



PNN PhD Survey

Asking the relevant questions

Collective labour agreement

Promovendi Netwerk Nederland

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Contents

Summary	2
Recommendations	3
Samenvatting	4
Aanbevelingen	5
Introduction	6
Methodology.....	6
Results	7
Knowledge of PhD-specific clauses	7
Pregnancy leave	8
Parental leave.....	9
Sick leave	11
Internships.....	13
Employee representation	15

Summary

- Many employee PhDs at universities do not know about the PhD-specific clauses in the collective labour agreement.
 - 63.9% of the (non-male) PhDs know that they get an extension of their contract for the duration of their pregnancy leave
 - 35.9% of the PhDs know that they get an extension of their contract for the duration of their parental leave
 - 29.3% of the PhDs know that they can get an extension of their contract if they have been sick for more than eight weeks
 - 25.4% of the PhDs know that they can get an extension of their contract when they participate in employee representation
 - 8.6% of the PhDs know that they can get an extension of their contract if they do an internship.
- The majority of the PhDs who had taken pregnancy leave had gotten an extension of their contract (77.4%). 12.9% still had to arrange the extension.
- Half of the PhDs who had taken parental leave got a contract extension. 22.7% is still arranging this, 13.6% did not know this was a possibility.
- 7% of the PhDs who had not taken parental leave indicated that they would have liked to take on parental leave. They often did not because they feared they would not be able to finish their project on time, because they did not know this was a possibility or because they feared this would impact their future career. A handful of PhDs had even been discouraged to take on parental leave.
- 16.8% of the PhDs who had been sick for more than eight weeks got an extension of their contract. 24% indicated they were still in the process of asking. 9.3% of the PhDs who asked for an extension did not get an extension: they were often told this was not possible or that there was no funding for extensions. 8% of the PhDs had been discouraged to even ask for an extension, often being told that it was not possible. 26.7% did not know that an extension was possible.
- The PhDs who did an internship mostly did not know they could get an extension of their contract for that (57.5%). 23.1% of the PhDs got an extension of their contracts. The PhDs who did not do an internship, but would (maybe) have liked to do an internship, had not done so because they did not know this was a possibility or feared that they would not be able to finish their project in time. 4.1% of the PhDs were discouraged to do an internship, mostly by supervisors who prioritized the project or did not think an internship would be useful.
- Slightly more than half of the PhDs who participated in employee representation did not know they could get a contract extension for this (51.9%). PhDs also often indicated that their representation work did not fall under the clause in the collective labour agreement, and therefore could not get an extension. This was often the case for PhDs who participated in a PhD council. PhDs who did not participate in employee representation, but would have liked to, often did not because they feared they could not finish their project in time or because there were no positions available. 4.8% of the PhDs was discouraged to participate in employee representation, often by supervisors who feared this would delay their trajectory.

Recommendations

- Change the optional clauses in the collective labour agreement into obliged clauses. There is a range of clauses that offer loopholes: universities *can* offer extension in said cases, but are not obliged to do so. This is the case for sick leave, employee representation, and internships. The survey shows that PhDs often do not get contract extensions in such cases, and confirms the image PNN already had based on the questions we receive from individual PhDs. PNN is often contacted by PhDs who come across this when they ask for extensions of their contracts. For instance, 39% of the questions PNN received in 2020 so far were about extensions in the case of sick leave. In many cases, PhDs are refused an extension. All of the people involved in the collective bargaining process should therefore bear in mind that even when something is adapted in the final agreement, institutions will use loopholes whenever possible.
- All stakeholders should take an active role in promoting existing rights for PhDs. For the first time, this survey has shown the limited level of awareness amongst PhDs regarding their knowledge of the PhD-specific clauses in the collective labour agreement. There are signs that the survey even put some PhDs on the track to actually put these rights to good use in their situation. This knowledge should be much more widespread than currently is the case. Institutions, graduate schools, and PhD councils should play a prominent role in the dissemination of what these rights are. PNN has set an example for this with recurring Know Your Rights events throughout universities in the Netherlands and will continue to do so.
- Graduate schools should proactively motivate and stimulate PhDs to pursue their own plans. The results in this survey show that some supervisors vehemently discourage PhDs to broaden their horizon, dissuading them to participate in employee representation and to do internships. Supervisors have a role in shaping the PhD trajectory, but it is up to the PhD to shape her/his career according to her/his wishes for the future.

Samenvatting

- Promovendi zijn overwegend slecht op de hoogte van de clausules die specifiek voor hen bedoeld zijn in de cao.
 - 63,9% van de (niet-mannelijke) promovendi weet dat ze een verlenging van hun contract krijgen voor de duur van hun zwangerschapsverlof
 - 35,9% van de promovendi weet dat ze een verlenging van hun contract krijgen voor de duur van hun ouderschapsverlof
 - 29,3% van de promovendi weet dat ze een verlenging van hun contract kunnen krijgen als ze langer dan acht weken ziek zijn.
 - 25,4% van de promovendi weet dat ze een verlenging van hun contract kunnen krijgen wanneer ze vertegenwoordigingswerk doen
 - 8,6% van de promovendi weet dat ze een verlenging van hun contract kunnen krijgen als ze een stage hebben gelopen.
- Het merendeel van promovendi die zwangerschapsverlof opnamen kregen een verlenging van hun contract (77,4%). 12,9% moest deze verlenging nog regelen.
- De helft van de promovendi die ouderschapsverlof hadden opgenomen kreeg een contractverlenging. 22,7% probeert dit nog steeds te regelen, 13,6% wist niet dat dit mogelijk was.
- 7% van de promovendi die geen ouderschapsverlof hadden opgenomen, gaf aan dat ze dat wel graag hadden gedaan. Vaak deden ze dat niet uit vrees dat ze hun promotie niet op tijd zouden kunnen afronden, omdat ze niet wisten dat dit een mogelijkheid was of omdat ze vreesden dat dit hun toekomstige carrière zou beïnvloeden. Een aantal promovendi werd zelfs actief ontmoedigd om ouderschapsverlof op te nemen.
- 16,8% van de promovendi die meer dan acht weken ziek waren kregen een verlenging van hun contract. 24% gaf aan dat ze nog bezig waren met het aanvragen van verlenging. 9,3% van de promovendi die een verlenging vroegen, kregen die niet: vaak werd hen verteld dat dit niet mogelijk was of dat er geen financiering bestond voor verlengingen. 8% van de promovendi werd actief ontmoedigd om een verlenging aan te vragen, met als reden dat dit geen optie was. 26,7% wist niet dat een verlenging mogelijk was.
- Promovendi die een stage hebben gelopen wisten meestal niet dat ze daarvoor een verlenging van hun contract konden krijgen (57,5%). 23,1% van de promovendi kreeg contractverlenging. De promovendi die geen stage hadden gelopen, maar dit (misschien) wel hadden willen doen, hebben dit niet gedaan omdat ze niet wisten dat dit een mogelijkheid was of vreesden dat ze hun promotie niet op tijd zouden kunnen afronden. 4,1% van de promovendi werd ontmoedigd om stage te lopen, meestal door begeleiders die het promotietraject lieten prevaleren, of uitspraken dat ze het nut van een stage niet inzagen.
- Iets meer dan de helft van de promovendi met vertegenwoordigingstaken wist niet dat ze daarvoor een verlenging konden krijgen (51,9%). Promovendi gaven ook vaak aan dat hun vertegenwoordigingswerk niet onder de clausule in de cao viel, en om die reden geen verlengingsmogelijkheid bood. Dit was vaak het geval voor promovendi die deelnamen aan een promovendivertegenwoordiging. Promovendi die niet deelnamen aan werknemersvertegenwoordiging, maar dat wel hadden willen doen, deden dat vaak niet uit vrees dat ze hun promotie niet tijdig af zouden kunnen ronden, of omdat er geen functies beschikbaar waren. 4,8% van de promovendi werd zelfs actief ontmoedigd, vaak door begeleiders die vreesden dat dit het promotietraject zou vertragen.

