



Strategic Plan 2025

PhD Candidates Network Netherlands (PNN)

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Introduction to PNN

The PhD Candidates Network Netherlands (PNN) represents and advocates for the interests of PhD candidates in the Netherlands. Through collaboration with academic institutions, national organizations, and policy makers, PNN makes efforts to address pressing issues faced by PhD candidates, promote sustainable PhD trajectories and improve working conditions in Dutch academia. PNN is a member organization, with PhD organizations across universities, university medical centers (UMCs) and other research institutes as their member body. The members share signals about what is going on in Dutch academia and guide PNN's policy.

PhD candidates form the [largest group of researchers](#) in academia in the Netherlands. They are the future generation of science, pioneer with open science practices in their PhD, perform research with strong societal and academic impact, while being a dedicated colleague and often young scholar. However, throughout their PhD trajectory, they often encounter challenges that relate to social safety, mental health, discrimination, or the labor conditions they work under. In recent years, PNN has been advocating, among others, to reduce the risk of social unsafety, improve the conditions of international scholarship PhD candidates, and ensure that PhD candidates' perspectives are reflected in the collective labor agreements at universities and UMCs.

Our work in 2024

In 2024, PNN worked on key initiatives to improve the position of PhD candidates. To enhance social safety in academia, PNN co-signed a covenant that established a government-funded steering group. PNN also addressed systemic issues such as prolonged PhD trajectories by conducting focus groups with 50 participants, supported by a SoFoKles grant. In line with open science principles, PNN joined a project to tackle challenges in sharing sensitive data, securing funding for workshops to be held next year. Additionally, PNN opposed the budget cuts in higher education through [protests](#), stakeholder meetings, and a [letter](#) to the Minister of Education.

PNN expanded its impact by revitalizing its advisory board, improving its website with a [PhD support compass](#), and hosting the third annual PO day focused on advocacy and community building. We also provided input on university and UMC labor agreements, organized "Know Your Rights" sessions, and applied for a multi-year subsidy from the government in collaboration with PostdocNL. These efforts reflect PNN's continued dedication to fostering safer, fairer, and more transparent employment conditions for PhD candidates in the Netherlands. In our annual report, we will further elaborate on the past year. In this strategic plan, we look forward to the coming year.

Goals for 2025

As PNN will apply for a large subsidy during 2025, which requires an extensive activity plan, we wrote a more simplified strategic plan for 2025 based on five goals that we have formulated for the upcoming year. Throughout the year, we will share more about additional plans, facilitated by the subsidy. PNN's strategic objectives for 2025 are built around addressing the key challenges facing PhD candidates, enhancing its organizational capacity, and ensuring its advocacy efforts continue to have a lasting impact.

1) **Providing a counterweight to budget cuts**

PNN will actively campaign against further budget cuts in higher education, which threaten the quality of PhD trajectories and the well-being of PhD candidates. We will continue to partner with other academic unions and organizations to present a unified front against the budget cuts and to update and inform our members and the PhD community in the Netherlands about the implications of the cuts. Further, we will engage in direct discussions with stakeholders, emphasizing the long-term impact of budget cuts on research quality, supervision, wellbeing and career prospects.

2) **Further professionalization of PNN and its members**

To increase PNN's influence and capacity, PNN aims to continue its professionalization efforts. Key actions include leveraging the subsidy from the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (OCW) to improve internal structures and expand operational capacity, and organizing our annual PO day to bring our members together to connect and learn from each other. The subsidy plans will be expanded upon and shared with our members in the second half of 2025.

3) **Recognition & Rewards and Open Science for PhD candidates**

PNN will continue its engagement with the national Recognition & Rewards movement, ensuring that PhD candidates are recognized for their diverse contributions to academia. Our objectives include 1) advocating for a more inclusive system of recognition that values not only research output but also activities such as teaching, mentorship, and community engagement, and 2) promoting Open Science practices among PhD candidates, providing them with the tools and support needed to contribute to the open-science access movement. The project on hard to share data will be a substantial contribution towards this goal in 2025.

4) **Follow-up Sofokles project**

The project on PhD duration will be wrapped up in 2025. We will share the results of the research in the first months of 2025, and aim to organize an event to give insight into the findings. We will build on the results of the project for further actions.

5) Ensuring continued commitment to social safety in academia

We continue our efforts in improving social safety in academia, with a focus on PhD candidates. We will monitor common themes and trends in complaints about social safety, continue to represent PhD candidates in the steering group for social safety and encourage PhD candidates to apply for a subsidy with the social safety steering group. Next to that, we focus on advocating for the importance of this topic, especially in times of budget cuts, with our political allies and partners.