



Amsterdam Public Health research institute

PhD Education Committee APH-VU/ VUmc

PhD Handbook APH-VU/VUmc

Training Plan

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1. Aim of this handbook

A Training Plan that is designed by the PhD candidate and supervisors is an important and compulsory aspect of each PhD trajectory, and should be submitted at the beginning of the PhD trajectory. The main aim of this handbook is to provide an overview of relevant topics pertaining to the training of a PhD candidate at the Amsterdam Public Health (APH) research institute. This handbook provides information on procedures concerning doctoral regulations and Hora Finita, Training Plans, supervision (recommendations), Portfolio and Training Plan Certificate.

2. 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 regards to preparations for the promotion, the tasks and authorities of those involved in the promotion (supervisor, Doctorate Committee, etc.), and dispute regulations. Regarding the education and training of PhD candidates, the Doctorate regulations define that ‘The PhD candidate shall devote at least 30 EC (840 hours) to training’. Please click [here](#) for the full version of VU Doctorate regulations.

2.1 Thesis requirements

There are no fixed rules with requirements for the articles of your dissertation. It is therefore very important to determine the types and number of (published) articles in your thesis in consultation with your (co)supervisor. Discuss this early in your PhD trajectory so that you know what is expected. There is a Joint guideline of the Graduate Schools of the Dutch University Medical Centers ([NFU guideline](#)), that indicates that “an approved thesis contains 3 to 5 papers, of which 2 to 3 are published or accepted with the PhD student as first author, and of which at least 2 are or will be published in journals with a medium to high impact factor in the research field of the discipline”. Note that it is a guideline and may therefore be debated or deviated from. Moreover, the final approval of a thesis is an individual decision of the doctoral committee.

