



Universiteit  
Utrecht

## **Call for proposals**

# **Science for Sustainability Graduate Programme**

**2023**

Utrecht, November 2022  
Utrecht University

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The [Science for Sustainability](#) (S4S) community was initiated in 2021 by researchers from the natural-science departments of the Faculty of Science of Utrecht University. S4S aims to be an inclusive and inspiring platform for interaction between researchers, lecturers, and students interested in solutions for sustainability issues. The S4S community strengthens the enormous potential of Utrecht University's sciences to address societal challenges in the field of sustainability. S4S functions as a new community within Utrecht University's strategic theme, [Pathways to Sustainability](#) (PtS).

In 2021, the Faculty of Science acknowledged the Science for Sustainability Graduate Programme (GPS4S), which aims to boost sustainability research within the Faculty of Science by funding PhD positions in the period 2022-2027. In this period, the GPS4S will train eight excellent PhD students in projects that:

- are proposed and entirely written by the (prospective) PhD students themselves, typically during the final year of their MSc program;
- are endorsed by two PIs from different departments who check the feasibility and the academic level of the proposal and who commit themselves to the supervision of the PhD student;
- are selected by an independent committee;
- have sustainability as an important aim or aspect, which must be clear from the submitted proposal;
- will lead to a PhD degree at Utrecht University in 4 years;
- demand commitment from the selected PhD candidates and their supervisors (i) to contribute actively to the S4S platform activities and (ii) to interact with other disciplines on sustainability-related activities, for example, in the context of PtS;
- demand commitment from the supervisors to participate in the acquisition of ideas and funds for the next phase of the GPS4S.

The PhD students in this program commit themselves to actively contributing to organizing at least one annual S4S workshop or another S4S activity. The PhD students and their supervisors also commit themselves to actively participating in S4S activities to optimize the synergy of the GPS4S and to broaden their knowledge across the spectrum of S4S fields and topics.

Teaching should be an integral part of the task of the PhD students; it is expected to involve the usual 10% of the time on an annual basis.

### 1.2 Available budget and timeline

A total budget of 2.3M is available for funding two groups, each consisting of four PhD students.



The first group was selected in June 2022. These four PhD students started in 2022 and are expected to finish in 2026.

The second group will start between September 1st and November 1st 2023, and is expected to finish in 2027. For this second round, the funding of the GPS4S will cover the costs for the first forty months of the PhD positions (from September – November 2023 until December 2026 – February 2027). The final eight months of the project in 2027 need to be co-financed. The intended supervisors are required to align with their departments on how to match the GPS4S funding by covering the costs in 2027 (corresponding to the final eight months of the PhD project). For more details, see 3.2.

### 1.3 Deadline for submission

For the second group starting between September 1st and November 1st 2023, the deadline for submission of proposals is **April 14th 2023, 17:00:00 hours CET**. The selection procedure will be concluded in June 2023.



## 2 Aim

The transition to a sustainable society is a challenge that, on the side of the sciences, requires both immediate and sustained research of new technologies, materials, processes, and methods. This graduate programme based on bottom-up PhD projects proposed by (recently graduated) MSc students will boost sustainability research within the Faculty of Science.

Besides, this programme is expected to strengthen the position of the Faculty of Science within UU's strategic theme Pathways to Sustainability (PtS) – Fundamentals for Sustainability (strategic plan 2022-2025). The structure of the graduate programme is such that it boosts collaborations beyond the boundaries of the departments of the Faculty of Science. The GPS4S should also facilitate further development of S4S, for instance, by catalyzing initiatives for new programs within the Faculty of Science.

### 3 Guidelines for applicants

#### 3.1 Who can apply?

Any student who is expected to graduate no later than August 2023 (or who recently graduated), who is interested in sustainability issues, and who has any connection to Utrecht University's sciences can apply (e.g. students who pursued an MSc programme at Utrecht University or who have followed (part) of their studies under the supervision of a Utrecht University staff member). Students and staff new to the sustainability field are also welcome to apply.

The proposal needs to be supported by two PIs from two different departments. A PI can only be involved in one proposal that will be submitted for the GPS4S 2023. The supervisors who are involved in one of the four projects that have been funded in the first round of the GPS4S cannot supervise a proposal that will be submitted for this second round of GPS4S.

