

Teaching time of PhD candidates - Faculty of Science

About this document

URL working draft	Teaching time of PhD candidates
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Document type	Faculty guideline
Last modified	8 May 2024
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Distribution	PhD coordinators, HRM, director Education, FB
Consolidated PDF versions	
<i>Version</i>	<i>Description</i>
16-05-2023	Version for assessment by HRM
10-10-2023	Version for assessment by PhD coordinators, HRM & director Education
23-01-2024	Revised version on basis input PhD coordinators, HRM, dean, and director Education
26-03-2024	Revised version on basis input heads of the departments, HRM, dean, and director Education
09-04-2024	Revised version on basis input heads of the departments
08-05-2024	First formal version, adopted by FB

Introduction

Teaching is a skill that PhD candidates need to acquire as academics, and is therefore recommendable as an integral part of PhD trajectories. By properly combining teaching with research practice, PhD candidates not only become better teachers, but also better researchers (Valentijn & Bovenschen, 2021). In addition, their chances to find a job inside, but also outside, academia increase after getting experience in teaching.

The teaching includes, but is not limited to, giving tutorials, practical classes, lectures, and providing support in writing theses and doing research in the context of student projects. Notably, as laid down in the [Faculty assessment policy](#) (2022), the PhD candidates are not qualified for final assessments; that needs to be done by a person with a PhD and a university teaching qualification (Dutch: *basiskwalificatie onderwijs, BKO*). In addition, they are not qualified to develop or provide independently an entire education module.

There are no central VU guidelines on the teaching time of PhD candidates yet. Most employed PhD candidates have some teaching responsibilities. However, the kind of teaching activities and the amount of time dedicated to teaching is not specified. In addition, this is not defined in the [collective labour agreement of Dutch Universities](#) (CAO). This faculty guideline on teaching time aims to clarify what PhD candidates with a three- or four-year employment contract and their supervisors can expect. This guideline unifies the time dedicated to teaching and the kind of teaching activities, limits differences between PhD candidates within and between departments, and keeps the teaching time limited, although some diversity will remain.

This guideline is not intended for external PhD candidates¹, although they are also encouraged to get some experience in teaching, for example by supervising students with their theses, for at least 3 EC as part of the Teaching and Supervision Plan.

This guideline is also not intended for junior lecturers that combine teaching with a PhD trajectory within a temporary employment contract of, in principle, six years. During this period, the junior lecturers are expected to obtain the BKO and successfully complete a doctoral program. The junior lecturers should dedicate 40% of their time to teaching, although temporary deviations are possible. For example: temporarily devoting more time to teaching, because of taking courses related to teaching, or, conversely, temporarily devoting more time to research to complete the PhD programme.

The teaching time of employed PhD candidates at different universities and at other faculties of the VU has been investigated for reference (see References and Background).

In some faculties of the VU, the teaching time of PhD candidates is defined (e.g. in [VU Graduate School of Social Sciences](#) and [Faculty of Law](#)).

In the VU Science Faculty, the time of the PhD candidates dedicated to teaching varies to great extent, and therefore an uniform guideline is desirable. [A survey among PhD candidates](#) of the Science Faculty in 2020 showed that 30% of the PhD candidates spent more than 20% of their time on teaching, and that an increase in the time spent on teaching was associated with lower levels of satisfaction on teaching

¹)~44% of the total number of PhD candidates at Science Faculty do not have an employment contract (Hora Finita data of 1-1-2024). These include PhD candidates with a scholarship, externally funded PhD candidates and external self-funded PhD candidates (UNL PhD candidate categories 2, 3 and 4).

time, but a higher level of satisfaction on teaching skills. A recent survey, held in 2023, indicated that the PhD candidates of the Science Faculty spend on average 7.8% of their time on supervising and 8.1% on teaching, amounting to 15,9% of their time. However, 36% and 33% of the PhD candidates do not spend any time on teaching or supervising, respectively. It is not clear whether these are external PhD candidates.

In some departments, there is a 15% of time requirement (with 4x1680 hours/year, this would be 1008 hours in total). At some departments, a part of the PhD candidates do not have to teach, for instance those with a 3-year funding from the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions of the EU and external PhD candidates.

Guideline on teaching time for PhD candidates

Each PhD candidate should have sufficient time to carry out research, participate in PhD training, and get experience in teaching, to develop the full breadth of academic skills. To express this in time distribution, a PhD candidate with a full-time four-year employment contract, amounting to a total of 6720 hours (=4 x 1680 hours a year) shall be entitled to spend:

- minimally 30 EC credits² to training (article 14.1, [VU doctorate regulations](#)) which equals about 0,13 FTE
- 0,12 FTE to maximally 0,15 FTE (1008 hours) to teaching³
- minimally 5712 hours for research which equals about 0,72 FTE

The teaching time includes the number of hours required for preparation, teaching, supervising, and helping with grading and testing. This includes courses, as well as providing support to Bachelor and Master students in writing theses and doing research. It is recommended to maintain balance between teaching in courses and supporting students with writing their thesis and doing research, to obtain experience in all these different teaching activities. In addition, it is advised to not support either Bachelor or Master students, but both groups of students, and limit the time dedicated to support students in writing theses to maximally 50% of the teaching time.