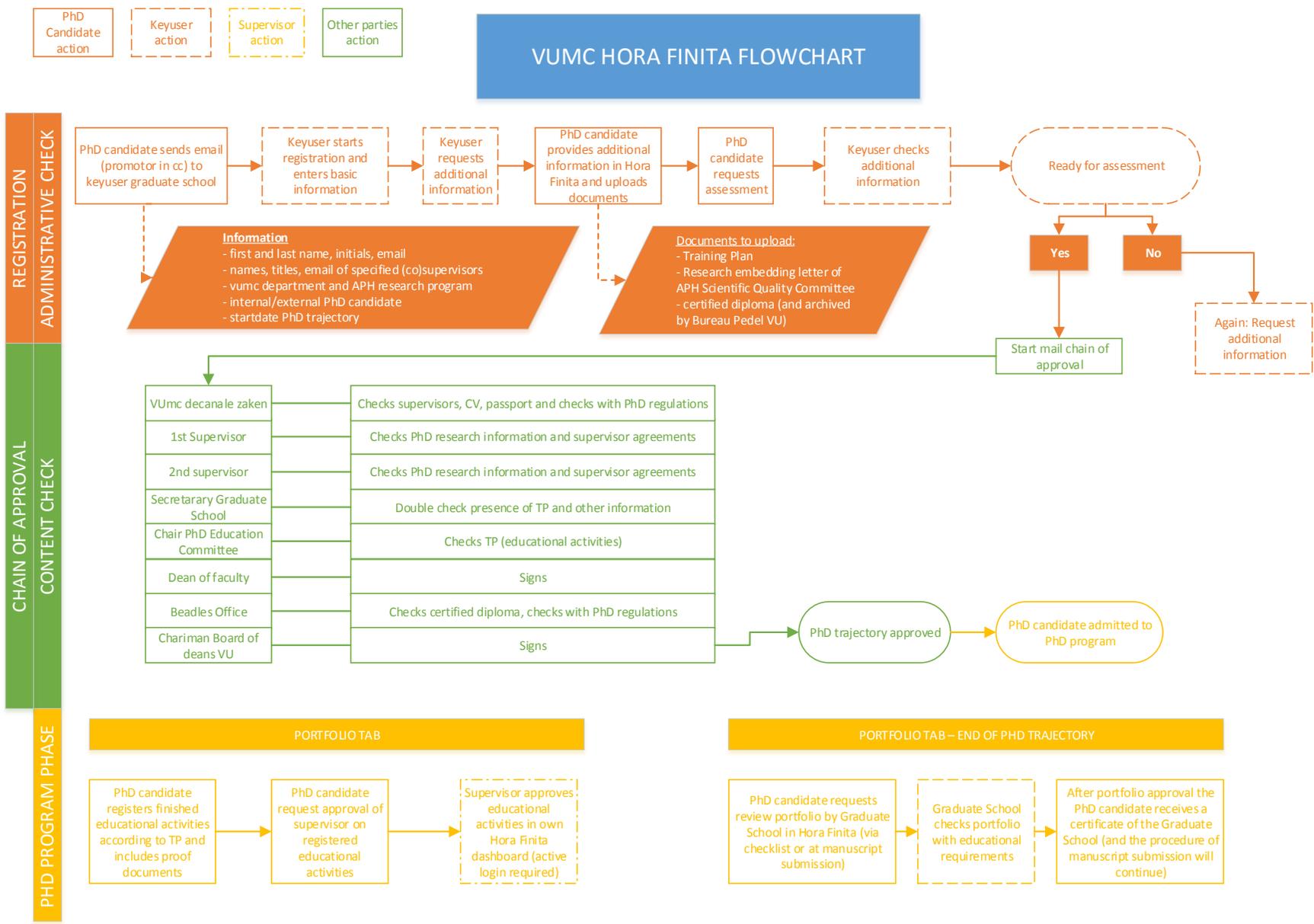
3. HORA FINITA



All PhD candidates have to sign in at Hora Finita. Hora Finita is the registration system for PhD candidates of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. All processes related to the PhD trajectory, from the admission to and keeping track of the trajectory to the submission of the dissertation, run through this system. This also includes the submission and approval of the Training Plan, and the approval of the Portfolio at the end of the PhD trajectory. Please click [here](#) for the general Hora Finita manual.

Hora Finita has been implemented throughout the campus (VU/VUmc), but the work flow sometimes varies slightly per faculty and research institute. The specific work flow for VUmc PhD candidates who are affiliated to the APH research institute, can be found below and on the [APH website](#).

The flowchart as presented below is divided in three phases: Registration, Chain of approval, and PhD Program. The Training Plan should be submitted during the registration phase.



Phase 1: Registration

After the initial registration in Hora Finita, the VUmc PhD candidate is requested to provide additional information (e.g., personal information, certified diploma, PhD trajectory information and supervision) and to upload both the officially signed research embedding letter provided by the APH Scientific Quality Committee and the Training Plan.

Research embedding letter

Every (PhD) research project that will be carried out within APH needs to be registered at the Scientific Quality Committee (SQC). The submitted research project will be judged by the relevant APH program leaders on suitability and relevance to the preferred research program. Following positive judgement, the submitter and project leader will receive a signed research embedding letter from the SQC including a SQC-number: year-xxx). To ensure that the PhD research project is embedded, the signed research embedding letter must be submitted in Hora Finita in the box 'overig' (see Figure 1). For more information regarding the embedding procedure, please click [here](#).



Figure 1. Uploading your research embedding letter in Hora Finita

Phase 2: Chain of approval

When the VUmc PhD candidate has completed all required information and has submitted both the research embedding letter and the Training Plan, he/she can request assessment by clicking the submit button. After an administrative check, the information will be automatically submitted to the 'chain of approval'. Then, a number of actors have to grant approval for the information that has been submitted before the registration becomes an official PhD trajectory. The Training Plan will be reviewed by the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc.

Phase 3: PhD Program

After the Training Plan has been approved and all other actors have granted their approval for other submitted information, the PhD trajectory is official and the PhD Program phase starts. During this phase, the VUmc PhD candidate should register educational activities in the portfolio tab in Hora Finita. At the end of the PhD trajectory, the portfolio will be reviewed by the chair of the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc.

Below, the role of the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc and procedure for the Training Plan and Portfolio is outlined.

4. PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc

The PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc is comprised of two senior researchers (chair and vice-chair), one postdoc researcher, one PhD candidate and a policy officer of APH, who are responsible for reviewing the Training Plan according to the VU/VUmc-specific and the APH-specific requirements.

You can contact the PhD Education committee APH-VU/VUmc by using the general email address: aph.phdcommittee@amsterdamumc.nl.

5. Training Plan

5.1 Introduction

The Training Plan includes mandatory, elective mandatory and elective courses that the PhD candidate must complete alongside the PhD trajectory for the amount of at least 30 ECs. 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 EC is equal to 28 hours of workload. The overall aim of the agreement is to ensure a course program that is tailored to the minimal requirements of VU/VUmc and APH, and to the needs of the individual PhD candidate and research.

The Training Plan should be submitted in Hora Finita by means of a standardized form. The template for the Training Plan can be found [here](#).

The assessment requirements (5.2) of the Training Plan are explained below. Following approval, the PhD candidate needs to keep track of his/her educational activities him/herself (see 5.4). The Training Plan should be discussed during the annual progress meeting and might be adjusted if necessary (see 5.5). At the end of the PhD trajectory, the education program included in the Training Plan will be checked for the courses and right amount of ECs (see 5.6).

5.2 Training Plan requirements

5.2.1 Mandatory and elective courses

Courses required by the VU/VUmc and APH research institute are categorized as follows (NB: use this structure for clarity when you design your Training Plan):

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

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

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

- Courses focused on advanced (methodological) research skills in public health (a minimum of 6 ECs)
- Transferrable skills (a minimum of 1 EC, see table 1 below)
- Research meetings, expert meetings, seminars etc. (1-2 ECs)

3. Elective courses/activities (16.5-19 EC)

- 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 ECs, in total)**
- E.g. courses that are subject-specific and related to the PhD research project

* 1 EC per (preferably) international conference consisting of several days attended without giving a presentation, or 2 ECs with oral or poster presentation. International conferences: typically held by international professional associations. Note that this can also be held in the Netherlands. National symposia are counted based on duration (1 EC = 28 hours) and with (oral or poster) presentation as 1 EC.

** If a maximum is given, this means that the number of ECs must at least match the number of hours invested (1 EC = 28 hours). NB. CaRe days, APH (spring/annual) meetings and Amsterdam UMC Science Exchange Days do count for the total ECs in your Training Plan but they do not count in the total of max. 10 ECs for conference and symposia attendance. These conferences can therefore be included as elective activities, additional to the maximum of 10 ECs.

5.2.2 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 (5.3.1). 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. PhD candidates whose research project is embedded within APH will receive a discount of 25% on the course fee of the courses and/or the Master program in Epidemiology. This discount arrangement does not apply to the exams. For more information, and a list of courses, please visit the [EpidM website](#). Note: when courses are only attended, the earned ECs can be counted based on the duration of the course attendance (1 EC = 28 hours). When courses are attended and exams have been made, you can count the ECs corresponding to the course.

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

Transferrable skills

i.e., are the skills you acquire and transfer to future employment settings within or outside academia. Examples of transferable skills are:

Table 1: Types of transferrable skills	
Personal development courses described in the PhD portal (also accessible for VU PhD candidates)	Number of ECs 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 ECs based on number of hours
Courses on Project management	Number of ECs based on number of hours
Courses on Grant writing	Number of ECs based on number of hours
For teaching activities (e.g., giving courses, supervision of students**) a maximum of 5 EC can be included in the training plan. For courses taken in the context of teaching (e.g., BKO), there is no maximum for the number of EC.	Max. 5 ECs*
Organizing PhD activities, e.g., within a research institute	Max. 1 EC
External work placements (e.g., travel grant)	Max. 6 ECs
Participating in an APH PhD intervision year group (0.5 EC, see below)	0.5 EC
Peer review of scientific papers	0.25 EC per paper, Max. 2 EC

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

** Please note that the supervision of 1 student equals 1 EC.

APH PhD intervision year group

The APH Education Committee organizes intervision meetings for PhD candidates and junior researchers. These are conversations between PhD candidates and juniors from all departments within the APH research institute. 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 intervision 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 aph.phdcommittee@amsterdamumc.nl if you are interested.