Aanbevelingen

- Verander de optionele clausules in de cao in vereiste clausules. Er is een aantal clausules dat mazen creëert: universiteiten *kunnen* verlengingen aanbieden in die gevallen, maar zijn niet verplicht om dat te doen. Dit geldt voor verlenging bij ziekte, vertegenwoordiging en stages. De survey laat zien dat promovendi in deze gevallen vaak geen verlenging krijgen, en bevestigt het beeld dat PNN al had op basis van de vragen van promovendi die bij ons binnenkomen. PNN krijgt vaak vragen van promovendi die hier tegenaanlopen wanneer zij om verlengingen vragen. Bijvoorbeeld, 39% van de vragen die PNN tot nu toe heeft gekregen in 2020 ging over verlengingen bij ziekte. In veel gevallen kregen de promovendi geen verlenging. Alle partijen die betrokken zijn bij de cao-onderhandelingen zouden er daarom rekening mee moeten houden dat, zelfs wanneer iets wordt aangepast in de definitieve overeenkomst, instellingen alle mazen zullen gebruiken die de cao hen toestaat.
- Alle belanghebbenden zouden een actieve rol moeten innemen om de bestaande rechten van promovendi te promoten. Deze survey laat voor het eerst zien dat promovendi heel weinig kennis hebben van promovendi-clausules in de cao. Er zijn tekenen dat deze survey sommige promovendi zelfs op het juiste pad heeft gezet om in hun situatie gebruik te maken van hun rechten. Deze kennis zou dus verder verspreid moeten worden dan nu het geval is. Instellingen, Graduate schools en promovendivertegenwoordigingen zouden een prominente rol kunnen spelen in het informeren over de rechten van promovendi. PNN heeft hierin het goede voorbeeld gegeven met terugkerende “Know your rights” presentaties op verschillende universiteiten in Nederland en zal hier ook in de toekomst mee doorgaan.
- Graduate schools zouden promovendi proactief moeten motiveren en stimuleren om hun eigen plan te trekken. De resultaten in de survey laten zien dat sommige begeleiders hun promovendi sterk ontmoedigen om hun horizon te verbreden, en ontraden hen om deel te nemen in werknemersvertegenwoordiging of stages te open. Begeleiders hebben een rol in het vormgeven van het promotietraject, maar het is aan de promovendus zelf om zijn/haar carrière vorm te geven naar zijn/haar plannen voor de toekomst.

Introduction

The collective labour agreement for Dutch universities contains several clauses specifically for PhDs, for instance stating that PhD contracts can be extended for the duration of pregnancy leave, parental leave or sickness leave. However, some of these clauses offer loopholes: universities *can* offer extension, but do not have to. PNN is often contacted by PhDs who come across this when they ask for extensions of their contracts: in many cases, they are refused an extension.

To get more insights in the extent to which this happens, we included a section in the PNN PhD survey asking employee PhDs at universities about their knowledge of and experiences with these clauses. We specifically asked PhDs about the clauses concerning pregnancy leave, parental leave, internships, employee representation and sickness leave.

Methodology

The questions about the clauses in the collective labour agreement were asked to all employee PhDs at universities. For the other types of PhDs, these clauses, or the entire collective labour agreement, are not applicable. We present the results only for PhDs who fully completed the survey. More information about the response rate and the completion criterion can be found in the [PNN Survey report on Survey information, demographics and COVID-19](#).

The methodologies of the substantive questions will be discussed in the results section.

Results

Knowledge of PhD-specific clauses

We asked all employee PhDs the following questions concerning the PhD-specific clauses in the collective labour agreement:

- Did you know that, if you ask for it, your contract has to be extended with the duration of your pregnancy leave?
- Did you know that, if you ask for it, your contract has to be extended with the duration of your parental leave? (This regulation has been in effect since July 1st 2018. For any parental leave taken before July 1st 2018, this arrangement does not hold.)
- Did you know that if you want to do an internship, your contract can be extended for the duration of your internship?
- Did you know that your contract can be extended if you participate in any form of official employee representation? (For instance: university council, work as a union representative (sometimes work for a PhD council))
- Did you know that your contract can be extended if you take on sick leave for more than 8 weeks?

The first question concerning pregnancy leave was only asked to PhDs who indicated that they were not male. The PhDs could respond with “yes” or “no”. The responses to these questions can be found in figure 1.

The results show that of all clauses, the extension for pregnancy leave is most well-known (63.9%) amongst PhDs for whom the clause is relevant. However, all other clauses are much less known by PhDs: 35.9% know about the extension option for parental leave, 29.3% know about the extension possibility for sick leave, and 25.4% of the PhDs know about the extension for employee representation. The least well-known clause is the clause concerning extensions for internships: only 8.6% of the PhDs know about this clause.

