



Institute of Physics

Policies for PhD candidates

Preamble

The Institute of Physics (IoP), one of the eight research institutes of the UvA's Faculty of Science (FNWI), comprises all physics research carried out at the UvA. Three disciplinary demarcated divisions can be distinguished within IoP: the Institute for High-Energy Physics (IHEF; embedded within Nikhef, the National Institute for Subatomic Physics), the Institute for Theoretical Physics Amsterdam (ITFA) and the Van der Waals-Zeeman Institute for Experimental Physics (WZI). As these institutes until 2011 operated as independent institutes, normal practice slightly differs in some areas. Nevertheless, initial differences in regulations have in the meantime been standardized in unambiguous institute policies, for example in the field of PhD policies.

A shrinking fraction of the IoP PhD candidates work on projects funded by the former Foundation for Fundamental Research (FOM), since 2017 integrated within the Dutch Research Council (NWO), specifically the Institutes organisation thereof (NWO-I). Because FOM traditionally did not delegate its role as employer to the university workgroups, these students are registered at the UvA as non-employed staff ('Personeel-niet-in-dienst' or 'PNID'; category NWO-appointed). With FOM/NWO-I as their employer, the collective labour agreement and working conditions of FOM PhD candidates are different from those of UvA-employed PhD candidates, but this mostly has little noticeable effect in practice.

For PhD candidates in research collaborations that transcend the IoP (mostly related to their supervisor having a shared appointment at two institutes), the policies of the primary appointing institute apply (coinciding with the institute where the supervisor is formally appointed). A somewhat special situation exists for PhD candidates within IHEF. As these students are fully embedded within Nikhef, they fall under the regulations and policies of the Nikhef organization. Similarly, PhD candidates employed at IoP but performing their research at the Advanced Research Center for Nanolithography (ARCNL) primarily follow regulations and policies at ARCNL. Generally, the IoP aims to avoid situations in which PhD candidates are disadvantaged because of such double affiliations. When in doubt, the institute management is able to provide guidance as to which policies prevail.

1. Responsibilities and quality monitoring

The supervisor or 'promotor' is ultimately responsible for the academic quality of the dissertation. The Principal Investigator (PI) of the research project acts as daily supervisor; this can be the promotor, or a staff member in the same group. In addition to this academic supervisor, each PhD candidate is assigned a second, independent supervisor from another research group at the start of the project. The independent supervisor is a contact person for both the PhD candidate and the supervisor(s), and helps to detect problems early on and remedy them. The presence of the independent supervisor during the annual interviews ensures that the PhD research is also reviewed with a birds' eye perspective. Involving an independent investigator in the PhD programme is intended to prevent stagnation of the project, which potentially results in delays and extensions. It also serves as an informal route for the PhD candidate to obtain confidential advice, e.g. in situations where the views of the PhD candidate and the supervisor(s) do not align.

Upon appointment of the PhD candidate, the supervisor and PhD candidate prepare the Training and Supervision Plan (TSP, or Opleiding- en Begeleidingsplan, OBP), which is evaluated during subsequent progress meetings and adjusted when necessary.

The IoP support office plays a key role by stimulating the supervisor and PhD candidate to prepare the TSP in time, instigating the planning of the annual meetings, supporting the filling out of forms for the Doctorate Board (College voor Promoties, CvP) and submitting TSPs, evaluation reports and other relevant documents to the relevant staff organizations (i.e., the Human Resources department at the Faculty of Science).

For IHEF PhD candidates embedded in Nikhef the relevant local policy of the Research School Subatomic Physics (OSAF, see also below) applies: a three-member advisory committee 'C3' is set up, comprising the supervisor, second supervisor, and a member of the Education Committee of the research school (not directly involved in the research of the PhD candidate). The C3 committees are organized within Nikhef, but for PhD candidates under UvA employment, all IoP policies described in this document apply.

In addition to the above, the regulatory guidelines of the Doctorate Regulations with respect to the composition and functioning of the PhD committee are deemed to offer sufficient assurance of the quality of the dissertation.

2. Research schools

The IoP participates in two research schools, namely:

- Dutch Research School for Theoretical Physics (DRSTP, or Landelijke Onderzoeksschool Theoretische Natuurkunde, LOTN; see web.science.uu.nl/DRSTP). All PhD candidates working under supervision of ITFA researchers are enrolled at DRSTP.
- Research School Subatomic Physics (Onderzoeksschool Subatomaire Fysica, or OSAF; see www.nikhef.nl/activiteiten/onderzoeksschool). All PhD candidates working under supervision of IHEF researchers, who are hence embedded at Nikhef, are enrolled at OSAF. All partners in the Nikhef collaboration (UvA, VU, UU RU, RUG, UM) participate in OSAF.

