the beginning of the supervision process;
- finish every meeting with your PhD candidates with specific, clear agreements and feasible deliverables for the upcoming meeting as well as the overall planning of the project.

The way feedback is given to the PhD candidates influences the improvement and progress of the manuscript.

- Seek a balance between appreciation and constructive criticism.
- Present criticism impersonally.
- Be precise and clear.
- Ensure that your PhD candidate understood your comments.
- Ask your PhD candidates for feedback on your style of supervision.

As PhD supervisor, you also have a role as personal mentor, who needs to:

- guarantee a relationship that is built on trust;
- communicate the way you would prefer to be approached by your PhD candidates between regular meetings;
- be aware of emotional problems;
- offer support in times of illness;
- offer support in balancing work and personal life.
2
The PhD Project
2.1 Doctorate regulations

The Graduate School for the Humanities (GSH) has set up guidelines for PhD theses based on articles, which supplement the regulations of the university and should be adjusted to the tradition and culture of citation and co-authorship in the different disciplines in the humanities.

The thesis may be, according to article 13 of the doctoral regulations of Radboud University:

- a scholarly discourse in the form of a book; or
- a scholarly discourse in the form of a collection of articles; or
- a research design produced on the basis of theoretical understandings and methods specific to the field, accompanied by an argumentation and documentation at an academic level.

The thesis must satisfy the requirements set out in these regulations, and must in every case include a description of, and argumentation for, the candidate’s research approach.

A thesis in the form of a collection of articles should be accompanied by a general introduction and a summary of contents, written specifically for the purpose (i.e., not previously published).
GSH guidelines for a PhD thesis based on articles

A PhD thesis based on articles **may include**:

- published articles;
- submitted articles;
- unpublished articles;
- articles with co-authors;
- a combination of articles and chapters.

It is ultimately up to the manuscript committee to determine whether a collection of articles is of sufficient quantity and quality to be eligible for submission as a PhD thesis.

A PhD thesis based on articles **should**:

- be accompanied by an introduction, which puts the articles in the perspective of the current scientific debate and provides a motivation for the methodology used;
- be accompanied by a general discussion, which integrates the articles;
- describe the individual contributions in case of co-authored articles;
- end with a summary written in Dutch.

A co-author of an article may not be a member of the doctoral thesis committee.
2.2 Feasibility

As PhD supervisor it is your responsibility to approve feasible PhD proposals only and to constantly monitor the feasibility of ongoing projects.

In your role as assessor of the PhD project, you:

- communicate the expected quality standard for a PhD manuscript clearly;
- are aware of procedures for ethical approval and reserve time for this in the PhD project;
- help the candidate to sketch a micro planning for each year with clear deliverables and a macro planning for the entire project;
- set clear deadlines;
- adjust and revise the planning when needed.

In your role as mentor/teacher of the PhD candidate, you:

- analyse the potential and experience of your PhD candidates and estimate a planning based on their profile;
- include buffer periods;
- advise your PhD candidates to block hours for writing each week and to stick to these, ideally in a writing group;
- work towards a manuscript that is good enough for defending instead of aiming for the perfect master piece.
2.3 Dealing with ups and downs

Focus on positive reinforcement while being aware of individual limits

Your PhD candidates will face ups and downs during their PhD projects. As PhD supervisor you will follow their journey, which might include stages like:

- great expectations;
- relief and possibly exhaustion after a successful Go / No Go assessment;
- reflecting critically on the role and duties of a researcher;
- gaining international appreciation;
- exploring career options carefully while also dealing with the rising pressure to finish on time.

In your role as mentor, share your own experiences in dealing with these stages earlier in your career with your PhD candidates:

- focus on positive reinforcement;
- offer support in times of frustration;
- be aware of your PhD candidates’ individual limits;
- help your PhD candidates to integrate in the university community;
- make sure that your PhD candidates take breaks.
2.4 Scientific integrity

In line with the regulations for integrity in science, dissertations consisting of co-authored papers should contain an appendix that clarifies:

- which qualitative input was contributed by other authors than the PhD candidates under your supervision;
- which parts of the co-authored publication were written by co-authors and not by the PhD candidate.