Utrecht University aims to embed equality and diversity in all our activities so that we can provide an inclusive, welcoming and inspiring place to work and study. We welcome PhD students with a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives, and we especially encourage students from unrepresented groups to apply for a position.

#### 3.2 What can be applied for?

Funding can be requested for the first forty months of the salary costs of a PhD student (1.0fte). The PhD student will be appointed for forty-eight months in total (see table 1). The intended supervisors need to align with their departments on how to co-finance the remaining eight months. The departments to which the project supervisors are appointed will need to agree on the division of these costs and state this in a letter of commitment (see attachment 2).

The salary is in accordance with the CAO-NU salary tables applicable at the moment the grant is awarded (scale P according to the Collective Labour Agreement Dutch Universities CAO-NU-2022).

A maximum of 48K material budget per application can be applied for; specifications are required in the proposal.

The funding does not include overheads.

	<b>2023</b> <i>4 months Sep – Dec</i>	<b>2024</b> <i>12 months</i>	<b>2025</b> <i>12 months</i>	<b>2026</b> <i>12 months</i>	<b>2027</b> <i>8 months Jan – Aug</i>
<b>Salary costs PhD-student</b>	S4S Graduate Programme	S4S Graduate Programme	S4S Graduate Programme	S4S Graduate Programme	Co-financing



<b>Material budget</b>	A maximum of €48.000 for the whole PhD project can be applied for within the S4S Graduate Programme.
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Table 1: Overview of the funding in the S4S Graduate Programme

### 3.3 Preparing and submitting an application

#### 1. Fill in the proposal template.

[Download](#) or see attachment 1.

#### 2. Complete the proposal. Make sure to include the following:

##### 1) The support letters of the supervisors

All proposals need to be supported by two PIs. The two supervising PIs must be affiliated with research groups of different departments of the Faculty of Science of Utrecht University. It is also possible to have one PI from the Faculty of Science and one from another faculty of Utrecht University. A PI can only be involved in one proposal that is to be submitted to the GPS4S 2023. The supervisors who are involved in one of the four projects that have been funded in the first round of the GPS4S cannot supervise a proposal that will be submitted for the second round of GPS4S.

##### 2) Letter of commitment for the co-funding ([Download](#) or see attachment 2)

A letter of commitment needs to be attached to the application. In the letter of commitment, the departments to which the project supervisors are appointed commit to cover the salary costs of the PhD candidate in 2027 (the final eight months).

##### 3) Your CV

#### 3. Proposals are to be submitted as a pdf file and should be submitted before the deadline by email to [a.f.nelissen@uu.nl](mailto:a.f.nelissen@uu.nl).

### 3.4 When and where can applications be submitted?

The deadline for submission of proposals is **14 April 2023**, 17:00:00 hours CET. Applications (in pdf format) can be submitted by email to Anne Nelissen, [a.f.nelissen@uu.nl](mailto:a.f.nelissen@uu.nl).

### 3.5 Conditions on granting

Candidates and their supervisors will be informed immediately after the selection procedure has been finalized. Acceptance of a successful proposal is to take place within two weeks after the offer and includes acceptance of both the specific terms (starting date, activities within S4S) and the general ones for PhD students in the specific research group or institute.

## 4 Assessment procedure

### 4.1 Procedure

The quality of the proposals will be assessed by a committee consisting of independent scientists. Based on the assessment, the committee will provide their advice to the dean of the Faculty of Science.

#### 4.1.1 Selection Committee

The selection committee, appointed by the dean, will cover the spectrum of sustainability-related research activities in the Faculty of Science as broadly as possible. PIs who are foreseen as a supervisor of a submitted proposal cannot be a member of the selection committee.

#### 4.1.2 Timetable

November 2022	The call for proposals is published.
Before <b>14 April 2023</b> , 17:00:00 hours CET.	Submission of the application.
April/May 2023	Assessment of the applications by the selection committee, possibly including interviews with (some of the) candidates
May/June 2023	Selection of four projects; informing candidates.
September 1 <sup>st</sup> – November 1 <sup>st</sup> 2023	Start of the four selected projects.