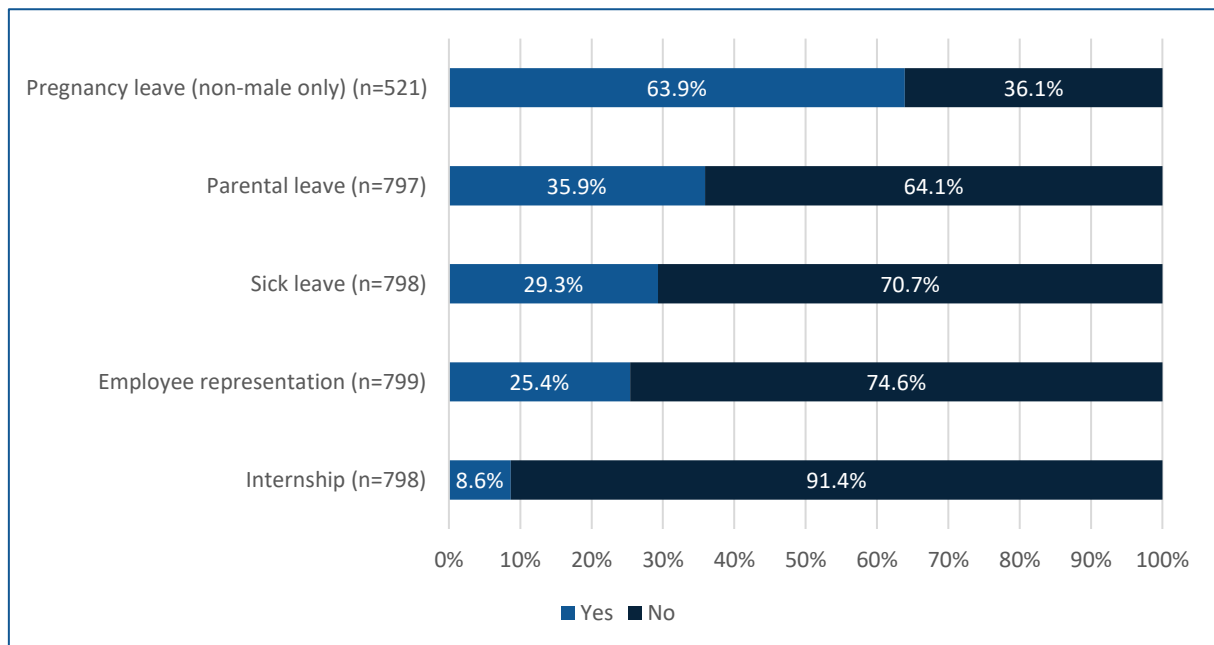


Figure 1: Responses to the questions regarding the knowledge of the PhD-specific clauses in the collective labour agreement of Dutch Universities.

Pregnancy leave

We asked all non-male PhDs whether they had taken pregnancy leave during their PhD trajectory. This was the case for 6.2% of these PhDs (n=32). These PhDs were subsequently asked whether they asked their employer/supervisor for a contract extension to compensate for their pregnancy leave (n=31). We gave the following options in advance:

1. Yes, and my contract was extended
2. Yes, but my contract was not extended
3. No, I did not want a contract extension
4. No, I did not know this was a possibility
5. No, I was discouraged to ask for contract extension
6. Other, namely.

However, only three of these options were selected in the end, namely 1, 2 and 6. Looking at the answers given with the option “Other, namely”, we saw some recurring patterns, and therefore decided to code these open answers manually and to depict them graphically as well.

The responses to the question can be found in figure 2. The large majority of PhDs (77.4%) asked for a contract extension and got one too. Four PhDs indicated that they are still looking into arranging the extension for their pregnancy leave. One PhD indicated that she asked for a contract extension, but did not get one. Another PhD did get some compensation, but was not fully compensated. The final one got another form of compensation.

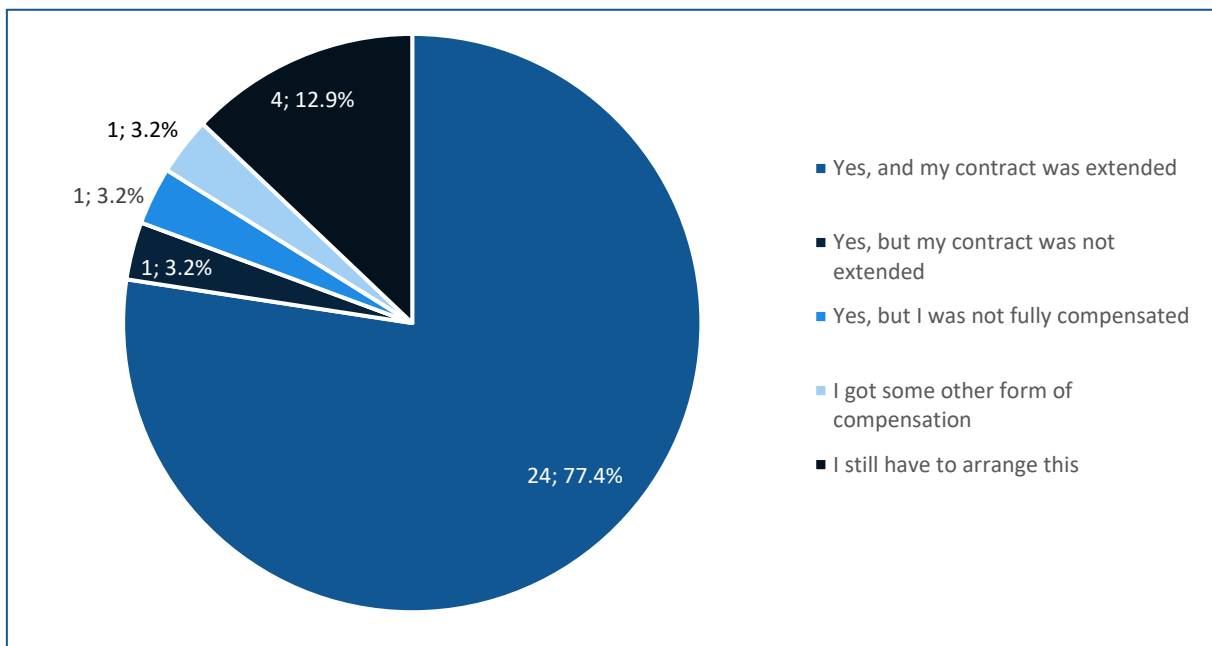


Figure 2: Responses to the question: “Did you ask your employer/supervisor for a contract extension to compensate for your pregnancy leave?” (n=31).

Parental leave

We asked all PhDs whether they had taken parental leave during their PhD project, but after July 1st 2018 (n=800). The PhDs could choose between “yes”, “no” and “not applicable”. 2.9% of the PhDs indicated that they had taken parental leave in that period, 46.4% indicated that they did not take on parental leave in that period, and 50.9% indicated that parental leave was not applicable to them, most likely because they are not parents.

The PhDs who did take parental leave were asked whether they had asked for a contract extension. They were given the following options:

1. Yes, and my contract was extended
2. Yes, but my contract was not extended
3. No, I did not want a contract extension
4. No, I did not know this was a possibility
5. No, I was discouraged to ask for contract extension
6. Other, namely.

