Supervisor – PhD candidate expectations

A PhD trajectory is a multi-year project that requires commitment from both the PhD candidate and the supervisor(s).
The supervisor has overall responsibility for the PhD trajectory and has specific duties pertaining to this role. Regulations related to completion of a PhD trajectory (i.e., graduation) are given by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and might deviate for Amsterdam UMC location VUmc. Supervisors and PhD candidates should be aware of the prevailing regulations at the applicable location.

In this document we describe what PhD candidates can expect from their supervisor(s), and what supervisors expect from their PhD candidates.

This document has been set up by Sophie van der Sluis (Center for Neurogenomics and Cognitive Research (CNCR), Department of Complex Trait Genetics), and is based on, inspired by, and in line with:

- The Amsterdam UMC Research Code (2022)
- The PhD Guide and PhD-supervisor guide of the Graduate School of Life Sciences of Utrecht University
- Expectations as phrased by the Sex-chromosome lab at Arizona State University (http://www.sexchrlab.org/lab#/expectations)
- The study "It takes two to tango" by H. van der Boom, G. Klabbers, K. Putnik, M. Woolderink, Maastricht, June 2013.
- Golden rules of PhD supervision, as formulated by Leiden University (2018) (https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/ul2staff/onderzoek/promoveren/golden-rules-phd-supervision)

Note that according to the PhD Education Guidelines such as formulated by the Faculty of Science, VU (2018):

- PhD candidates are viewed as full members of the research community; their education program represents a professionalization of their skills.

This document summarizes the expectations that the supervisors should have of these full members of the research community.

SUPERVISOR	PhD candidate
RESEARCH PROJECT AND SUPERVISION	
The research project	
Share the department-specific minimal requirements for a defendable thesis, and help formulate well-defined, realistic research plans to build towards this end goal. Provide/develop alternative plans if needed.	Plan your research and manage your projects adequately. Maintain a detailed log of your research projects, data, methods, and decisions using project-appropriate tools, like Github, Bitbucket, Snakemake, Elab or Evernote. The documentation should allow complete reproduction of results without additional instructions.
Discuss suitable methods and analysis plans, and help interpret results.	Follow instructions regarding the design and execution of the research. Prepare and run experiments and analyses. Interpret and present outcomes and results.

Be open about the uncertainties/risks of the project.	Be transparent about all aspects of your work. Promptly inform the supervisor if the planning or other aspects of the work are proving difficult to realize.
Take responsibility for the project: be up-to-date regarding your knowledge of theory and methodology, provide useful scientific input, and contribute your own expertise as well as your network's.	Take responsibility for the project: be up-to-date regarding your knowledge of theory and methodology.
Keep to agreements with other stakeholders in the research projects (or be open when circumstances have changed), while being an advocate for your PhD candidates' interests/needs.	Keep to agreements with other stakeholders in the research projects (or be open when circumstances have changed).
Contribute to structuring, writing, proof-reading and reviewing of manuscripts within a reasonable time-frame.	Write and submit manuscripts.
Timely discuss issues related to the publication of the research findings, including authorship order[1].	Timely discuss issues related to the publication of the research findings, including authorship order[1].
Support travel to at least one research meeting of 2 full days per year (note: Training & Supervision Plan states 4 EC required for research meetings).	Present a poster or talk of research progress at research meeting of at least 2 full days at least once a year (note: Training & Supervision Plan states 4 EC required for research meetings).
Provide adequate working conditions, including infrastructure.	Follow instructions regarding work organization, including working hours and presence on site (or discuss them openly).
Inform your PhD candidate about your different roles as a supervisor (e.g., coach, trainer, project leader, stakeholder), and be transparent when your personal aims and end goals do not completely coincide with those of the PhD candidate.	Be accountable and transparent.
Be aware of the "Netherlands code of conduct for research integrity" which can be found online[2].	Be aware of the "Netherlands code of conduct for research integrity" which can be found online[2].
Adjust the composition of the supervision team when necessary.	Show proper behavior and respect when interacting with research participants or handling animals.
Progress meetings	
Schedule regular (e.g. weekly, bi-weekly) progress meetings: your regular availability is essential to project progress. Frequency of meetings may need regular adjustment, depending on the stage/content of a project, and the needs/skills of the PhD candidate.	Take responsibility regarding the planning and success of progress meetings. Be open about the amount of supervision you need.
Prepare for progress meetings (e.g., read provided documents).	Prepare for progress meetings (e.g., make agenda), and make sure your supervisor can prepare too (e.g., provide relevant documents on time). Documenting progress meetings (e.g.,