Both research schools provide a substantive education programme coordinated by an education committee in which the UvA is represented at all times.

The PhD candidates working in the WZI division have not been part of a research school ever since the research school status of COMOP (Condensed Matter and Optical Physics) was terminated. Nevertheless, the educational component of these PhD projects is secured through the respective TSP's. Education in these cases is provided, for example, through participation in topical winter or summer schools.

In the past years, the Faculty of Science has made significant steps in setting up a soft-skills training programme for PhD candidates (see also below), thereby increasingly playing the role of a research school.

3. Recruitment and selection

For the recruitment and selection of candidates for PhD projects the IoP follows the following procedures:

- Recruitment is done through various the UvA websites (UvA, Faculty of Science, IoP, research group), Academic Transfer and LinkedIn, as coordinated by the IoP support office with the Human Resources department of the Faculty of Science.
- The project description is written under responsibility of the prospective supervisor. In general, it follows the description of an externally funded project.

- If a good internal candidate is available (for example a master student), (s)he can be appointed at the request of the prospective supervisor, assuming the case can be made that no more suitable external candidates are expected to be found.

The selection of candidates is the primary responsibility of the supervisor(s). This also includes inviting candidates and setting up a selection committee.

4. Training

In the first 1-3 months of the PhD programme, the PhD candidate prepares a Training and Supervision Plan (TSP, or Opleiding- en Begeleidingsplan, OBP) together with his/her supervisor. The Faculty of Science has developed a template for this. This plan details who will be responsible for the supervision, who will act as independent supervisor, and also which types of training the PhD candidate will follow.

Training is available in the following categories:

1. Educational/didactical skills: prior to involvement in education as teaching assistants PhD candidates are trained in teaching skills through a compulsory, compact course module.
2. Academic skills: course modules covering general academic skills, such as project management, presentational and writing skills. These courses are organized and coordinated by the FNWI Career Services. The compulsory training 'Mastering your PhD' forms the main part of this training programme.
3. Specialist training: these training components are largely offered in the context of the research school and are further secured by participation in (mostly international) summer and winter schools, workshops and conferences, and in some cases also in specialised course modules of the Master programme Physics & Astronomy. This category also includes the specific lab safety instructions given to the PhD candidates in experimental physics by their supervisor and/or colleagues.
4. Career prospects: training courses aimed at preparing for the job market. This is coordinated by FNWI Career Services, and also covered by the annual Amsterdam Physics and Astronomy Career Days organized by IoP, API and the VU department of Physics & Astronomy.

In some cases, PhD candidates are offered the possibility to independently identify relevant course modules, for which the IoP can supply a financial contribution in case the research group has insufficient funds.

For non-Dutch PhD candidates (as well as postdocs and permanent staff), the IoP offers an in-house Dutch training at all levels (A1-C2) to which participation is free of charge.

5. Teaching

Besides taking part in training, every PhD candidate is expected to contribute to teaching. As little distinction as possible is made as to the nature of the appointment (UvA, NWO-I), embedding (Nikhef, ARCNL, Faculty of Science) or background (Dutch, non-Dutch) of the PhD candidate: in principle all PhD candidates are requested to contribute at most 24 ECTS to education. For PhD candidates within WZI, who are also involved in the daily supervision of BSc and MSc internships, this is in practice limited to 18 ECTS. The PhD candidate has a say in the distribution of educational efforts over his/her contract duration and can indicate courses of preference.

Since scholarship or bursary PhD candidates are no employees at UvA, they can in no situation be expected to engage in teaching. In case the candidate opts to volunteer for an educational task (e.g. in the form of a useful learning experience for a future academic career), this possibility can be investigated. However, this should in all cases be done on voluntary basis and can as such not lead to remuneration.

6. Supervision and assessment

The shape and intensity of the daily supervision of the student depends in part on the research project; there are typically differences in the supervision of theoretical and experimental research projects. In all cases there is frequent contact between the PhD candidate and his/her supervisor(s). In this respect IoP has not drawn up local policies in addition to existing policies.

As described in the "Responsibilities and quality monitoring" section, each PhD candidate (except IHEF-students) has a second supervisor from another research group. The role of the second supervisor is that of contact point for both the PhD candidate and the first supervisor and serves to signal problems at an early stage.

Periodic assessment and progress meetings, the planning of which is instigated in general by the IoP support office, take place in the presence of at least the PhD candidate, supervisor and second supervisor. During these meetings the following topics are addressed:

- how the PhD candidate develops as a scientist;
- training arrangements to be made for that purpose;
- (in the transition to the final year) the expectations and opportunities for the PhD's career after the promotion.