Again, we saw that the responses under “Other, namely” show patterns. Therefore, we manually coded those open responses and present them together with the pre-given options in figure 3.

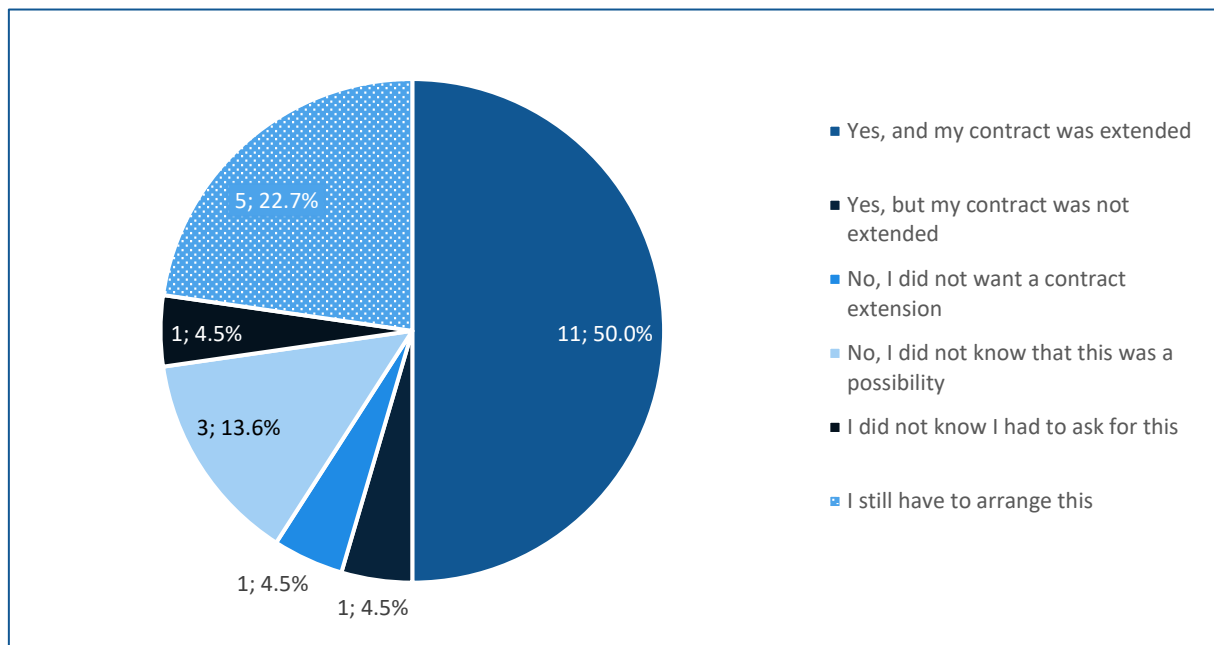


Figure 3: Responses to the question: “Did you ask for a contract extension because of your parental leave?” (n=22).

Half of the PhDs indicate that they asked for and got a contract extension. 22.7% of the PhDs are still arranging the extension, and 13.6% did not know that an extension was a possibility. Finally, one PhD indicated that s/he asked for an extension, but did not get one, another one did not want an extension, and yet another PhD did not know that s/he had to explicitly ask for an extension in order to get one.

We furthermore asked PhDs who did not take parental leave (excluding PhDs who answered “not applicable” to that question) whether they would have liked to take parental leave. The large majority of PhDs would not have liked to take parental leave, but 7% of the PhDs indicated that they would have liked to take parental leave. A possible reason why a large group would not have liked to take parental leave could be that they think they can finish within the required time, and therefore do not want to hand in salary (when on parental leave, employees only receive 62.5% of their income).

The PhDs who indicated that they had not taken parental leave, but that they would have liked to do so, were asked why they had not taken parental leave. They were given the following options:

1. Fear that I would not be able to finish my project in time
2. I was discouraged to ask for parental leave
3. Fear that it would impact my future career
4. Other, namely

The option “Other, namely” was again selected relatively often, and the responses to this option showed a pattern. Therefore, these answers were coded manually and added to the overall response set, displayed in figure 4.

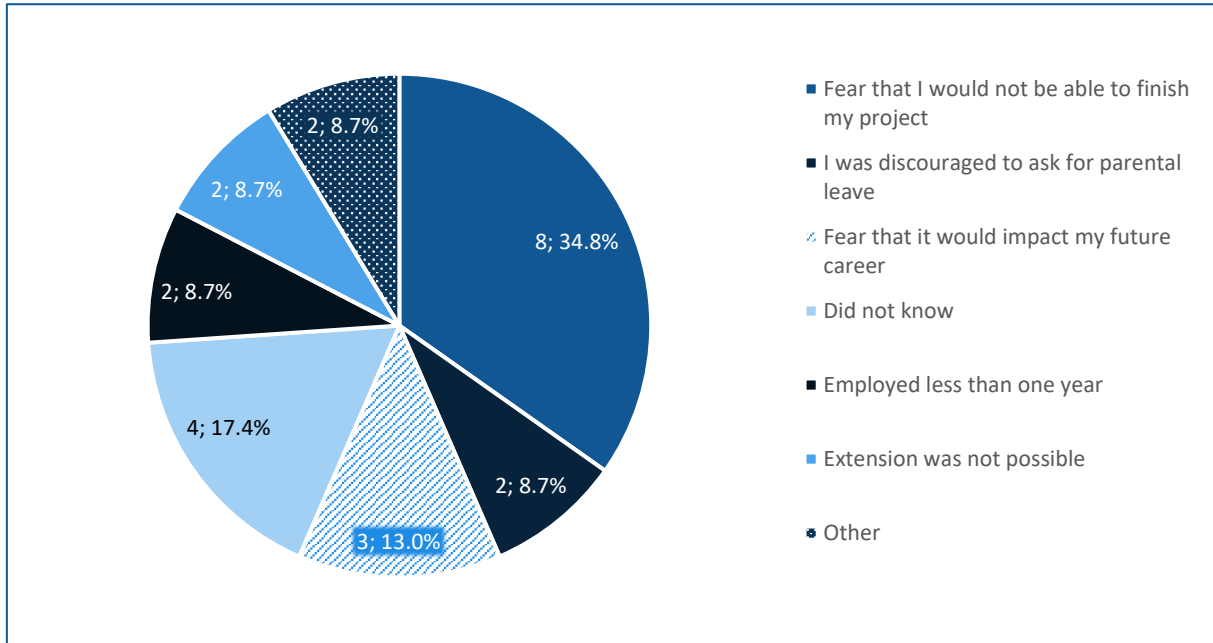


Figure 4: Responses to the question: “What is the main reason why you did not take on parental leave during your PhD project?” (n=23).