	topics discussed, decisions made, next steps). can save a lot of time and misunderstanding.
Be approachable. Make agreements on e.g., the preferred method for PhD candidates to contact you (e.g., mail, Slack, come to office), and whether you expect them to send you reminders after a period of non-response.	Be available in the lab/office for a minimum agreed set of hours to facilitate interactions.
Schedule the mandatory 4-month, 9-month, and yearly performance appraisal interviews with the PhD candidate.	Be open about your uncertainties, dilemmas, and possible mistakes (making mistakes is not a problem, covering them up is).
When needed, be available for unplanned consultation within a reasonable time-frame.	Be aware of your supervisor's time constraints.
Be open and realistic about your expectations regarding e.g., project progress and development.	Be open and realistic about your progress, expectations and needs.
Research generally deals with uncertainties. Your views and opinions on the next best step in a project may change: acknowledge your changed views. Keep track of what you say and advise.	Be open about your progress. Progress meetings aim to discuss struggles, obstacles, questions, uncertainties and challenges: be open and clear about those.
Time and project management	
Planning research can be challenging and plans often need adjustment throughout a project. Realistic planning is essential for a PhD project.	Planning research can be challenging and plans often need adjustment throughout a project. Realistic planning is essential for a PhD project.
Fill-out the Training & Supervision Plan with your PhD candidate.	Fill-out the Training & Supervision Plan with your supervisor.
Stimulate the creation of a PhD Roadmap, i.e., overview and planning of the whole PhD project, including research activities, the mandatory 30EC of courses, conferences, and holidays.	Create a PhD Roadmap, i.e., overview and planning of your whole PhD, including research activities, the mandatory 30EC of courses, conferences, and holidays.
Be prepared to change the planning or the content of a project when necessary. Be open about this. Formulate short term as well as long term goals.	Keep track of how you spend your time and discuss planning regularly with your supervisor. Formulate short term as well as long term goals.
Make sure your PhD candidate knows what the minimum requirements are for graduation.	Make sure you are aware of the minimum requirements for graduation.
Feedback: giving and receiving	
Provide regular, constructive (positive and critical), respectfully formulated feedback. Address the work rather than the person, be specific, and provide manageable suggestions for improvement. Give room to the PhD to respond to the feedback.	Be open to receiving both positive and critical feedback, and use it to your advantage. Feedback is a prerequisite to your professional development and the advancement of your project. Feedback generally concerns your work, not your person. Actively ask for feedback to acquire your supervisor's thoughts and expectations (e.g. "Am I on the right track for this project?", "Do you have any advice on how to show the results better?")

Be aware and cautious of your wording and the timing of feedback, and of e.g. cultural variation in your group of supervisees.	If you experience feedback as unhelpful, reflect on it (with others), and discuss it with your supervisor in a professional manner.
See mistakes as an opportunity for improvement.	See mistakes as an opportunity for improvement.
Reflect (critically) on your own behavior and work as a researcher/supervisor.	Reflect (critically) on your own behavior and work as a researcher/PhD/supervisee.
Be open to, and ask for, constructive feedback from the PhD candidate. Your reaction to feedback impacts the openness of your relationship with your PhD candidate.	You can contribute to the supervision process by giving constructive and respectful feedback to your supervisors.
Team effort	
Science is often a team effort. Make sure you define the role of the PhD candidate, and the roles of the different supervisors, and act as a team for the PhD candidate.	Science is often a team effort. Make sure you are aware of your role and contribution to the team's progress and success.
If you supervise a team of PhD candidates, find the balance between the common good and their individual needs. Division of tasks within the team is your responsibility: you need to be a team player as well as a team builder.	Be willing to develop as a team player and contribute to the teams that you are part of: your project team, your department, your research institute, your graduate school.
Professional attitude	
Different needs and competencies of PhD candidates require different supervision strategies; adapt your supervision style to the needs of the PhD candidate.	Your supervisors come with their own personality and supervision style. Adapt to this style, or discuss aspects that do not fit you. Realize that different PhD candidates invite/require different supervision approaches.
Be aware of your role in creating and maintaining a professional environment. Friction within the PhD team can be discussed with an independent advisor, like a PhD candidate advisor, who is not involved in the project.	Be aware of your role in creating and maintaining a professional environment. Friction within the supervision team can be discussed with an independent advisor like a PhD candidate advisor.
Be aware of the hierarchical nature of the supervisor-supervisee relationship; invest in a safe environment and respect the social boundaries that characterize a professional relationship.	Keep to agreements and deadlines. Be open about progress, expectations, and obstacles/mistakes, and about experience/skills that need work.
Departmental research climate	
Attend regular meetings and encourage active participation of PhD candidates in the scientific discussion.	Attend regular meetings and participate actively in the scientific discussion.
Strive to answer relevant research questions through work of high theoretical and methodological quality.	Participate in general departmental responsibilities (e.g., teaching, intern supervision, maintenance common areas, organization lab outings/activities).
Create room for original thinking, innovation, and PhD candidates' own ideas, and open discussion of uncertainties, dilemmas, and mistakes.	Consult colleagues and seek out and utilize best practice information and expertise.