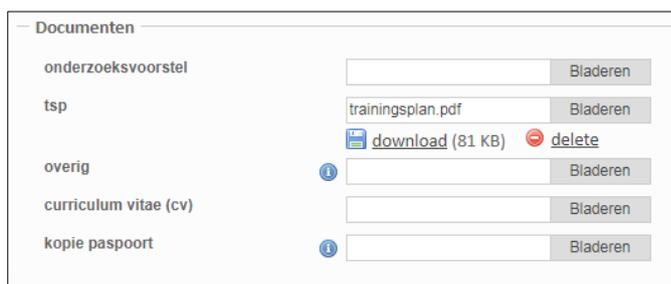
Research meetings, expert meetings, seminars etc.

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

Regular research meetings are typically considered to be 1 to 2 EC (depending on frequency of the meetings).

5.3 Training Plan assessment

The Training Plan needs to be submitted in the box 'tsp' in Hora Finita (see Figure 2).



Documenten	
onderzoeksvoorstel	<input type="text"/> Bladeren
tsp	trainingsplan.pdf Bladeren download (81 KB) delete
overig	<input type="text"/> Bladeren
curriculum vitae (cv)	<input type="text"/> Bladeren
kopie paspoort	<input type="text"/> Bladeren

Figure 2. Uploading your Training Plan in Hora Finita

In addition to submitting the Training Plan, the PhD candidate needs to fill out the global planning for the first year and the following years in Hora Finita, i.e., providing the steps/studies that will be undertaken.

The PhD candidate can request assessment of his/her registration, including the Training Plan, by clicking the submit button (make sure all required information is submitted, e.g., your research embedding letter). As part of the 'chain of approval' the PhD Education Committee APH VU/Vumc will in its turn receive an email that the Training Plan is ready for assessment (Please, see the flowchart as presented above for the order of actors giving approval). The PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc assesses the Training Plan against the following criteria:

- The education program consists of a minimum of 30 ECs;
- The education program meets the minimum requirements set by VU/VUmc and APH (see paragraph 5.2).

Meetings of the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc take place on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month. Training Plans that are sent to the committee 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 approve the Training Plan or provide the VUmc PhD candidate with instructions to amend the Training Plan (via Hora Finita).

5.4 Portfolio Tab

After the Training Plan has been approved, the VUmc PhD candidate should register educational activities according to the Training Plan in the portfolio tab in Hora Finita during the PhD trajectory. Please note that for each completed activity the PhD candidate must upload signed proof documents. Without adequate proofs your portfolio cannot be approved. Please find below a list with examples of proof documents.

Courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate of attendance (signed) • Certificate of passing the course exam (signed) • A document with statement of attendance signed by the course coordinator • Print screen of followed courses from digital badge
Conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificates of attendance (signed) • Certificates of (oral/poster) presentation (signed) • Program booklet with proof of your oral/poster presentation • A confirmation e-mail of the organization committee for oral/poster presentation • Proof of registration for the conference
Research meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A document with statement of attendance signed by first promotor
Teaching activities / student supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof of your supervision by means of your name on thesis of student • A document with statement of supervision signed by first promotor
Internal / external committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A document with statement of attendance signed by first promotor
Intervision group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate of attendance (signed)
Peer review activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print screen of email, proof of peer review listed in Publons • A document with statement of peer review signed by first promotor
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A document with statement signed by first promotor

Approval by first promotor

After the registration of educational activities in the Portfolio, an automatic task will be generated that is sent to the supervisor's tasks list in his/her Hora Finita dashboard. The supervisor needs to log in to Hora Finita dashboard and will find the educational activities that need approval in the tasks list.

