



Amsterdam Public Health

PhD Education Committee APH-VU/ VUmc

PhD Candidate Manual Training and Supervision Plan

Version 2018

Aim of this manual

In the first three months following the PhD candidate's appointment, a Training and Supervision Plan (TSP) must be approved and signed. The aim of this manual is to provide an overview of relevant topics pertaining to the education and supervision of a PhD candidate at the Amsterdam Public Health (APH) research institute.

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1. VU/VUmc Doctorate regulations

The VU doctorate regulations apply to APH PhD candidates having an appointment at VU or VUmc. The Doctorate regulations contain information about the access to promotion, the procedure with regard to preparations for the promotion, the tasks and authorities of those involved in the promotion (promotor, promotion committee, etc.), and dispute regulations. Please click [here](#) for the full version of VU doctorate regulations.

From 1 January 2015 new Doctorate Regulations came into effect. Starting from 1 April 2015, Form I must be used to apply for admission to the PhD track. Form I has to be submitted at the start of the PhD track (no later than one month after the date of commencement of employment). Alongside Form I, PhD candidates must also submit a signed 'Training and Supervision Plan (TSP)' at the start of their PhD track (please see Paragraph 3).

2. PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc

The PhD Education Committee consists of two senior researchers (chair and secretary), two PhD candidates and the manager APH-VU/VUmc, who are responsible for reviewing the TSP (paragraph 3) that is designed and signed by the PhD candidate and supervisors at the beginning of each PhD project. This TSP includes the obligatory and individually selected courses that the candidate must complete alongside the PhD research project for the amount of at least 30 ECTS. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a standard for comparing the study attainment and performance of students of higher education across the European Union. In the Netherlands, 1 ECT is equal to 28 hours of workload. The overall aim of the agreement is to ensure a course program that is tailored to the needs of the individual PhD candidate and project requirements.

You can contact the Committee by using the general email address: phdcommittee@vumc.nl

3. Training and Supervision Plan (TSP)

3.1 Introduction

In general in the first three months following the PhD candidate's appointment, a mutually drafted and accepted Training and Supervision Plan (TSP) must be signed. This agreement is compiled by the direct supervisor, together with the PhD candidate. In addition to a number of general aspects, such as information about the aim of the appointment and a general description of the PhD candidate's tasks, the TSP also defines a number of specific aspects. There is a description of where the PhD candidate will be working, under whose (co-)supervision, and for which period of time. Furthermore, a plan will be made by the supervisor and PhD candidate for the training courses in which the PhD candidate will participate. The TSP is signed by the (co-)supervisor(s), the PhD candidate and the Chair of the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUMC. The chair signs on behalf of the Director of the APH research institute VU/VUmc.

The TSP will be discussed and adjusted, if necessary, during the annual progress-reporting. At the end of the PhD track, the education program included in the TSP will be checked for the courses and right amount of ECTs (see 3.4).

The TSP for VUmc PhD candidates [can be downloaded here](#), and for VU PhD candidates it can be found on [VUnet](#).

3.2 Initial TSP assessment

Preferably within 3 months after the appointment of the PhD candidate, the supervisor sends the TSP, signed by the (co-)supervisor(s) and the PhD candidate, to the (Vice) Chair of the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUMC.

The PhD Education Committee:

- Reviews the TSP. Meetings of the PhD Education Committee take place on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month. TSPs that are submitted at least 3 workdays before the day of the meeting will be discussed (Thursday in week before).
- After the meeting, the chair of the Committee will sign the TSP or provide the PhD student with instructions to amend the TSP.

The PhD Education Committee assesses the TSP against the following criteria:

- The education program consists of a minimum of 30 ECTs and meets the minimum requirements set by APH and VU/VUmc (see also: paragraph 3.3.2), spread over the course of the PhD track.
- Possession of the embedding letter from APH (with SQC-number), which shows that the PhD project has been assessed and approved by the Scientific Quality committee (see also: paragraph 3.3.6)

3.3 Requirements TSP

3.3.1 General information and research plan

The TSP form starts with more general data, including personal data, work address, previous qualifications, doctoral programme, supervisors, graduate school/ research school and research institute. For PhD candidates affiliated with APH this is research school CaRe.

Then, information is asked about the research plan. You can copy this from your project proposal/ METc application/ embedding request.

