

Frequently Asked Questions for PhD-students (at Environmental Science)

A. General info

1. Where can I find information on doing my PhD?

For all generic, university wide information, see <https://www.ru.nl/phd/>

2. Where can I go with my questions?

First, finish reading these FAQ ☺. For remaining or any other questions, always feel free to approach your supervisors. If they can't answer themselves, they can help you find the right person to ask. In addition, a fellow PhD student of the department is assigned as your **buddy**. The management assistants and your supervisors will arrange you to get one. During a coffee break or any other time, you can informally chat with your buddy to help answer questions you have, or you did not know yet that you have.

3. Do I need to become a member of a graduate school?

All PhD candidates within RIBES are automatically enrolled in the RIBES Graduate School (<https://www.ru.nl/en/ribes/education/graduate-school>). In addition, you can become member of another graduate school (e.g., the research School for Socio-Economic and Natural Sciences of the Environment (SENSE), <https://www.sense.nl>; or the Graduate School for Production Ecology & Resource Conservation (PE&CE, <https://www.pe-rc.nl/>), but this is optional. Through the graduate school(s), you can take courses, and when you meet all the requirements by the end of your PhD project, you obtain a certificate as proof that you successfully completed a coherent educational programme, which can give you an advantage in future job applications.

B. Research

1. How do I start up my research?

During the first 6 months, you are expected to write down an outline of your PhD project in the form of a **proposal**, usually based on the proposal used for obtaining the grant. The outline (3-6 pages) should give a general description of the objectives, methods and planning of the research and an overview of the thesis chapters. If you participate in a graduate school, this proposal will be submitted and typically reviewed by the graduate school. The plan must then meet the criteria of this graduate school in terms of length and content. The plan is made in collaboration with your supervisors. You will have regular discussions together, but you can also have discussions with other experts within or outside the department, depending on topic and interests. Within the 1st year of your PhD, you are expected to organize a **brainstorm session** with other permanent staff members and experts on or related to your topic. You can decide with you supervisors who to invite for this session.

2. How many research chapters should I write?

The general rule is a thesis consisting of **four** research chapters, in principle all as a first author, plus a general introduction and synthesis (so six chapters altogether). The research chapters are to be submitted to scientific peer-reviewed journals or books. See <https://jcr.clarivate.com/jcr/browse-journals> for journals. You could start by looking at the ones

within the topic “environmental sciences”. Your supervisors or co-authors can help to decide where best to publish in. In case of five research chapters/articles, one may be written as a second author. When the synthesis chapter is submitted/accepted as a journal article, it also counts as a research chapter. In exceptional cases (e.g., a paper in Nature or Science, which typically requires a lot of additional work), a total of three research chapters is acceptable.

3. When should my first paper be ready?

There is no golden rule. Typically, the first full manuscript is ready at the **end of the first year**. However, if one performs a lengthy experiment or develops a completely new computer model or approach, the first paper might take 2 years, and in exceptional cases even more. Subsequent manuscripts then typically follow quickly, using the results of the lengthy experiments or new computer model/approach.

4. What if my appointment lasts for less than 4 years?

The demands will be tailored proportionally.

5. How much time can I spend on other activities?

A maximum of **25%** of the total time may be spent on other activities, of which (roughly) 10% is meant for teaching courses and supervising BSc and MSc students, and 15% may be used for your own education and training and participating in committees (PON, RIBES, SENSE). Supervision of students can contribute to your research project, so if the work of a master student contributes substantially to your research, extra time can be spent on supervision. Educational PhD students with a 5-year contract are expected to spend 25% of their time on teaching, supervision and obtaining the University Teaching Qualification (UTQ; see D3), so in total 40% of their time on other activities (25% for teaching and related activities and 15% for own education and training).