As supervisor you bear responsibility for the scientific integrity of the PhD candidate’s research and therefore:

- acquaint your PhD candidates with the regulations for integrity in science;
- make sure that they have sufficient training in statistics, methodology and ethics where necessary/applicable;
- agree on how to deal with co-authorship and explain the culture of citation in your research field to your PhD candidates at the beginning of the PhD project;
- inform you PhD candidates on procedures and timing of the ethical approval of their research where applicable;
- make sure they have participated in the GSH workshop on scientific integrity before the end of their second year.

As assessor of the PhD project you are aware that a research data management plan is a dynamic document, and you will discuss and update it regularly with your PhD candidates.

In case of co-authored publications during a PhD project, you will explain the culture of citation in your research field to your PhD candidates.
2.5 Valorisation

The societal relevance of scientific and scholarly research has become an important aspect of many research projects. Relevance to society is measured by “quality, scale and relevance of contributions targeting specific economic, social or cultural target groups, of advisory reports for policy, of contributions to the public debate”. (SEP 2015-2021)

In order to prepare PhD candidates for the possible valorisation of their PhD project, discuss with your PhD candidates right from the start:

- How does society benefit from their research (relevance)?
- Which population, institutions, organisations may be interested in the outcome (target group)?
- Why is the outcome of the research project important for society (contribution)?
- Which societal consequences can be drawn from their research (relevance)?
- What activities can the PhD candidates use to disseminate their research and make it known among a wider public (contribution)?

To further stimulate activities consider domains such as:

- **Education**: workshops, presentations, interaction with schools, interaction with research participants;
- **Social Services**: websites, exhibitions, participation in committees/parties, presence in media, articles in popular journals, public lectures, critical reviews of books, collaboration with musea, talk shows;
- **Spin offs**: e.g. coach/trainer for stakeholders, expertise centre/network.

In order to stimulate this process, the GSH offers a number of valorisation grants each year.
Once a year PhD candidates can apply for a valorisation grant of max. 1000 EUR to finance an initiative which furthers the societal relevance of their PhD project.
2.6 Career perspectives

An important aspect in the supervision process is discussing career perspectives as well as giving advice and support to build a profile that will allow your PhD candidates to continue to enjoy a stimulating and satisfying career after finishing their PhD project.

You may point out to your PhD candidates that in the course of writing their dissertation they have the chance to develop key competencies, such as:

- elaborating a research question and hypothesis;
- analysis and problem solving;
- methodological skills;
- data management skills;
- programming skills;
- presentation skills;
- writing skills;
- critical thinking;
- project management;
- language skills;
- knowledge transfer;
- interpersonal and leadership skills;
- self management;
- postponement of gratification (four years or more).

As senior scholar, you are an expert on building a scientific career; thus:

- integrate your PhD candidates in your local research group;
- choose an appropriate national research school to integrate your PhD candidates in a national platform of PhD colleagues;
• introduce your PhD candidates to scholars in your national and international networks and consider collaborations and research stays as part of their PhD project;
• select national and international conferences where your PhD candidates present their research to a scientific community;
• suggest journals or book series in which to publish during the PhD period;
• inform your PhD candidates about grants at a national and international level;
• encourage your PhD candidates to plan an international research stay and make use of your contacts abroad;
• list your PhD candidates for awards and scholarships.

Apart from advice on how to continue with an academic career, you should/can also discuss with your PhD candidates possibilities outside the academic world by:

• defining key qualifications and a profile of competencies of your PhD candidates on a more general level;
• detecting relevant stakeholders and institutions outside academia;
• introducing them to your contacts outside academia;
• encouraging your PhD candidates to present their research to wider audiences inside and outside of academia;
• encouraging them to seek advice on how to present themselves to future employers and in the media.
2.7 Final months before the PhD defence

The last months of finalizing a PhD manuscript are very intense for both supervisor and PhD candidates. PhD candidates vary in their personal style of coping with the pressure to finish their manuscript.

In your role as assessor of the PhD project, you should/can:

- agree on a more intense feedback process in the last months;
- consider a feedback loop with all supervisors of the supervision team;
- stick to deadlines for each supervisor to give feedback on time;
- communicate towards the PhD candidates to present deliverables according to plan;
- give feedback on a chapter of the thesis/journal article within 15 working days.