3.3.2 Education (training) program

Courses required by the APH research institute can be categorized as follows (NB: use this structure when you design your training plan):

1. Mandatory courses (VU/VUmc-specific) (Total: 3-5.5 ECTS)

- Course on scientific integrity (2 ECTS)
- At least one conference attendance (1-2 ECTS)*
- **BROK** (if necessary, mandatory for projects that are covered by the Human Research Act (WMO)) (1.5 ECTS).

2. Elective mandatory courses (APH-specific) (Total: 8 ECTS)

- Courses focused on advanced (methodological) research skills (6 ECTS)
- Transferrable skills (1 ECTS, see table 1 below)
- Research meetings, expert meetings, seminars etc. (1 ECT, but max. 2 ECTS)

3. Elective courses (16.5-19 ECTS)

- E.g. additional courses focused on advanced (methodological) research skills
- E.g. additional transferrable skills (see table 1 below)
- E.g. additional conference and symposia attendances (max. 10 ECTS, in total)**
- E.g. courses that are subject-specific and related to the PhD project

* 1 ECT per conference attended without giving a presentation, 2 ECTS per conference attended with (oral or poster) presentation. All national days count as 1 ECT. Symposia count based on duration (1 ECT=28 hours).

**If a maximum is given, this means that the number of ECT credits must at least match the number of hours invested (1 ECTS = 28 hours).

The required number of ECTS to be achieved are stated in brackets. In general, the number of ECTS credits is based on number of hours (number of hours/28).

3.3.3 Types of education

Advanced (methodological) research skills

i.e., advanced statistical analysis, methodological training, advanced quantitative and qualitative research skills.

Courses can be followed at every university, as long as they meet requirements as mentioned above (3.3.2).

Connected to APH is EpidM, which is a part of the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics (E&B) at VUmc. EpidM organizes advanced Master's courses in epidemiology. For more information, and a list of courses, please visit: [the EpidM website](#).

Other master programs from interfaculty research institutes of VU/VUmc are mentioned at [the PhD portal](#).

Transferrable skills

Transferable skills are the skills you acquire and transfer to future employment settings within our outside academia. Examples of transferable skills are:

Table 1: Types of transferrable skills	
Personal development courses described in the VUmc PhD portal (also accessible for VU PhD candidates)	Number of ECTs based on number of hours
Courses/ workshops provided by Taalcentrum-VU (including Dutch for foreign PhD candidates)(e.g., course on academic writing, course on presenting in English)	Ask at Taalcentrum, depending on course
Workshops focusing on entrepreneurship and/or valorization, e.g., courses provided by IXA	Number of ECTs based on number of hours
Courses on Project management	Number of ECTs based on number of hours
Courses on Grant writing	Number of ECTs based on number of hours
Teaching activities/tasks (e.g., contributing to bachelor or master courses, tutor, supervising internships and teaching courses (BKO)).	Max. 5 ECTs**
Organizing PhD activities, e.g., within a research institute	Max. 1 ECT
External work placements (e.g., travel grant)	Max. 6 ECTs
Participating in an APH PhD intervision year group (0.5 ECTs)*	0.5 ECTs

*The APH commission Quality of Education (Commissie Opleidingskwaliteit) organizes **intervision meetings** for PhD candidates and junior researchers. These are conversations between PhD candidates and juniors from all departments within APH. Daily issues of each PhD candidate or junior researcher are discussed. PhD candidates or juniors can attend these meetings for free. The focus of the meetings is to develop insight and problem solving skills of our PhD candidates and junior researchers. One may think of planning of work, motivation, cooperation with supervisors etc. Discussing these themes with other young researchers within APH can provide the understanding and the other point of view to strengthen oneself as a skilled researcher. Taking part in the

interview meetings provides the PhD candidate or junior researcher also with a network to discuss practical or methodological issues with others from within the Institute. **Send an e-mail to intervisie.emgo@gmail.com if you are interested.**

****If a maximum is given, this means that the number of ECT credits must at least match the number of hours invested (1 ECTS = 28 hours).**

Research meetings, expert meetings, seminars etc.

e.g., research meetings, workshops, colloquia, journal clubs, or similar inside or outside your department.

3.3.4 Supervision and annual progress meetings

The supervision of the PhD candidate is regulated in the TSP, and is part of the employment agreement. The supervision is the responsibility of the principal supervisor (first promotor) together with one or more (co-) supervisors (i.e., project leaders). Note that the supervision is not part of the TSP, and therefore does not count for the number of ECTS. There are no official rules for number of hours of supervision. However, the PhD Education Committee advises a minimum of 8 hours of co-supervision per month from daily co-supervisor(s), and 2 hours per month from the principal supervisor. This often includes reviewing papers and other (remote) activities to support the PhD candidate.