The most common reason why PhDs did not take parental leave was fear that they would not be able to finish their project in time (34.8%). 17.4% also indicated that they did not know that it was possible to take parental leave, and 13% indicated that they feared it would impact their future career. Smaller groups of PhDs indicate that they were discouraged to take parental leave, could not take parental leave because they had not worked at the university for more than one year, or that they had been told that extension would not be possible.

Sick leave

We asked the respondents whether they have been ill for more than 8 weeks during their PhD project. 9.4% of the PhDs responded yes to this question, while 90.6% responded no.

The PhDs who had been ill for more than eight weeks were asked whether they asked for a contract extension to compensate for the time they had been ill. They were given the following options:

1. Yes, and my contract was extended
2. Yes, but my contract was not extended
3. No, I did not want a contract extension
4. No, I did not know that this was a possibility
5. No, I was discouraged to ask for contract extension
6. Other, namely...

The option “Other, namely...” was selected relatively often, with many PhDs indicating that they had not yet asked for an extension. These responses were therefore coded into the new category “Not yet”. The results can be found in figure 5.

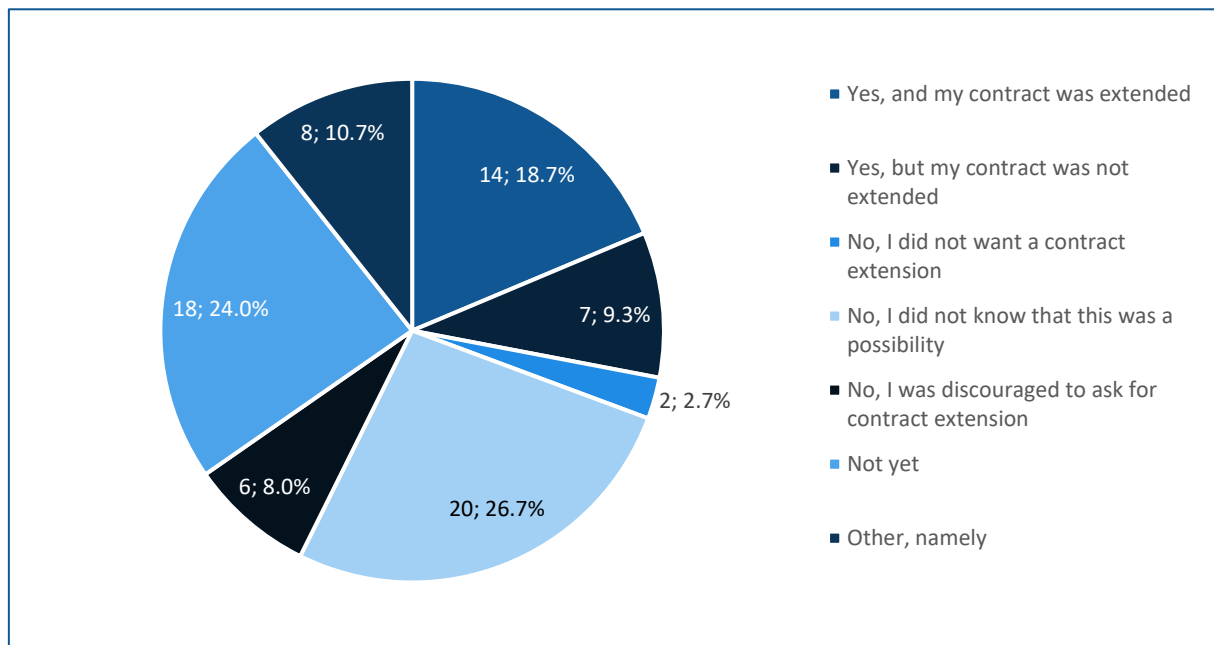


Figure 5: Responses to the question: “Did you ask for a contract extension to compensate for the time you've been sick?” (n=75).

18.6% of the PhDs got an extension to compensate for the time they had been ill. 26.7% of the PhDs indicated that they did not know that this was possible, and 24% indicated that they had not asked for an extension yet, in some cases because the PhD was still on sick leave at the moment of filling in the survey. 18.7% of the PhDs had asked for and gotten an extension. A small minority (2.7%) did not want an extension and 10.7% had a different experience. Some of this last group (n=4) indicated that they were still unsure about an extension, as their university would decide on the extension at a later moment, often at the end of the contract.

However, 9.3% (n=7) had asked for an extension, but did not get it. We asked them to elaborate on why they did not get an extension in an open question. Seven PhDs provided an elaboration. Three of them stated that there were financial reasons that they did not get an extension, two indicated that the process was still ongoing and that they had not heard back. The final two were told that an extension was not possible, either in general or due to the source of funding.

8% (n=6) of the PhDs were also discouraged to ask for an extension. We asked them why or by whom they were discouraged to ask for an extension for their sick leave in an open question

as well. Six PhDs elaborated. Five of them explicitly mentioned that they were discouraged by their supervisor, who in some cases told them it was not possible to get an extension or were delaying the request. However, one supervisor made the discouragement personal:

“[My supervisor] said that mental health issues showed weakness in people. If I was having those kinds of problems, I should reconsider whether I made a mistake going into academia.” (R.1).

Internships

As we saw before, the clause on extensions for internships was the least known clause amongst PhDs. We subsequently asked whether the respondents had done an internship during their PhD project, and only 3.4% of the PhDs had done an internship, and 96.6% had not.

We asked the PhDs who did do an internship whether they had asked for an extension of their PhD contract for their internship. We gave them the following options:

1. Yes, and my contract was extended
2. Yes, but my contract was not extended
3. No, I did not want a contract extension
4. No, I did not know that this was a possibility
5. No, I was discouraged to ask for contract extension
6. Other, namely

This time, there were only two respondents who chose “Other, namely”, so we did not manually code these open answers into response categories. The answers to this question can be found in figure 6.