### 4.2 Criteria

The quality of the research proposal is assessed based on the following criteria:

#### 1. Scientific excellence of the PhD candidate (30%)

The following indicators will be considered for the assessment:

- cv of the candidate
  - i. Academic qualifications, including grades;
  - ii. Potential as a researcher;
  - iii. Demonstrated motivation and capacity for doing research related to sustainability. Students new to the field of sustainability are also welcome to apply.
- Match of the profile of the candidate with the supervisors as indicated in the designated section of the proposal

#### 2. Scientific excellence of the research proposal (50%)

The following indicators will be considered for the assessment (in arbitrary order):

- originality, novelty, and feasibility of the proposed project;
- focus on the natural-science components of the proposed project;
- the interdisciplinary focus of the project.





**3. Relevance for sustainability (20%)**

- Impact on sustainability and added value of this project for Pathways to Sustainability and/or Science for Sustainability, as indicated in the designated sections of the proposal (e.g. expanding on the development of relevant technology and methods, or by developing new knowledge that can be expected to lead to future sustainable technology and methods). New or unusual collaborations on sustainability involving groups that have been weakly linked to the theme are valued equally to proposals from groups with a long-standing track record in sustainability research. Proposals linking groups from these two categories may bring considerable added value.
- Sustainability decisions for the proposed research itself; decisions on how this research can be done most sustainably.



## **5 Contact details**

For questions about this call for proposals, please contact Anne Nelissen, [a.f.nelissen@uu.nl](mailto:a.f.nelissen@uu.nl).



## Attachment 1: Proposal template GPS4S 2023

Download the Proposal template in Word format [here](#).

### 1. Basic Details

#### 1.1 Project

Project title:

Abstract (max 200 words):

#### 1.2 Details of applicant

Title(s), initial(s), name:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Master's program, University:

(Expected) graduation date:

#### 1.3 Details of supervising PI's

##### First supervisor

Title(s), initial(s), name:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Main affiliation (institute/department):

##### Second supervisor

Title(s), initial(s), name:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Main affiliation (institute/department):

In case neither of the PI's will be promotor:

##### Intended promotor:

Title(s), initial(s), name:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Main affiliation (institute/department):

#### ***Please attach the support letter of your supervisors to the application.***

The support letter should state that the PI's support the project, agree to be involved in the project, and allow the candidate access to the research facilities of their research groups.



## 2. Project Proposal

### 2.1 Project

#### **Description of the proposed research**

*Provide a well-motivated project description that is understandable for a broad spectrum of natural scientists but also includes the essential details for specialists. Make sure you include:*

- *the overall aim, objectives, background, relevance and key questions;*
- *the methods and techniques that will be used in the proposed research and discuss their applicability and availability;*
- *future prospects and the impact on sustainability;*
- *a motivation why the candidate and the two PI's are a good (or even optimal) match;*
- *a (strategic) description of the added value of this project for [Pathways to Sustainability \(PtS\)](#) and/or Science for Sustainability;*
- *a sustainability plan for the proposed research .*

*Use no more than 2000 words excluding literature references.*

### 2.2 Budget

#### **Specification of requested material budget**

*Specify the requested material budget and give a rough indication of the financial planning of the project.*

## 3. Attachments

Please include the following attachments:

- Your CV (including grades);
- The two letters of the PI's;
- Letter of Commitment.



## Attachment 2: Letter of commitment template GPS4S 2023

Download the template in Word format [here](#).

To: Prof. dr. Isabel Arends, Faculty of Science

Subject: Letter of commitment to "Science for Sustainability Graduate Programme 2023"

<place, date>

Dear prof. dr. Arends,

With this letter,

- <name of the department> commits itself to its own investment that consists of <percentage of> the salary costs of the final eight months of the PhD-student (January – August 2027 / February – September 2027 / March – November 2027)

and

- <name of the department> commits itself to its own investment that consists of <percentage of> the salary costs of the final eight months of the PhD-student (January – August 2027 / February – September 2027 / March – November 2027).

Together, <name of the department> and <name of the department> will cover 100% the salary costs of the PhD-student for the final eight months of the project.

Yours sincerely,

<signature>

<name>

Head of the <name of the department>

and

<signature>

<name>

Head of the <name of the department>