According to the VU/VUmc regulations, every PhD candidate has an annual progress meeting with his/her superior. During this annual progress meeting, the following aspects could be discussed during the annual meeting (but are not limited to): workload, collaboration with other (co-)supervisors within the same project, satisfaction with the supervision etc. There are special forms that could help guide the process and reporting of the annual meeting, which can be found at the P&O service websites (VUmc intranet and VUnet). There is a **competence self-evaluation tool** available for PhD candidates which they can use e.g. to prepare their meeting.

3.3.5 Scientific Quality committee (embedding letter)

The main task of the Scientific Quality Committee (SQC) is to advise the Directors of Amsterdam Public Health (APH) on their scientific quality policy, and to support the quality of research within APH. The Committee does this by facilitating the embedding and peer review of research projects, and by providing information and tools to improve the quality of research.

APH has started embedding its research projects from January 1, 2018 onwards. Every (PhD) project that will be carried out within APH needs to be registered to the Scientific Quality Committee by the principal investigator or project leader. When submitting a research project, each proposal has to be accompanied by a submission form that includes at least the preferred APH research program for embedding. The submitted research project will be judged by the relevant APH program leaders on suitability and relevance to the preferred research program.

All embedded projects will be registered in a project database. Embedding of a project should take two weeks at most. Please contact aph.sqc@vumc.nl for further instructions.

To ensure that the PhD's project is embedded, we ask you to send your embedding letter along with the TSP to the PhD Education Committee.

3.4 TSP annual monitor

During the annual progress meeting (3.3.4), the supervisor(s) and the PhD candidate also discuss the progress regarding TSP education requirements. Only in case of significantly large adjustments, a second assessment of the TSP by the PhD Education committee is obligatory. The supervisor and PhD candidate will follow the same procedure as during the initial assessment.