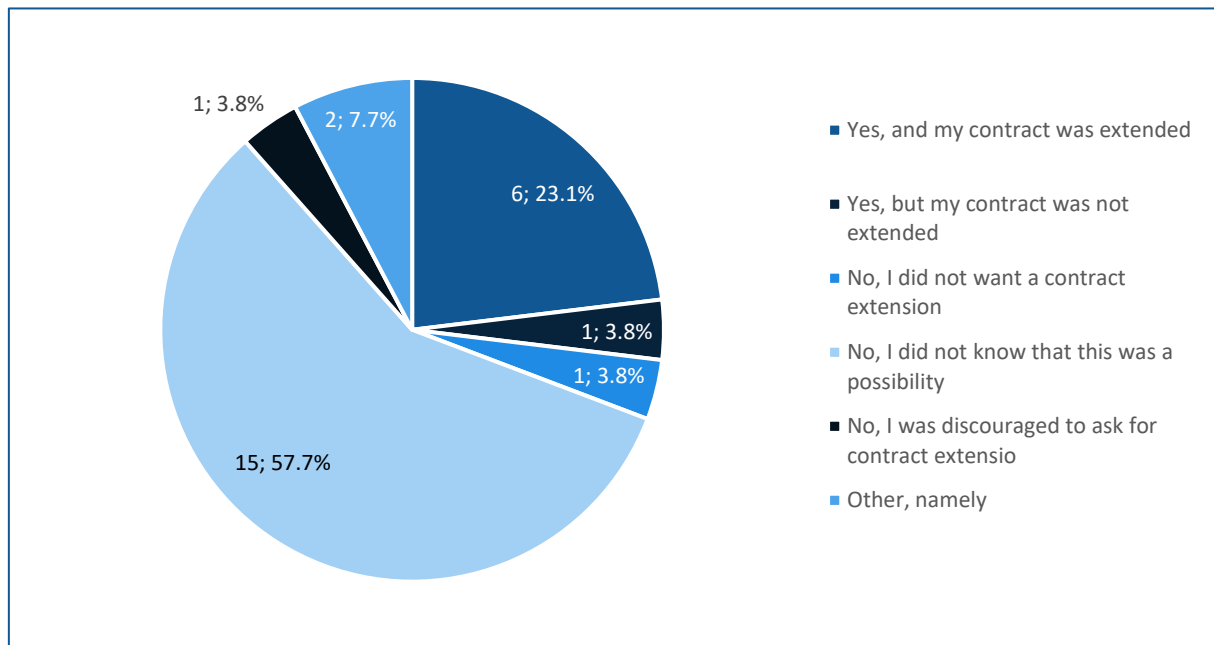


Figure 6: Responses to the question: “Did you ask for a contract extension because of your internship?” (n=26).

The majority of the respondents had not asked for an extension because they did not know that this was a possibility (57.7%). 23.1% of the PhDs asked for an extension and got it as well. One PhD asked for an extension, but did not get it, another PhD did not want a contract extension, and yet one other was discouraged to ask for an extension.

The PhDs who did not do an internship during their PhD project were asked whether they would have liked to do an internship during their PhD project. 20.9% of the PhDs responded “yes”, 23.2% of the PhDs responded “no”, while the majority of 55.9% stated that they “maybe” would have liked to do an internship.

The PhDs who responded “yes” or “maybe” to that question were subsequently asked why they did not do an internship during their PhD project. We gave them the following options:

1. There were no internships available
2. I was discouraged to do an internship
3. Fear that I would not be able to finish my project in time
4. Other, namely...

Unfortunately, we did not include an option “Because I did not know this was a possibility”, resulting in a very high number of PhDs indicating “Other, namely...” (57.8%). To make up for this, the 317 open answers provided in this option were manually coded and included as separate categories in figure 7.

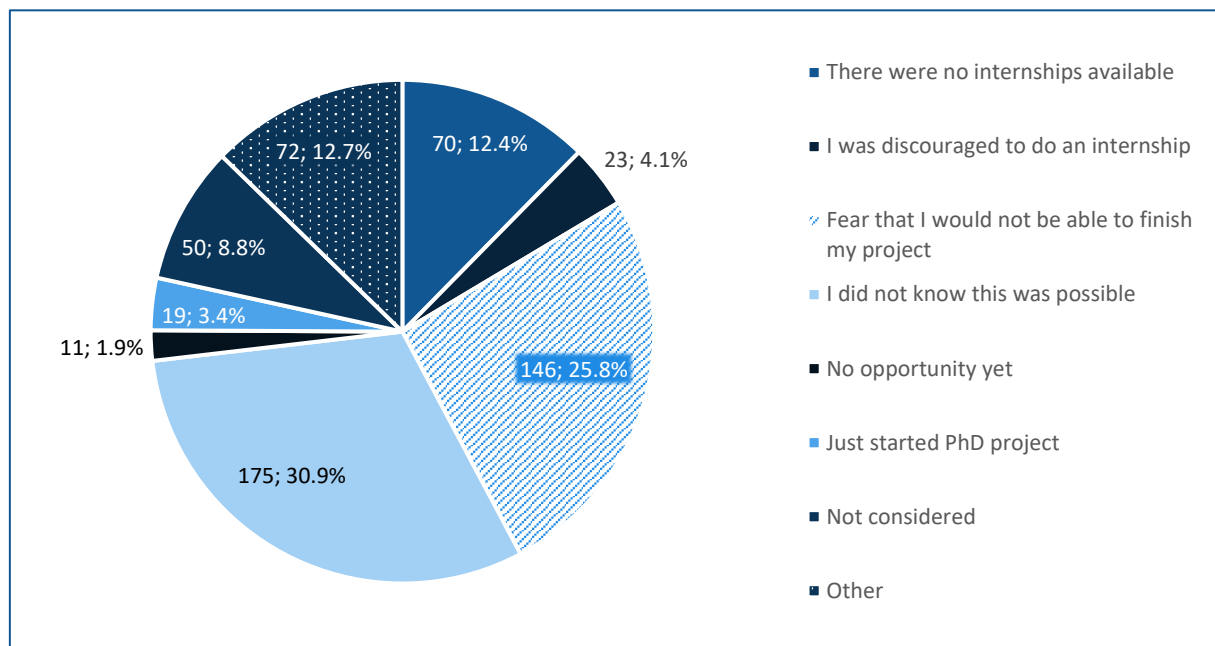


Figure 7: Responses to the question: "What is the main reason why you did not do an internship during your PhD project?" (n=566).

Figure 7 clearly shows that the most common reason to not have done an internship is that PhDs did not know this was a possibility (30.9%). 25.8% indicated that they fear they would not be able to finish their project on time if they did an internship. 12.4% indicated that there were no internships available, and 8.8% indicated that they had never really considered doing an internship. 3.4% of the PhDs furthermore stated that they just started their PhD projects and had not gotten to the point of thinking about an internship, and 1.9% said they hadn't seen a good opportunity yet. 12.7% also indicated another reason, but these were so diverse that they could not be classified into categories properly.

4.1% of the PhDs was also discouraged to do an internship. We asked them why or by whom they were discouraged to do an internship. 19 PhDs responded to this open question. 14 of them indicated that they were discouraged by their supervisors, who were often worried about the progress of the project and prioritized this. Two PhDs indicated that they had been told that an internship would not be useful.

