

Policy plan PhD Network Netherlands

This is the new policy plan of the PhD Network Netherlands. When writing this plan at the end of 2019, we tried not only to look ahead to the coming year, but also to establish a vision for the longer term.

Much has happened within PNN over the past year. For example, we regularly spoke out against the PhD bursary students experiment and its interim evaluation, drew attention to the invisibility of the external PhD candidates and made our voice heard in collective bargaining negotiations and cutbacks in education and research. However, there is still plenty to improve in all these areas for PhD's in the Netherlands.

To ensure the (long term) vision of PNN is more clear, we have established three focal points that are inextricably linked to PNN. Furthermore, problems, points of view and goals have been formulated for each portfolio, which will be further explained later on in this document.

PNN is also working on internal professionalization. For example, from 2020 on, PNN will receive structural financial support from the VSNU, which is necessary to keep PNN up and running. This concerns both budget support and compensation for the work of the board members. With this structural support it is possible to continue existing projects, but also to free up manpower for new plans and to better respond to problems that need to be tackled ad hoc. In addition, a board member has been appointed who will be particularly concerned with communication. In this way PNN wants to increase its visibility to partners, but more important the PhD's we are representing!

We hope that after reading this document, you have gained a sufficient picture of the plans that PNN has in mind for the coming period. We look forward to the coming years, hope for fruitful cooperation with our partners and to be able to do a lot for those we try to represent, the PhD's in the Netherlands.

Lucille Mattijssen

President PhD Network Netherlands

Focus points

The focus points below are the issues that PNN will be working on in the coming period.

1. Investing in science is investing in PhD's

- PhD's are an important basis for science in the Netherlands. By investing in PhD's, you invest directly in Dutch science.
- A doctorate is work and for that reason PhD's must be treated as employees. PhD's are responsible for a large part of the research conducted in the Netherlands and must be rewarded for this. You retain and attract talented young researchers through attractive employment conditions. This improves the quality of research.
- Investing in young researchers does not stop with investing in research. Universities must commit to the broader development and career opportunities of PhD's. In this way, society outside the academy can also benefit from the knowledge and skills of these scientists.

2. PhD trajectory possible and feasible for everyone

- Doing research and working at the academy must be possible for everyone regardless of gender, orientation, ethnicity or health. Universities are committed to a diverse group of scientists to serve as an example and to be a role model for an equally diverse group of Dutch people.
- Moreover, these researchers must be given the space to grow in what they distinguish themselves to promote diversity outside of science. There must be a proper balance between workload and workability in order to be able to optimize the creativity required for science. PhD's must receive the guidance that enables them to achieve their final goals. This guidance must therefore be offered individually and tailor-made.
- PhD's are at the bottom of the hierarchy within the university and are therefore by definition in an unequal balance of power. This makes PhD's vulnerable as a group. Universities and promoters must be aware of these relationships and ensure that PhD's are not affected negatively.

3. Future-proof trajectory

- Science is full of perverse incentives with a strong focus on output standards, such as the number of publications, the number of citations and the amount of scholarships that have been collected. This creates high pressure in all ranks of science and ensures an unsafe working environment, especially for PhD's. PNN wants a wider system in which all activities are included in the assessment of scientists and PhD's. There should also be recognition for teaching and peer reviewing. Feedback should not only be given top-down, but bottom-up must also be possible, so that misconduct can be raised in higher ranks.
- The promotion premium that universities receive for each dissertation delivered allows them to earn on external PhDs and international scholarship PhDs. PhD research may not be a revenue model. The ambition to deliver more PhDs must be accompanied by more investment in PhD's and must not be at the expense of the employment conditions of PhD's.

PNN Themes policy plan

PNN works with themes, each with its own board member who is primarily responsible for the theme. The plans below relate to the long-term vision that we have in mind within PNN regarding these themes.

Labour conditions

PNN believes that PhDs are employees who do a large proportion of Dutch research and are at the same time in training. This means that good working conditions are crucial to bring this special process to a successful conclusion. Therefore, it is important that PNN remains involved in collective bargaining. In addition, PNN aims at increasing awareness amongst PhDs about their rights and obligations through Know Your Rights meetings throughout the country. In collaboration with the trade unions, a flyer and a website environment are being developed on which the existing employment conditions are discussed. The aim here is to not only provide information for employee PhDs, for whom the rights are most clearly defined in the collective labor agreements, but also for other types of PhDs, such as scholarship PhDs. This is a vulnerable group that, due to its precarious position, often does not get much attention. Moreover, when it comes to employment conditions, they often end between regulations.

