

Guide for PhD Supervision; ISS PhD Programme in Development Studies

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1. Introduction to the guide for PhD supervision.

The PhD programme is a vital component and a major strength of the ISS research programme. ISS envisions a PhD programme where the PhD candidate is the owner and driver of the PhD process. The candidate takes responsibility for the process and should feel confident enough to signal needs with regards to supervision and support.

The supervisory team shares the responsibility for the PhD journey. It is the first line of support and ensures that the PhD process and its outcomes fulfil the standards of the institute and university.

This guide is meant for ISS supervisors of PhD candidates, as well as PhD candidates so that they know what is expected from PhD supervision.

It is based on the [PhD Vision](#) that was adopted in 2018 and takes into account the current Rules and Regulations and the administrative system of Hora Finita.

Although the guide lays down expectations and elaborates on the skills required for supervision, it should not be read as a training manual. Supervisors that feel the need to enhance their skills are encouraged to engage in training.

1. Supervisory team

Getting a supervisor

The PhD candidate is in the driver's seat and PhD candidates are encouraged to select their supervisors. However, in many cases prospective candidates do not know whom to approach, in which case the RDC will arrange supervisors at the start of the project. In case supervisors of choice of the candidate are not available (for example because of work-overload), RDC will propose a suitable arrangement.

Once a promotor is in place, the PhD Support Office will register the PhD candidate in Hora Finita, after which the PhD trajectory can start. The promotor will – with the candidate - seek a balanced composition of the supervisory team. Issues such as required expertise, available network and the expectation to build a good professional relationship are considered.

Composition of the team

Supervision is done in teams ranging from 2 to 3. Working in a team enhances a supervisor opportunities for peer learning and feedback.

For all PhDs in the Netherlands the “four-eyes”-principle is the basis of the supervision. Every PhD candidate will have at least two supervisors. The first supervisor (promotor) is always a professor or an associate professor with *ius Promovendi* (the right to promote) at ISS/EUR; the second supervisor could be either professor, associate professors or assistant professor. The second supervisor preferably adds to the knowledge and skills that are needed by a candidate. It is possible to add a third member to the supervisory team.

The guidelines for the composition of the supervisory team are described in the [Rules & Regulations, Part 1, Chapter 3](#)

If needed expertise is missing within ISS/EUR, it is possible to ask external experts to provide specific input or become a part of the team. In case an external adviser becomes part of the team, it is important to be clear about responsibilities and incentives. Arrangements are subject to the approval of the research director of ISS and need to be specified in an MOU. The MOU is signed by the research director of ISS, and the counterpart at the other institution. It is advisable to make the arrangements as early as possible.

The regulations allow for a second supervisor who may be based at another university. This may be a university in the Netherlands or abroad.

ISS prefers that in cases where the first supervisor is an “umbrella promotor” (see below), there will be two additional supervisors appointed, to adhere to the “four-eye” principle.

The composition of the supervisory teams is subject to the approval of the RDC.

Umbrella promotor

Due to the requirement that promotor should have the right to promote (*ius promovendi*), it may happen that the major expertise and responsibilities lie with the co-promotor/second supervisor.

In this case, the (nominal) first supervisor or so-called umbrella promotor is not involved in daily supervision but retains responsibility for the quality of the DDS and FDS documents and the final manuscript. S/he has the final responsibility in case of major problems of wellbeing, ethics or issues that jeopardize the completion of the project.

Division of roles and labour

The division of responsibilities in the advisory team should be specified in the Training and Supervision Plan, that must be submitted within three months after registration.

One of the supervisors functions as a contact person for the RDC and the PhD support office. This contact person is responsible for the planning and organization of the seminars, updating information in Hora Finita, and the yearly progress evaluation and submission of the form.

Tasks

The tasks of the supervisory team are to:

- advise the candidate on the formulation of the dissertation outline and on elaboration of the research design, help to establish boundaries and gaps.
- secure consistent and timely communication with the candidate. This requires realistic expectation management about feasible deadlines, feasible research goals, interaction, and guidance on time management
- advise on necessary coursework for the TSP. In case the supervisory team is convinced that less (or no) coursework is required, the contact person of the team can send an elaborated request to the RDC (via the PhD Support Office) to waive (part of) the coursework.
- respond with comments on documents submitted by the candidate, preferably within 2 weeks of receiving the document; but never beyond 6 weeks.
- advise the candidate about the form of the thesis: as a monograph, based on articles or hybrid forms (see below);
- guide the candidate on ethical issues, professionalism and integrity;
- advise during fieldwork
- advise the candidate in the preparation of presentations in seminars and conferences;
- advise and support the candidate on research activities;
- advise and support the candidate on academic and societal research uptake activities
- attend the PhD seminars given by the candidate;
- guide candidates in the preparation of the DDS, MTS and FDS (or their alternatives), and the Public Defence;
- discuss with the candidate his/her career development and bring career opportunities to his/her attention;
- perform administrative tasks in relation to the TSP, seminars, yearly monitoring progress meetings and the defence in Hora Finita.