“In [the opinion of my supervisors], an internship is a waste of time because projects mostly don't get finished in time (for publication). For me personally, it was a question to get certain training/expertise that our university is lacking.” (R.3).

Employee representation

Finally, all PhDs were asked whether they had participated in any form of PhD representation. 76.4% of the PhDs had not participated in employee representation, 16.7% had been involved in a PhD council and 6.9% had participated in another form of employee representation, such as the university council or local labour union. We specifically made the distinction between PhD councils and other types of employee representation as, unlike other types of employee representation, PhD councils often formally do not fall under this clause. However, many universities do offer some form of compensation or extension for PhDs who participate in a PhD council.

The PhDs who did take part in a form of employee representation were asked whether they asked for a contract extension because of their employee representation. They were given the following options:

1. Yes, and my contract was extended
2. Yes, but my contract was not extended
3. Yes, but my employee representation work did not fall under this arrangement
4. No, I did not want a contract extension
5. No, I did not know that this was a possibility
6. No, I was discouraged to ask for contract extension
7. No, I knew my employee representation work did not fall under this arrangement
8. Other, namely...

13.9% of the PhDs choose the option “Other, namely” again, but this time we noticed that many given answers could actually be classified into existing categories. These responses were therefore recoded into their matching categories. PhDs who answered that they asked for a contract extension, but did not get a contract extension were also asked to elaborate why their contracts were not extended. Many of them (n=5 out of 7) mentioned that they were told that they cannot get an extension for their representation work. These responses were therefore recoded from 2 to 3. In the end, only one new category, “Not yet”, was added. The results are presented in figure 8.

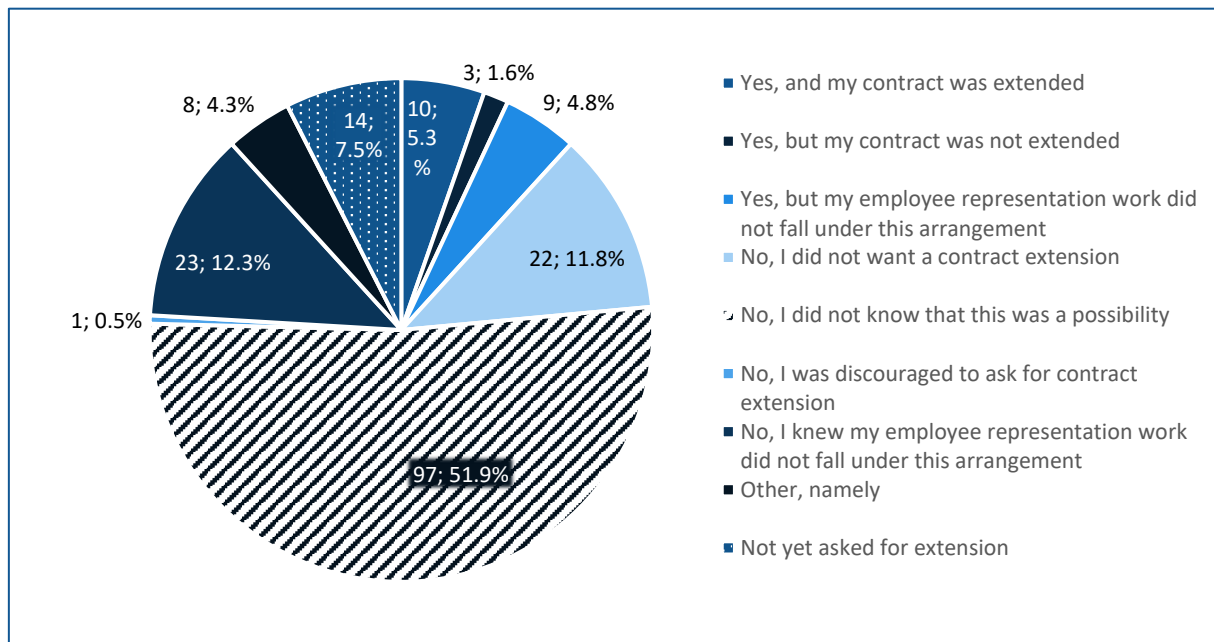


Figure 8: Responses to the question: “Did you ask for a contract extension because of your employee representation?” (n=187).

More than half of the PhDs indicated that they did not ask for an extension because they did not know this was a possibility (51.9%). Another 12.3% indicated that they did not ask for an extension, because they knew that their type of employee representation did not fall under this clause. Another 4.8% found out about this after asking for an extension. 11.8% of the PhDs furthermore indicated that they did not want an extension. Only 5.3% of the PhDs asked for an extension and got it too. 1.6% has asked for an extension, but did not get it.

Given that PhD councils formally do not fall under this clause in the collective labour agreement, we also looked at the responses to this question separately for PhDs who participated in a PhD council and PhDs who participated in another form of employee representation (figure 9). Conversely to what we would expect, relatively many PhDs who participate in another type of employee representation indicated that they did not ask for an extension because their representation work would not fall under the extension arrangement. PhDs in PhD councils, however, relatively more often are told that their representation work would not fall under the extension arrangement after they have asked for an extension. PhDs who participate in another type of employee representation only rarely get an extension for the representation work, though relatively more than PhDs who participate in a PhD council.