A shorter PhD track (e.g. an approved three-year contract) involves less time for research, while the norm of the minimum required credits for receiving training remains 30 EC. The teaching time is then proportionally limited to 0.15 FTE. Thus, in case of a PhD candidate with a 3-year contract, maximally 756 hours can be dedicated to teaching. It is, however, strongly recommended to fully or partially exempt PhD candidates with PhD tracks shorter than 4 years from teaching tasks concerning courses to compensate for the relative short PhD trajectory and, in case of partial exemption, limit the teaching tasks to providing support in writing theses and doing research to students.

² One EC is equivalent to a workload of 28 hours → 30 EC ~ 840 hours → 0,125 FTE.

³ A percentage of 15% teaching time is based on the so-called "[Kengetallen Universitair Onderzoek](#)" ¹ with a ratio for PhD candidates of 80% research and 20% teaching including time for training. Every PhD candidate is entitled to have at least 30 EC time for training and development, that is divided equally to research and teaching, which leaves ~72% for research and ~15% for teaching.

The teaching activities to be carried out by the PhD candidate are preferably agreed upon by the PhD candidate and supervisor(s) at least five months before the teaching is scheduled to start. Also the coordinator of the educational program may be involved, if required. This timing is standard for the faculty, and is needed for scheduling all those involved in a teaching module. It should be safeguarded that the duties suit the PhD candidate, and are compatible with her/his research as much as possible. Once the staffing of the teaching program has been established, adjustments may be made during the academic year, subject to a new round of consultations by the program coordinator. The teaching time may not be evenly distributed over the years. Preferably, during the first and the last six months of the project limited teaching activities should be planned. Yet, the teaching time should not exceed 25% in a year.

The teaching duties should be registered in detail in the Teaching and Supervision Plan (TSP) in Hora Finita with an indication of a maximal teaching time of 0.15 FTE. The teaching maximally contributes to 3 EC related to teaching (category B, general skills courses and activities, in TSP). In this case, a reflection report on the teaching activity, written by the PhD candidate, needs to be approved by the PhD coordinator.

The PhD candidates should receive additional guidance and supervision for their teaching duties. They should receive sufficient information from coordinators of educational programs or their supervisors. To secure the quality of education to the students, the PhD candidates should receive training before starting to teach. For this, they can join the VU [PhD teaching community](#) via Centre of Teaching and Learning (CTL). They can also follow courses, e.g. Start to teach', supplied by the [Centre for Teaching & Learning](#) to learn didactical skills. The teaching duties carried out by the PhD candidate are evaluated in the annual assessment conducted with the supervisor(s).

References and Background

A global inventory on teaching time of PhD candidates at different organizations in the Netherlands & literature:

[Uva:](#)

Only during the first and the last six months of the project no teaching activities should be planned. As an employed PhD candidate, most faculties will require you to teach over the course of your doctoral programme. The relevant standards will vary depending on the faculty, but should be no more than 0.1-0.2 FTE for a full-time, four-year doctoral programme.

[VU-Graduate School of Social Sciences:](#)

Out of a total of 6720 hours (4 x 1680 hours a year), 5% (336 hours) should be devoted to teaching. The standard distribution of teaching hours for a full-time four-year PhD employment contract is 0%, 10%, 10%, 0% in the consecutive four years. Supervising a Bachelor's or Master's thesis (governed by FSS Examination Board regulations) is regarded as teaching, even when the research carried out for the Bachelor's or Master's thesis is directly relevant to the PhD candidate's own research or specific area of expertise.

[VU-Faculty of law](#)

Maximally 15% teaching time. This is preferably concentrated in the middle years to keep the PhD candidate in the first and last year of the appointment as much as possible free of teaching obligations.

[Leiden University \(Humanities\):](#)

Employed PhD candidates are expected to teach in their second and third years, preferably not in the first and last years.

Contract PhD candidates can only teach if the conditions of the grant provider allow this. Please discuss this with your supervisor(s).

External PhD candidates are not allowed to teach, unless they have been appointed to do so by a separate teaching contract.

[Utrecht University \(Graduate School of Life Sciences\)](#)

PhD candidates without the employee status are not obliged to teach.

[Promovendi Netwerk Nederland \(PNN\):](#)

Within a four-year contract, a teaching time of between 10% and 20% of your working hours is considered the most common (PNN Employment Conditions Monitor).

[National PhD student survey 2021:](#)

-Nearly 75% of the PhD candidates is involved in teaching; for 40% this is part of their employment contract.

-Employed PhD candidates are most involved in teaching (51%).

[Floris Valentijn & Niels Bovenschen:](#) Onderwijs moet een essentieel onderdeel zijn van een promotietraject, 2021, Science Guide.