In your role as mentor/teacher you offer support in this last period by:

- monitoring the stress level of your PhD candidates and their coping strategies;
- praising and appreciating the effort of your PhD candidates;
- coaching when needed, with the necessary professional distance.

As soon as the approximate date for an approved PhD manuscript is at hand, you will:

- select members of the manuscript committee in time;
- agree on an editor, publisher, series;
- remind your PhD candidates to schedule a mock defence;
- help the candidate to set a date for the actual defence.
3. Trouble shooting

How to deal with changes in the supervision team?

• Inform the research director of your institute as well as the graduate school coordinator of any changes in the supervision team.
• To adjust the registration form in Hora Est, contact the graduate school coordinator.

How to prepare a No Go assessment, when the progress of your PhD candidate is insufficient?

• Clearly communicate to your PhD candidates the quality standards for the writings sample, which is needed as a proof of the ability of finishing a successful manuscript within the time of the contract.
• Be in close communication with your PhD candidates and evaluate the reasons for insufficient progress.
• Inform the research director as well as the graduate school coordinator at the latest around 11 months if you consider progress insufficient, so that intervention still is possible.
• Set up an intervention plan and if necessary an extension of the Go/No Go evaluation in communication with the research director.
• Make sure that a representative of the personnel department is attending the Go/No Go evaluation.
• Inform your PhD candidates that they can ask for a neutral participant, e.g. the confidential advisor.
• In case of a No Go decision, support your PhD candidate in the next career step.

What to do, when your PhD candidate is not coping well with pressure of deadlines/stress?

• Every employed PhD candidate has the opportunity of five coaching sessions embedded in their contract.
• Refer to the coaches, bedrijfsmaatschappelijk werk, Arbo- en Milieudienst.
• Refer to the walk in hours at Radboudmc.
The GSH is offering biannual vitality trainings and a yearly discussion lunch on time management.

How do you deal with illness or chronic health problems of your PhD candidates?

- Remind your PhD candidate to report illness as well as chronic health problems to supervisor and the personnel department.
- Let your PhD candidate monitor the hours/days of absence caused by illness or chronic health problems.
- Inform the research director and graduate school coordinator.
- PhD candidates receive their income during periods of illness and cannot be replaced during these periods. Therefore PhD contracts cannot be extended due to illness.
- Be in contact with the research director three months before the end of the PhD’s contract (with a detailed schedule till completion of the thesis) to see if the research institute is capable to extend the project for a maximum period of three months.

How to proceed if the PhD manuscript is not finished within the contract?

- Evaluate the reasons for the delay with your PhD candidate.
- Agree on the continuation of the supervision process after the contract has extended.
- Check with the head of your department, if it is possible to let your PhD candidate use his/her desk, email and other facilities for an extended period.
- Ensure regular meetings on the progress.
- Stay in close communication with your PhD candidate.
- Let your PhD candidate report on the progress to the graduate school coordinator regularly.
4. Addresses - Links

**PhD regulations and forms**

http://www.ru.nl/gsh/phd/regulations-forms/

**Scientific Integrity**

Academic Integrity Radboud University:

http://www.ru.nl/english/about-us/our-university/integrity-conduct/

University Library – Managing research data:

http://www.ru.nl/library/services/research/researchdata/

KNAW – Ethics, Quality, Open access and digital preservation, Security

http://www.knaw.nl/en/topics
5. Further Reading

Denise Whitelock, Dorothy Faulkner, Dorothy Miell (2008)

Anne Lee (2008)

Estelle M. Phillips and Derek S. Pugh (2010)

Barbara Adkins (2009)
PhD pedagogy and the changing knowledge landscapes of universities, Higher Education Research & Development, 28:2, 165-177, DOI: 10.1080/07294360902725041

Barbara Grant (2003)
Mapping the Pleasures and Risks of Supervision, Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 24:2, 175-190, DOI: 10.1080/01596300303042

Duncan Nulty, Margaret Kiley & Noel Meyers (2009)
Promoting and recognising excellence in the supervision of research students: an evidence-based framework, Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 34:6, 693-707, DOI: 10.1080/02602930802474193