C. Training and education for PhD

1. Do I need to write an education plan?

Yes, during your first 3 months you are expected to write a **training and supervision plan** (TSP), in which they describe their planned courses and training See <https://www.ru.nl/phd/phd-journey/start-your-phd/training-supervisionplan-tsp/>. If it is decided to take part in an additional research school next to the RIBES graduate school, you are also expected to draw up an education plan in accordance with the standard format to be approved by this research school.

2. How do I select courses?

First, think about the skills that you need during and after your PhD project. Next, find the technical, communication, and management courses that cover your needs:

- The university has a digital learning and development portal called **gROW**, <https://www.ru.nl/en/staff/services/development-and-career-path/personal-development/grow-online-learning-environment>. gROW entails a specific channel for generic PhD courses. You are invited to take a glance at the programme and choose the trainings that best fit your needs. Most trainings are offered a few times a year, so it is easy to schedule them in alignment with your masterplan. Our faculty will bear the costs.

- SENSE and PE&CE offer a wide range of PhD courses in environmental, ecological and other disciplines, as well as PhD courses on project and time management (<https://www.sense.nl>; <https://www.pe-rc.nl/>).
- Talk to your fellow (older year) PhD students which courses they experienced as useful.

D. Teaching

1. How much time should I spend on teaching in courses and supervising BSc-MSc students?

As a rule of thumb, you are expected to spend up to **10%** (so 40% of the 25% set in question B5) of your time on educating BSc-MSc students. This is a general university rule.

2. How can I attract BSc-MSc students to help me with my research?

Write a short project description, inform the internship coordinator of the department (Steeff Hantsen) about it and have it put on the department's **website** by the management assistants. Please take a look at the department website for inspiration and examples.

3. How can I specialize in teaching?

The university offers didactical courses up to official education certificates (University Teaching Qualification (UTQ)). If you pursue an academic career, it would be advantageous to make a start with UTQ during your PhD-project. This is not mandatory in any way for getting your PhD. Information on the demands to obtain your UTQ and possible trainings can be found at <https://www.ru.nl/en/lecturers/lecturer-development/university-teaching-qualification-utq>. When you are an educational PhD, you are expected to follow didactical courses and obtain your UTQ during your 5-year contract.

E. Meetings and attendance

1. Can I work remotely?

Working remotely is no problem; many people in our group do this. The general guideline is, however, to spend **at least 50% of your time in the department**, including at least the days with department meetings and seminars (Mondays and Thursdays). We recommend to come more often particularly during the first phase of your project, to facilitate easy interactions with your supervisors and to get to know your colleagues. At the start of your project, please make specific agreements on office and home days with your supervisors.

2. Which conferences can I visit and how often?

Please consult your supervisor. Usually, one international conference or (project) workshop per year should be possible, provided that you give a platform presentation or poster presentation. You are encouraged to visit national conferences as well, again preferably with a presentation. If the project you are working on does not provide funding for conference visits, you are expected to explore the options to obtain external funding: see Appendix 1. You are expected to consider the environment when planning your conference visits, e.g. by avoiding flights over short distances, prioritizing European meetings over transatlantic meetings or by participating online.

3. Which meetings am I expected to attend?

Being a member of this department requires you to be involved in its activities:

- **Department meetings** with one PhD student presenting his/her latest progress and discussing scientific bottlenecks with all colleagues and one presentation of an MSc student, every Thursday at 15:30h.
- **Staff meeting** on non-scientific issues of general interest, every six weeks on Monday morning.
- Annual **department day-in** with presentations from the permanent staff to keep each other informed about ongoing research, or in the form of discussion groups to increase interactions between people from the department (environmental science day-in, mandatory).
- Annual **department day-out**: excursion to have fun together.
- Annual **RIBES-day** focussed on PhDs presenting their work via a presentation, poster, and poster pitches (mandatory).
- RIBES seminars (optional: judge for yourself whether the topic is of interest to you).