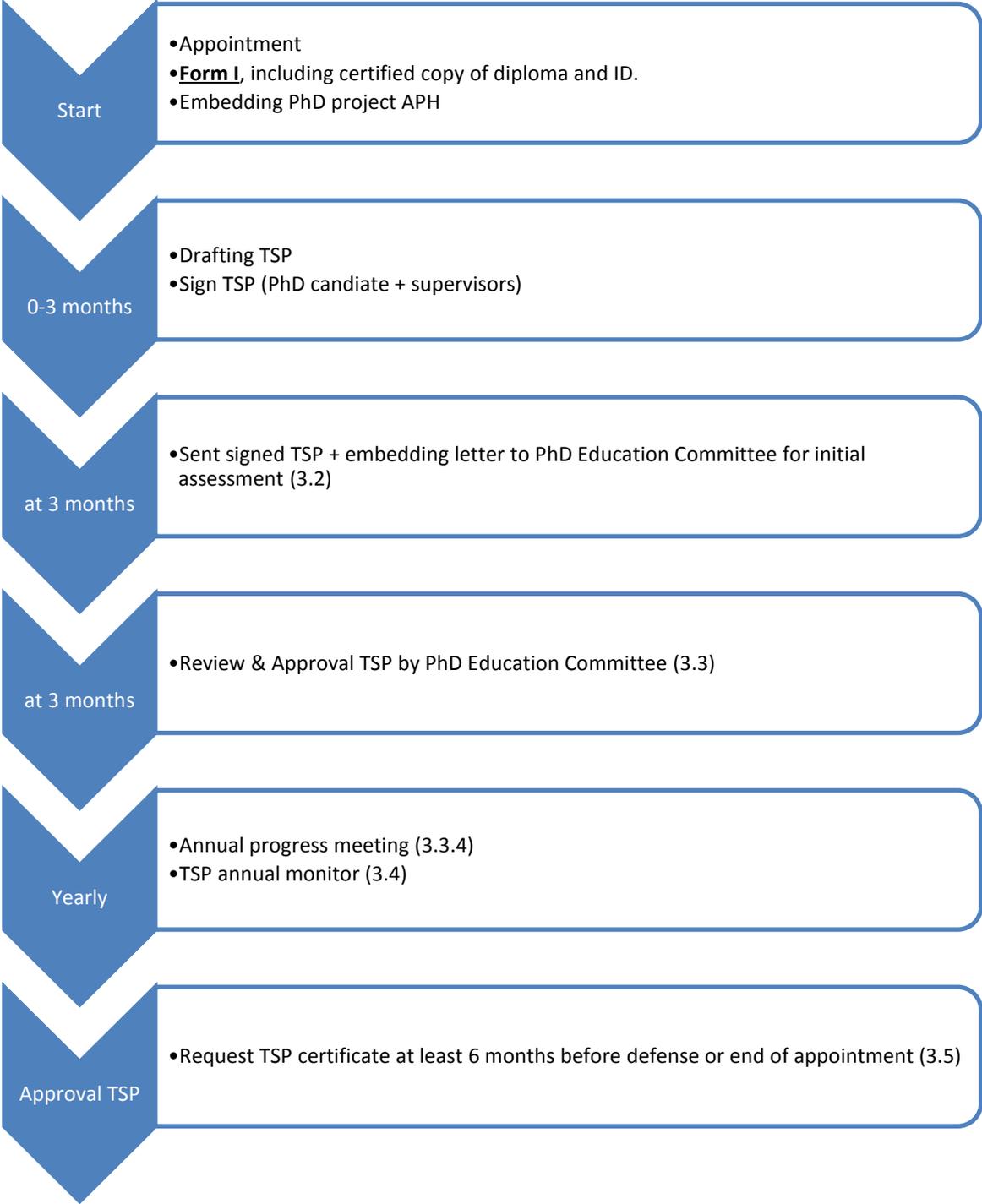
3.5 TSP certificate

In order to obtain the degree of Doctor from the VU, the PhD candidate will have to submit a request to the chair of the PhD Education Committee to determine whether all education (training) requirements have been met as agreed in the Training and Supervision Plan (TSP). The PhD candidate hands in his/her TSP portfolio, once the supervisor has approved the dissertation, but before sending it to the reading committee. Make sure you have at least 6 months left before the end of your appointment or defense to have your TSP reviewed by the PhD Education Committee.

TSP portfolio:

- The TSP portfolio consists of a summary of all relevant courses including corresponding certificates of attendance or otherwise, proof that education has been followed.
- The PhD Education committee is responsible for drawing up the training certificate and awarding it to the PhD candidate.

3.6 TSP time line



4. The PhD candidate and the (co-)supervisor(s): a few tips

4.1 Responsibilities of a PhD candidate

The success of all projects depends to a great extent on the PhD candidates themselves. A few tips are given here:

- The PhD candidate should state clearly what (s)he needs from the supervisor. When supervisors give contradictory advice, it is recommended to plan a discussion with the supervisors in question in order to achieve consensus.
- Explicit agreements must be made. It is wise to take minutes or to make a report, and to keep a log book throughout the entire project.
- Persistent problems, or problems that have a negative influence on the project, must be discussed. If you expect that nobody will take any action to solve your problems, then it is recommended that you discuss the problems with someone from the APH PhD Committee, or with someone who is higher in the hierarchy than your supervisor. If you mainly need someone to listen to you, then anybody you trust is suitable.
- Ensure the continuity of the project, for instance by making accurate and realistic plans, and refer to your supervisors for comments.
- Make everything debatable – for instance, make an early decision about the (co-)authorship of articles.
- During the assessment discussions (after 10 months and 3 years) and the annual discussions, ‘supervision and functioning of the leaders’ is always a specific topic. Use this official opportunity to discuss (again) any possible problems with supervision.

4.2 Guidelines of supervision

The nature of good supervision depends on the type of research, the content of the project, and the personal wishes of both the supervisor and the PhD candidate. However, what is certain is that the aim of the supervision must be two-sided: on the one side, it must result in a good project and good quality scientific products, and on the other side it must result in a junior researcher who has learnt how to carry out research independently and has been able to develop in the field of science. Note that not every PhD candidate will stay in science after the defense. Make sure that also other skills are focus of attention. We want to deliver excellent professionals be it in researcher or other occupations.

5. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

5.1 What should be provided in the TSP portfolio?

Please include all certificates of the attended meetings and courses. When there is no certificate provided, for example for research meetings at the VU, please ask your supervisor to sign a document that you have attended these meetings.

5.2 Can I receive exemption from (mandatory) courses of the TSP?

Exemptions (max. 15 ECTS) can be granted if the PhD candidate can prove that (s)he has completed these courses (or comparable courses) during preliminary education. Exemptions can be obtained for the following courses:

- Advanced methodological courses completed up to 5 years before the start of the PhD trajectory as part of an official Research Master's program. Research Masters are designated master programs which prepare for PhD trajectories and are different from course-based master programs for which also the title MSc (or sometimes MRes) is awarded.
- Scientific writing course followed up to 5 years before the start of the PhD trajectory.
- When the dissertation is in preparation and the individual has an appointment as for instance a (junior) researcher or physician (i.e., not appointed as a PhD candidate), all courses completed within this appointment can be included in the TSP. These are no exemptions, but regular courses followed during the PhD training period.