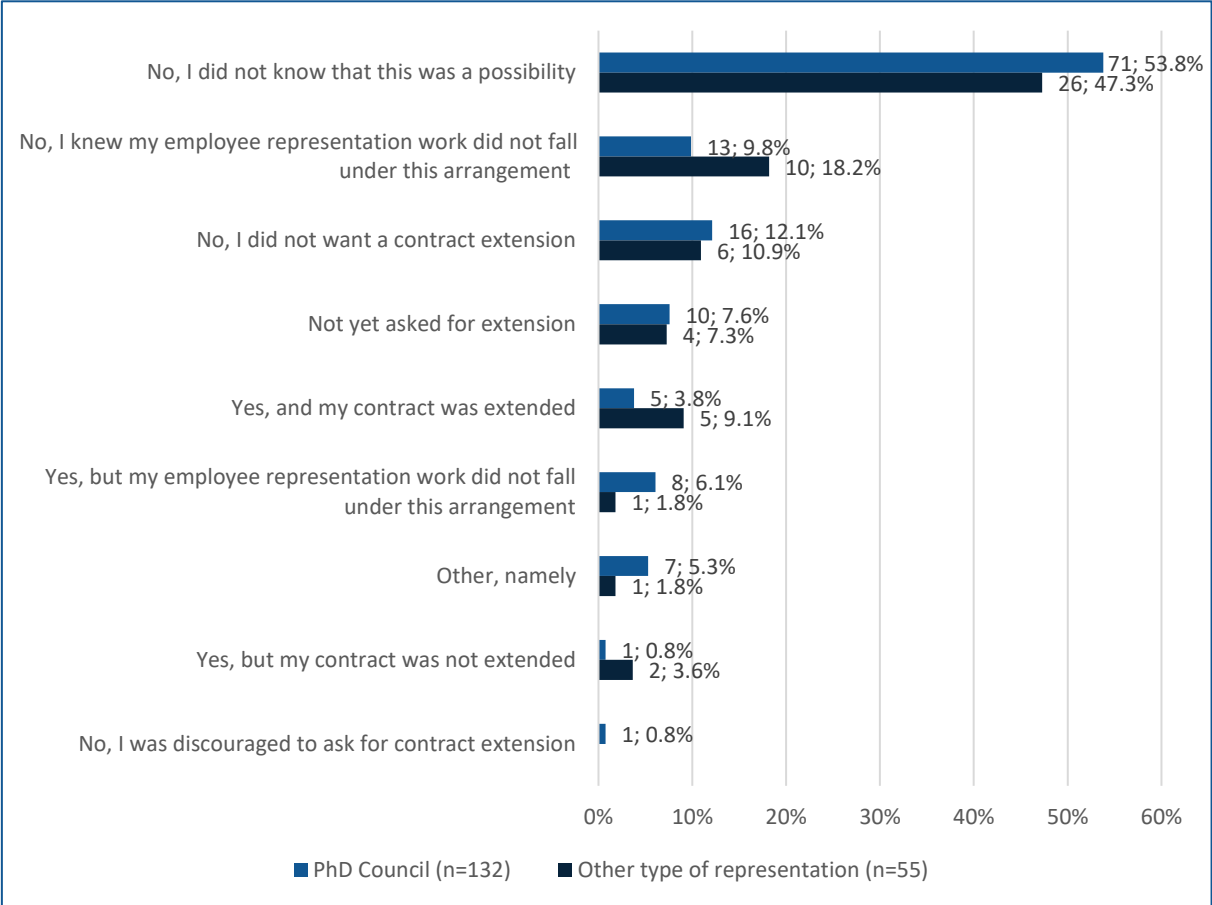


Figure 9: Responses to the question: “Did you ask for a contract extension because of your employee representation?”, per type of employee representation.

The PhDs who did not participate in employee representation were asked whether they would have liked to participate in employee representation (n=606). 10.2% of the PhDs would have liked to participate in employee representation, while 51.2% of the PhDs indicated that they would not have liked to do so. 38.6% of the PhDs said they “maybe” would have liked to participate in employee representation.

The PhDs who answered “yes” or “maybe” to this question were asked what the main reason was they did not participate in employee representation. They were given the following options:

1. There were no positions available
2. I was discouraged to participate in employee representation
3. Fear that I would not be able to finish my project in time
4. Other, namely...

Here also, we unfortunately did not include an option “I did not know this was possible”, resulting in a large number of respondents indicating this under “Other, namely...”. To make up for this, we again manually coded the open answers related to “Other, namely...” into new options for this question. These results can be found in figure 10.

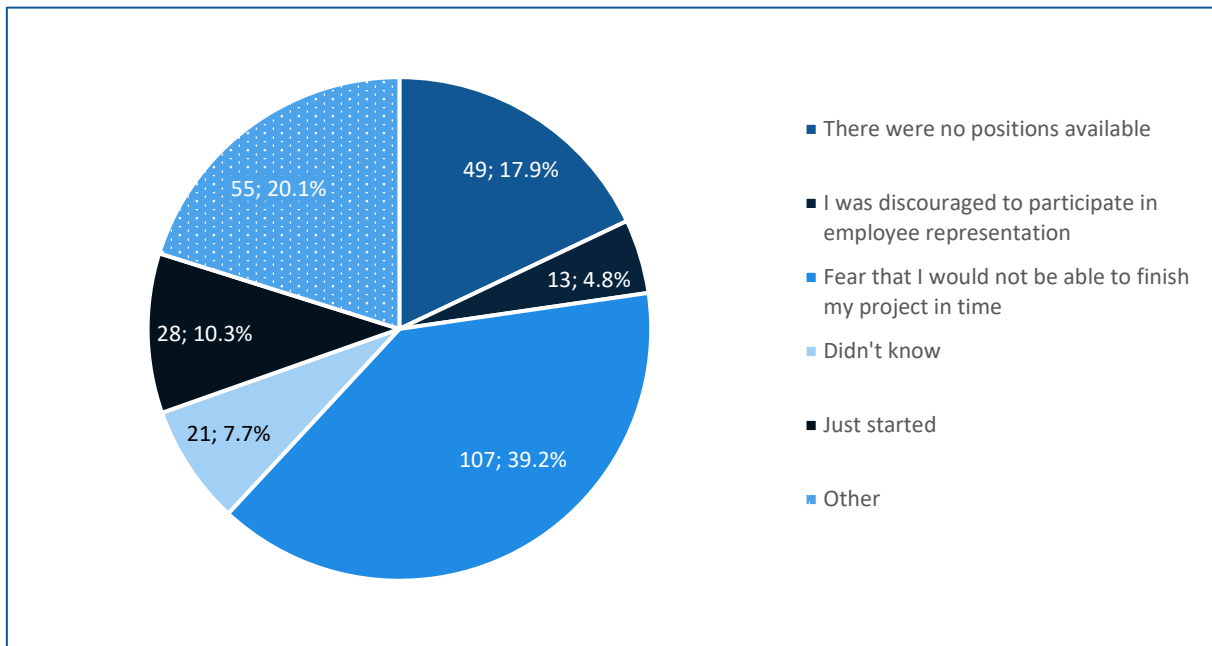


Figure 10: Responses to the question: “What is the main reason why you did not participate in employee representation during your PhD project?” (n=273).

39.2% of the PhDs indicated that they did not participate in employee representation because they feared that they would not be able to finish their PhD project in time. 17.9% furthermore indicated that there were no positions available. 10.3% had just started their PhD project and had not come to the point of considering participating in employee representation yet, and 7.7% didn’t know this was a possibility.

4.8% however did not participate in employee representation because they were discouraged to participate. We asked them why or by whom they were discouraged to participate in employee representation. 11 PhDs elaborated on this. 9 of them explicitly indicated that they were discouraged by their supervisors to participate in employee representation. These supervisors often feared that participation in employee representation would lead to delays in the project.

“My promotor says it costs too much time and she wants me to focus on my research. If we want to do any extra things, like join a commission of our department or be a representative, we have to do it in our own time, so take holiday hours for it.” (R. 7).