F. Supervision

1. What is the role of the PhD student and the supervisor/(co-)promotor?

You write the thesis under daily supervision of the co-promotor, with contributions of the promotor where needed. In some cases, the daily supervision is provided by the promotor.

The supervision should be tailor-made. The details are also written down in the TSP (see C1). For every PhD project a formal start meeting is organized in which the general project planning is discussed. Further, expectations from both the supervisor and the PhD student are expressed and general issues related to the research process are agreed upon. Questions to be addressed include:

- When to expect input from your supervisor/promotor?
- How much time to spend on an issue before asking for help?
- Who to consult for daily problems, structural problems, long-term planning problems?
- How to monitor the process and ensure the planning is achieved or adapted if needed?
- With which frequency do you have to keep your promoter updated?

The agreements are written down and will be evaluated and adapted if needed in the course of the PhD project (every year update of the TSP).

2. How self-reliant should I be?

You should consult your supervisor timely, as a rule of thumb at least every two weeks. The interaction decreases in the course of time, but mostly varies with the stages of your research. However, being self-reliant does not mean you have to solve your problems all by yourself. If you are stuck with something for a day, it is wise to find help from other PhD students or your supervisor.

3. What can I ask my supervisor?

Everything!

4. What skills should I have required at each stage of the project?

There is no general timeline for the skills to be obtained in the course of a PhD project. It is possible to regularly evaluate your skills with your supervisor, e.g. by discussing the progress after each submitted article. The initiative for these evaluations lies with you.

5. What skills should I have required at the end of the project?

Apart from a thesis, you should be able to design and carry out scientific studies independently, from writing a proposal to communicating your results in oral and written outlets. Independent is not synonymous to alone, by contrast, you should be able to involve experts for specific tasks as well. Furthermore, you should be able to help other PhD students and discuss your and their work together. During your annual talk, your supervisors will guide towards expectations and possibilities for you.

6 How do I know that I am performing well or not?

Ask feedback on a regular basis. A formal moment is the annual performance interview (see F8). Your daily supervisor(s) should be clear about their opinion on your performance.

7. How much of my own ideas can I put forward?

All ideas are welcome and encouraged, also to enhance discussion and further interaction with your supervisor(s). You are encouraged to discuss with your supervisor how open your project is to synergies (i.e. new projects) within the department, across RIBES or with external collaborators. If you are working on an externally funded project, your own ideas will have to be in synergy with the project obligations.

8. How am I evaluated?

PhD students are usually appointed for 4 years with a go/no go decision to be made in an evaluation interview after 1 year. The progress thereafter is assessed in **annual performance interviews**. Both you and your supervisors are responsible to plan these talks. To prepare for these interviews, make a list of products, plans, papers, courses attended/given, students supervised and related tasks. Beforehand, fill out the unofficial form of the department and the first part of the official form (both to be obtained from secretary) and send it to your supervisors. They use it to start the conversation and to identify discussion points. After the evaluation talk, fill out the rest of the official forms, have it checked and signed by your supervisors, and send it to the secretary. During the 3rd year talk, the focus is on discussing how to finalize the thesis within 4 years.

9. Is there room to talk about the process as well?

While the annual performance interviews are specifically to discuss progress on the contents, as well as the process, it is always possible to talk with your supervisor about how everything is going. Also, it is possible to plan extra regular talks about your performance and the interactions with the supervisors, e.g. every half year. We leave this up to the PhD student to request it.

G. Budget

1. Is it possible to spend part of my PhD abroad?

Yes, the department encourages PhD students to visit relevant groups abroad. If you are working on an externally funded project, your stay abroad will have to be in synergy with the project obligations.

2. What budget do I need for the stay abroad?

Costs for housing and transport may be reimbursed as a minimum. Depending on the project budget and additional grants awarded (Socrates, Erasmus and others to be consulted) other costs may be covered as well (see Appendix 1 for grant options). For more information, contact the International Office: <https://www.ru.nl/radboudinternational/english/phd-candidates/staff-mobility/outgoing-mobility-phds/>.