External PhD candidates

External PhDs make up a large proportion of PhDs in the Netherlands, but they are much less visible than PhDs with a university appointment. Moreover, it is a very diverse group, working under various kinds of arrangements, which means that the problems they encounter are diverse, as far as they are known at all. The aim of this portfolio is to identify within one year how many external PhDs there are in the Netherlands, what kind of variation exists within this group, what arrangements are set up and what their needs / problems are. Subsequently, efforts will be made to expand the existing focus group of external PhDs into a separate External PhD network which can function as a connecting factor between external PhDs. Within this network, external PhDs can exchange knowledge within a virtual meeting platform, but also during meetups.

Diversity

In the past year, provocative reports were issued in which the academy was presented the facts that abuse of power and harassment are no exception within the walls of the university. The VSNU has taken up the challenge to further investigate these problems and PNN is happy to support the most vulnerable group: the PhDs. First and foremost, greater awareness should be created, not only of the major excesses, but also of how constant small behaviors can lead to an unsustainable situation. This requires more data on micro-aggression and diversity / equality among PhDs and we will have to make our voices heard more clearly, together with other scientific role models.

International PhD candidates

In the Dutch academy, an increasing number of non-Dutch PhDs are working on their PhD trajectory. Although this benefits diversity, the circumstances in which these groups reside in the Netherlands are sometimes far from positive. Terms such as the "PhD factory" have been

coined in the past year. As PNN, we oppose such practices: we believe that, if you do your PhD in the Netherlands, you do so according to Dutch standards. We are aware that this can lead to a decrease in the number of international PhDs, but we prefer to invest in the quality of their promotions. PNN will first of all give more visibility to the situation of these PhDs and then enter into a discussion with universities about what is needed to give this group a stable basis.

Quality

Within the academy there is an increasing awareness that appreciating science should not only be expressed in quantity and impact factor, but that issues such as education and leadership are also necessary for the development of the new generation of scientists. The VSNU and NWO are currently working on a new framework of recognition and rewards. PNN strives to remain closely involved in these developments and to ensure that the voice of PhDs is included.

High-quality research can best be provided by PhDs who have the freedom to be creative. A good balance between workload and recreation is essential for this. There are currently many initiatives going on around mental health issues and burn-out complaints from academics at the local level. For now, PNN does not aim to take action at national level, but will support local initiatives and offer a platform where best practices in this area can be shared.

Career

PNN wants to support young researchers who will not work in academia after completing their PhD, but want to use their knowledge and skills in other areas of society. The possibilities for doing so should be further explored during the PhD trajectory and broadening in the form of internships should be encouraged. To this end, PNN already has contacts with NWO and Academic Transfer, among others. PNN does not see it as its task to actively offer internships, but it does want to look at how it can facilitate lowering the boundaries for PhDs who want to do an internship during their PhD trajectory.

Open science

Open science is a development within science that is increasingly growing. As PNN, we want to remain closely connected and involved in this development. PNN will facilitate representation in existing networks to ensure that young researchers have a voice. At the same time, it must be clear what PhDs think is important in this regard and we will therefore strive to stimulate contact by organizing focus groups.

PhD Bursary students

The PhD bursary students experiment is fueled by the fundamental focus that PNN expresses regarding the rights of PhD students. For that reason, PNN continues to keep a close eye on developments in this area and cooperates with all parties that are also concerned with this vulnerable group of PhDs.

UMC PhD candidates

The PhDs at the UMCs form a separate group in the Netherlands. They have their own collective labor agreement and often also have clinical obligations during their trajectory. The National Consultation Working Group UMC PhDs (LOUP) is a separate working group in which specific problems for this group are discussed. Work will be done to achieve more equality of

appointments within the UMCs, not only in terms of salary scale, but also in secondary conditions. The promotion regulations differ greatly per UMC, which means that the titles achieved are hardly comparable. For PhDs working in a peripheral hospital, there is often no clarity about the position in the collective labour agreement at all. The aim is therefore to get a better picture of this group and to include tailor-made conditions for them. The LOUP is also setting up a UMC-specific Know Your Rights meeting, during which UMC PhDs are informed about their rights and obligations.