5.5 Portfolio certificate

In order to obtain the degree of Doctor from the Vrije Universiteit, the PhD candidate must have an approved portfolio. Once the supervisor has approved all the registered educational activities, the

PhD candidate can request a review of the Portfolio from the APH PhD Education Committee via the checklist in Hora Finita or at the start of the manuscript submission procedure. The chair of the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc will determine whether all educational (training) requirements have been met as agreed upon in the Training Plan. This will be determined by checking the registered educational activities of the PhD candidate in the portfolio tab. Checking the proofs (see above) is an important part of this. Make sure that these are adequate and uploaded for each course/activity separately. When the PhD candidate complies to all educational (training) requirements), the PhD candidate is provided with an official 30 EC certificate (and the manuscript submission procedure continues).

5.6 Training Plan annual monitor

During the annual progress meeting (see paragraph 6.1), the supervisor(s) and the PhD candidate are strongly recommended to also discuss the progress regarding education requirements. Only in case of significant adjustments, a second assessment of the Training Plan by the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc is needed. There is no need, however, to inform the committee on attending a different conference than planned, or attending another advanced methodological course than planned. Make sure though that the VU/VUmc and APH requirements are still met. If there are any doubts, feel free to contact the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc with your questions.

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

6.1 Supervision and annual progress meetings

The supervision of the PhD candidate is regulated in Hora Finita as well, and is part of the employment agreement. The supervision is the responsibility of the principal supervisor (i.e., first promotor) together with one or more (co-)supervisors. Note that the supervision is not part of the Training Plan, and therefore does not count for the number of ECs. There are no official rules for number of hours of supervision. However, the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc advises a minimum of 8 hours of co-supervision per month from co-supervisor(s), and 2 hours per month from the principal supervisor.

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 (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 progress 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 for the meeting. At the first year of the PhD trajectory the PhD candidate and the supervisor must plan a go-no go meeting, in order to discuss the (dis)continuation of the PhD trajectory.

6.2 Responsibilities of a PhD candidate

The success of all research 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 research project.
- Persistent problems, or problems that have a negative influence on the research 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 the chair of the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc: Ruth van Nispen (you can contact the chair directly, who will treat your case confidentially), 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 research 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 progress meetings, 'supervision and functioning of the (co)supervisors is always a specific topic. Use this official opportunity to discuss (again) any possible problems with supervision.

6.3 Guidelines of supervision

The nature of good supervision depends on the type of research, the content of the research 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 learned 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 both in research or other occupations within public health.

7. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

7.1 What should be provided in the portfolio?

Please include all certificates (proof documents) 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 (see paragraph 5.4).

7.2 Can I receive exemption from (mandatory) courses of the Training Plan?

Exemptions (max. 15 ECs) 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 Training Plan. 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 Training Plan 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 APH-VU/VUmc if you have questions regarding the exemptions or if you would like to lodge an appeal against the decision of the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc.

7.3 Is there a good example of a completed Training Plan?

Please click [here](#) for an examples of a completed Training Plan. And if any questions remain, do not hesitate to contact the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc. To speed up the process, it is strongly advised that you obtain information from your supervisor or fellow PhD candidates from your department who already have a signed Training Plan, or from the PhD Education Committee APH-VU/VUmc before submitting it for formal assessment.

7.4 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 research 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 Training Plan.

7.5 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 project, 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 APH-VU/VUmc) can be consulted. Do not hesitate to take action and approach us.

7.6 Can I obtain a Doctorate degree as a junior researcher?

In some cases 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 register in Hora Finita and submit a Training 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 ECs requirement, as otherwise you are not allowed to obtain your Doctorate degree.

7.7 Can I obtain a Doctorate degree as an external PhD?

External PhD candidates are PhD candidates who are not employed by VU or 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 Plan and an approved research plan setting out their PhD research and curriculum in advance. Similarly, external PhD candidates must meet the 30 ECs requirement, as otherwise they will not be allowed to obtain their Doctorate degree.

7.8 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 VUmc operate a joint policy for the handling of academic integrity complaints, click [here](#) for more information. 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.

7.9 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 Training Plan (see also paragraph 5.2.2). 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).