To apply for exemption, the following procedure should be followed:

1. The PhD candidate and her/his supervisor make a written request for exemption from the course in question (letter or email);
2. The exemptions should be listed on the TSP in the required field;
3. The reasons for the application for exemption should be explained in the letter;
4. The letter should be addressed to the Chair of the PhD Education Committee APH VU/VUmc.

Please contact the PhD Education Committee if you have questions regarding the exemptions or if you would like to lodge an appeal against the decision of the PhD Education Committee.

5.3 Is there a good example of a completed Training and Supervision Plan?

Please click here for two examples of a course list of a TSP. And if any questions remain, don't hesitate to contact the PhD Education Committee. To speed up the process, it is strongly advised that you get information from your supervisor or fellow PhD candidates from your department who already have a signed TSP, or, from the PhD Education Committee before sending it in for formal assessment.

5.4 Who is financially responsible for the education that I receive during my PhD?

Finance for the education (training) of the PhD candidate is the responsibility of the principal supervisor (i.e., first promotor). The APH Institute cannot financially support individual training programs of PhD candidates.

To avoid misunderstandings, we strongly recommend to discuss finance before each application for a course with your (principle) supervisor. Furthermore, not all courses and conferences require a fee, and it might be worthwhile to explore the opportunities of free courses and conferences in your field of study.

Finally, specific regulations may additionally differ per faculty, and detailed information can be obtained from the respective faculty. We suggest to double-check this with your supervisor before submitting your TSP to the PhD Education Committee.

5.5 If a disagreement with my supervisor cannot be solved, what should I do?

If there is a dispute between a PhD candidate and a (co-)supervisor(s) with regard to the supervision, the training and/or the research, that cannot be solved, the principal supervisor (i.e., first promotor) should be involved in an early stage. If this is not possible, or if one of the parties so wishes, the chair, secretary (or another PhD representative from the PhD Education Committee) can be consulted. Don't hesitate to take action and approach us.

5.6 Can I obtain a doctorate degree as a junior researcher?

In some occasions you may be appointed as a junior researcher or equivalent positions such as a medical doctor with a research appointment. If, during your first year(s) as a researcher it becomes clear that there might be the opportunity to fulfill a PhD program along the same project, it becomes vital to submit Form I and complete an Training and Supervision Plan. Be aware that completing a doctorate degree as a junior researcher comes with the same rights and obligations as being appointed a PhD candidate. Therefore, you must meet the 30 ECTS requirement, as otherwise you are not allowed to obtain your doctorate degree

5.7 Can I obtain a doctorate degree as an external PhD?

External PhD candidates are PhD candidates who are not employed by the VU or the VUmc. In principle, external PhD candidates have the same rights and obligations as 'internal' PhD candidates (i.e., PhD candidates that are employed by VU/VUmc). They likewise have to submit a Training and Supervision Plan and an approved research plan setting out their PhD research and curriculum in advance. Similarly, external PhD candidates must meet the 30 ECTS requirement, as otherwise they will not be allowed to obtain their doctorate degree.

5.8 Which regulations Scientific integrity apply during my PhD appointment?

The VU doctorate regulations specify that all PhD candidates, supervisors and co-supervisors must at all times observe the norms for scientific integrity as formulated in the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice by the **VSNU**. VU and VU Medical Center operate a joint policy for the handling of academic integrity complaints, see **[this link for the joint policy](#)**. This complaints procedure outlines the various steps to be taken in the event of

a complaint, the officers who play a role in this procedure and what you can expect once a complaint has been submitted.

5.9 Should I contribute to teaching at my faculty?

The nature and extent of this PhD candidate's task differs per faculty or department, and we recommend that this should be discussed together with you as a PhD candidate. Within APH an indication of the extent of teaching is 5-10% of the working time, however, it depends on your appointment and agreements made with your supervisor/department. You may include your teaching courses (partly) in your TSP (see also paragraph 5.2).

It is important to realize that providing education is a task that should not be underestimated. The time-investment that is needed to provide education is usually greatly underestimated. Moreover, not all PhD candidates have the necessary didactical qualities or the ambition to teach. Training could be an option in that case (e.g. basiskwalificatie hoger onderwijs – BKO, or related courses).