Have a good understanding of the current literature within the field.	Have a good understanding of the current literature within the field.
Be aware of research integrity standards and other regulations pertaining to the research project.	Be aware of research integrity standards and other regulations pertaining to the research project.
MOTIVATING COLLEAGUE-SHIP	
Display enthusiasm for research.	Display enthusiasm for your project.
Treat your PhD candidates and scientific colleagues with respect.	Treat your supervisor and scientific colleagues with respect.
Strive for high quality and celebrate milestones with your PhD candidates/team.	Strive for high quality and celebrate milestones with your colleagues.
Show interest in the work, success, and progress of all colleagues, your PhD candidates' in particular.	Show interest in the work, success, and progress of all colleagues.
Show interest in your colleagues' personal circumstances, your PhD candidates' in particular.	Show interest in your colleagues' personal circumstances.
Give PhD candidates room to develop their own ideas and plans within the constraints of the research project.	Be pro-active in developing your own ideas for your research project.
Support PhD candidates in designing and conducting experiments, but take the lead when the work exceeds the PhD candidates' capabilities or the practical (e.g., financial, time) limitations of the project.	Be a constructive team member, i.e., support and assist colleagues when needed (e.g., help with analyses, proof-read manuscripts) and communicates respectfully.
Encourage PhD candidates to make the best of themselves, but do not ask for results that are too ambitious to achieve.	Aim to make the best of yourself and make the best of the project.
Stimulate networking.	Understand your own role and responsibility as a team member.
Your dedication to and interest in the progress of the project is essential to the development and motivation of the PhD candidate.	PhD candidates are part of a larger academic community that can motivate and support them; they can contribute to this community by motivating and supporting others.
TRAINING, EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT	
Stimulate the development of academic skills through experience and courses.	Be eager to learn new things.
Be aware that your PhD candidates' doctoral training (e.g., graduate schools) comes with requirements and commitments that take time and need planning.	Be aware that your doctoral training (e.g., graduate school) comes with requirements and commitments that take time and need planning.
Graduate schools allow PhD candidates to build their own future network, independent of that of their supervisor.	Graduate schools allow PhD candidates to build their own future network, independent of that of their supervisor.
Be aware of the rules and regulations of your PhD candidates' graduate school, and the opportunities this school offers for professional development and support.	Be aware of the rules and regulations of your graduate school, and the opportunities this school offers for professional development and support.

Help to plan and choose educational opportunities that fit a specific PhD candidates' needs and wishes.	Be open to further development of research skills and scientific knowledge, both within and outside your research niche.
STRESSORS	
Be a role model for your PhD candidates with respect to work-life balance and stress management. Your work ethics are easily seen as the professional standard. Stimulate your PhD candidates to take breaks and set an example.	Scientific work is never finished. Learn to plan your work and work hours carefully so that you preserve time for other activities.
Be aware of signals that may indicate (too much) stress and be open to discuss (personal) matters and/or their effects on work.	Manage your stress levels and respect your boundaries. Discuss this with your colleagues: sharing experiences makes life as a PhD candidate more agreeable.
Be a coach when spirits are low.	If motivation is low, discuss this with colleagues and/or your supervisor. Many PhD candidates go through such stages; others may help put things into perspective.
Schedule regular check-ups (e.g., twice a year) to discuss the general wellbeing of the student in addition to research progress and planning.	Feel free to suggest changes if working conditions are not optimal for you.
Know where to refer to (e.g., PhD psychologist, VU confidentiality counsellor, PhD coordinator, PhD candidate advisor, second supervisor) for help and/or support.	Know where to go (e.g., PhD psychologist, VU confidentiality counsellor, PhD coordinator, PhD candidate advisor, second supervisor) for help and/or support.
FUTURE	
Encourage your PhD candidate to think about future career goals within or outside academia, and, where possible, assist in facilitating these goals.	Give your career after your PhD regular thought, and decide whether you want to share this with your supervisor.
Jobs in academia are rare and competition is fierce; many PhDs will continue a career outside academia. Discuss your PhD candidates' career wishes regularly and timely, to avoid a build-up of stress near the end.	Do not feel hesitant to discuss career options outside academia. Your supervisor is aware that a high percentage of PhD candidates will leave academia. Your supervisor can advise you on your options and chances.
Make your PhD candidate aware of different ways to explore the job market and make your own network available to your PhD candidate.	Visit career events to explore your options. Build your own network. Let the outside world know who you are (e.g., attend conferences, create a personal website, set-up profiles on twitter, google scholar, LinkedIn).
Send your PhD candidate to career days, as organized by e.g. their graduate school.	Attend career days, such as organized by e.g. your graduate school.

[1] **Guidelines on authorship**

https://hms.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/assets/Sites/Ombuds/files/AUTHORSHIP%20GUIDELINES.pdf
https://www.research-integrity.admin.cam.ac.uk/research-integrity/guidance/guidelines-authorship
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https://wordvice.com/journal-article-author-order/

[2] **Netherlands code of conduct for research integrity**
https://www.nwo.nl/en/netherlands-code-conduct-research-integrity