As described below, the IoP PhD/postdoc council plays an important role in the social bonding of PhD candidates, as well as in familiarizing PhD candidates within the institute.

7. Facilities

The IoP provides every PhD candidate with adequate office space. A computer is made available in the form of (most frequently) a laptop. Depending on the type of funding (UvA or external) the computer's configuration is determined in consultation with the supervisor (and the person responsible for the budget, in case of externally funded research projects).

The IoP Secretariat acts as intermediate in finding (temporary) housing accommodation for foreign PhD candidates, coordinated by the UvA International Housing office.

8. Position of scholarship students

Several PhD candidate are self-funded, mostly through a scholarship from a foreign agency that the candidate obtained by him/herself. These PhD candidates are referred to as scholarship or bursary students. If the profile of the candidate meets the research profile of the prospective supervisor, a hosting agreement is drawn up with the candidate after consent of the Institute Director and the IoP Management. Although formally without an employer-employee relationship, these scholarship students are treated equally to other PhD candidates as much as possible, as long as this serves the interest of the PhD candidate. As mentioned above, scholarship PhD candidates are exempt from educational duties, but can opt in for teaching tasks on a voluntary basis if this is deemed in the interest of the candidate.

9. IoP PhD/PD Council

The [PhD/postdoc council](#) of the IoP consists of representatives of PhD candidates and postdocs of the IoP and serves as contact point to the IoP Director and IoP Manager for all policy matters concerning PhD candidates and postdocs. The council meets monthly with the Institute Manager. In addition to active participation in policy issues, such as the introduction of the second supervisor in PhD programmes, the PhD/postdoc council plays a key role in facilitating and organizing both content-related and social activities within the institute, such as:

- Welcome mail for new PhD candidates;
- Monthly drinks for PhD candidates and postdocs;
- Monthly Pizza lunch seminar;

- Periodic football, volleyball or other sports tournaments;
- Annual IoP barbecue;
- Career lunches in cooperation with FNWI Career services.

10. Support

It is important that the PhD candidates can rely on a wide array of support options if they face any problems, including (mental) health problems. The students are strongly encouraged to seek support from their colleagues, supervisor, independent supervisor, the IoP PhD/PD council, the secretariat, and/or Institute Manager Joost van Mameren.

Outside the IoP the UvA has multiple official support options for different types of problems. This includes:

- [Student psychologists](#). PhD candidates can have a chat with the student psychologists, free of charge! They also offer group sessions and multiple workshops, including a stress reducing workshop and a mindfulness workshop.
- [Company doctor and corporate social work \(ARBO\)](#). ARBO is the Occupational Health and Safety Service. Their services include a company doctor, but they are also available for any other health issues, including work conditions (they for example offer a work place check to fix your desk and chair for a better posture!), and mental health issues that affect your work. They also offer different workshops, for example about work pressure. These are also the people that can help you reduce your workload after incidents or when dealing with (severe) issues.
- [ProActief UvA](#) offers individual guidance, workshops, training courses and made-to-measure solutions regarding all aspects of career guiding inside and outside the academic world.
- [Faculty of Science Career service](#). For any questions and help regarding your further career, you can contact the Faculty of Science career service. They also periodically organize the IoP career activities.
- [Support for work pressure relief](#). The linked website contains information about (reducing) work pressure on this website, including tips for helping yourself, and trainings and workshops that are offered.
- [UvA website for Social Safety](#). The linked website contains an overview of the different individuals and institutions you can turn to if you experience an unsafe situation or undesirable behaviour.
- [Confidential Advisors](#). The UvA has several confidential advisors, with whom you can talk about problems related to undesirable behaviour.
- [Ombudsperson](#). For all problems and complaints related to diversity and/or inclusion, you can (in the nearby future) contact an ombudsperson. For more information regarding social safety in general, see the above website.

11. Compensation

For PhD candidates on externally funded projects for whom there is no budget available for **travel, training and other expenses** (often in the form of a "bench fee"), IoP covers such costs made within reasonable bounds. Specifically, the printing costs associated with the PhD thesis are supposed to be covered by the project budget if available (and otherwise by the institute). The institute provides a maximum of Eur 600 as compensation for the costs associated with the ceremony (e.g. for the cloakroom and catering costs, a graduation party).

12. Implementation of the strategy

All the elements of this document are part of the current IoP policies. Some policies, such as the introduction of the independent supervisor, were developed in close consultation with the PhD/postdoc council. Communication with the scientific staff about these and other PhD policy issues is done in regular staff meetings and via e-mail.