3. How much can I spend on courses, books, materials, congresses etc.

This depends on your needs and the resources available in the project/department, and is to be discussed with your supervisor before purchase or subscription.

H. Other

1. What should I do if my supervisors cannot solve my problems?

In some cases, it might be difficult to discuss your problems with your supervisor(s). You might consult another PhD student or another staff member you feel comfortable with. If no one at the department can help you out, you can consider external coaching, (<https://www.ru.nl/en/staff/services/development-and-career-path/personal-development>).

2. What should I do when I have a conflict with my supervisor?

When you cannot solve it directly with your supervisor, you can consider talking to your second supervisor, if you have one. Also, please consult other PhD students, they could advise you what to do.

Another option is to step to the department head or another permanent staff member, who you feel comfortable with. They are always open to help you solve the issue and to mediate, while keeping anything you said confidential if you want this.

If you do not feel comfortable discussing your conflict with a member of the department, you can contact a confidential advisor: <https://www.ru.nl/en/staff/services/guidance-advice-and-complaints/confidential-adviser-staff>

3. What should I do if I am discriminated, threatened, intimidated, bullied or experiencing any other type of physical or mental violence?

If possible, please report this to the head of the department, or another person of the permanent staff. If not, contact the official mediator, i.e. labour conflict advisor via

<https://www.ru.nl/en/staff/supervisors/during-work/conflicts-and-undesirable-behaviour>

Appendix 1. Travel grants

Inventory of travel grants for staff (PhD students, postdocs and permanent staff).
March 2022.

Link	Funder	For who	What for	Max funding in €	conditions	timing
1	RU	PhD students	travel and stay abroad for teaching, lectures, visit of congres, research	within EER: 400, outside EER: 700 euro	first check ERASMUS+; max 2 times per PhD period; toewijzing alleen als er nog voldoende budget is	apply min 2 wk in advance
2	Erasmus Plus equivalent;					
3	RU	Teaching staff	travel and stay; teaching outside Europa;	1000 euro	mimum 8 hours of teaching; part of teaching program of host institute; first check ERASMUS+ (see below)	apply min 2 wk in advance
4	Erasmus Plus equivalent; probably via RU	Teaching staff	id	id	id	
5	RU	Visiting staff	teaching from inside or outside EER	700 euro in EER, 1000 outside EER		apply min 2 wk in advance
6	Erasmus Plus	PhD students	work abroad (traineeship)	470 euro per month in low living cost countries; 520 in high living cost countries	Only Erasmus countries and partner countries; partner countries lower chance. Stay: 2-12 months	min 1 year in advance
7	Hugo de Vrie+E11+A10+A10:H12	PhD students or postdocs MSc	costs for research, symposia, educational projects	10.000 or more	Botany focus	6 weeks
8	Hugo de Vriesfonds	students	visit congres	500	Botany focus	also 6 weeks?
9	There is a great overview of grant opportunities for students AND PhDstudents at the website of Marjolijn Christianen, check that out!					

1. <https://www.radboudnet.nl/wiewatwaar/diensten-faciliteiten/diensten/io/radboud-internationaliseringstoelagen/toelagen/reisbeurs-uitgaande-phd/>
2. (probably via RU above)
3. <https://www.radboudnet.nl/wiewatwaar/diensten-faciliteiten/diensten/io/radboud-internationaliseringstoelagen/toelagen/reisbeurs-doceerverblijf-buiten-europa/>
4. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/individuals/staff-teaching/higher-education-teaching-staff>
5. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/individuals/staff-teaching/higher-education-teaching-staff>
6. <https://www.findaphd.com/funding/guides/erasmus-plus-phd-funding.aspx>
7. <https://www.hugodevriesfonds.nl/>
8. <https://www.hugodevriesfonds.nl/>
9. <http://penyu.nl/student-grant-opportunities/>