Change in supervisory team

The composition of the supervisory team may undergo changes in the course of the PhD journey for a wide variety of reasons. Neither candidates nor supervisors should see such a change as failure or embarrassment.

It is important to be clear about the new composition of the team, and make sure that this is properly discussed, including with supervisors that leave the team.

The promotor sends a proposal with argumentation for the required changes in the team to the RDC for approval.

2. Responsibilities of the PhD candidate

Successful supervision also depends on the commitment and responsibilities of the PhD candidates. These include:

- work on the PhD research in line with the agreements in the TSP;
- respond adequately to the supervisors' advice;
- signal problems on time and be transparent, so the supervisory team is able to provide support
- consult the information provided via the PhD wiki and other sources available on the website
- participate in a yearly monitoring progress meeting with the supervisory team
- ensure that information and evidence regarding completed coursework is uploaded in Hora Finita
- withhold from any form of plagiarism. In the case possible plagiarism is detected, the PhD candidate is required to discuss the problem with the promotor and to address it adequately. Repeated detection of plagiarism will result in discontinuation from the ISS PhD programme;

3. Supervision.

PhD candidates are highly diverse in the supervision they require.

This starts with the level of initiative and assertiveness of the candidate. Not all candidates are equally capable of expressing what they need and daring to enter a discussion with the supervisors if necessary. Candidates also differ in terms of the skills they bring. Culture and personality may also play a role. The type and level of supervision may change with the different phases of the PhD journey. It is recommended that the supervisory team probes with the candidate what level and style of supervision is expected.

Supervisory skills and competences

Supervisors are diverse in terms of their skills. It is not necessary that all supervisors have all the skills required for supervision, as long as the necessary skills are represented in the team, and the division of labour is clear. For example, when a candidate makes clear s/he needs coaching when it comes to planning, it can be decided that one of the supervisors will coach the candidate.

Expected supervisory skills and competences are:

- expertise on the topic of the PhD;
- appropriate epistemological and methodological expertise;
- coaching on skills including planning, structuring and writing;
- providing contacts, networks, opportunities for conferences;
- good communication skills in a multicultural environment;
- ability to build a relationship of trust and reliability with individual candidates and create a safe space for personal development;
- being easily approachable, empathetic, motivating and encouraging;
- openness to give and receive feedback.

Skills development

Supervision requires many skills and supervisors are encouraged to continue learning by discussing matters arising in supervision in the team. It can be very helpful to ask colleagues for feedback.

An example of a workshop/training open to supervisors of EUR:

<https://www.uu.nl/en/professionals/programmes/supervising-phd-research>

Supervisors are further encouraged to seek tailor-made learning opportunities, for example by requesting coaching from experienced colleagues, possibly to be arranged through RDC, or by organizing inter-vision. The RDC can also organize workshops with and for supervisors.

Research Ethics Committee

The objective of the ISS Research Ethics Committee (REC) is to establish an enabling environment for ethical research practice and ensure that the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of participants are considered carefully.

See for more information: <https://my.eur.nl/en/iss-employee/committees-boards/research-ethics-committee>.

Before going to the field all PhD researchers must ask for advice and need approval from the REC. Supervisors should discuss the advice of the REC with their candidate: what implications does the advice have for the research design and how to incorporate this in the DDS documents?

Supervision during fieldwork

Most candidates spend a prolonged period of time in the field.

In case there is a host institution or field supervisor, the arrangement needs to be made on time and mutual expectations must be clear. It is advised to agree on an arrangement between the host/field supervisor and the ISS supervisor/PhD candidate based on a written document (email) about expectations before the fieldwork starts.

It is important to have a clear arrangement about communication between the candidate and the supervisory team at ISS, with regards to the frequency, form and means of reporting, for example through email and regular video meetings. This arrangement must be made before the start of the fieldwork. PhD candidates should signal when more frequent or different types of interaction are required during the fieldwork, for example when conditions change substantially, or plans are significantly altered.

All fieldwork brings about risks for researchers, as well as research assistants, participants and host institutions.

- It is always advisable to ask candidates whom to contact in case of emergency.
- It is strongly advised that all PhD candidates follow the **Training on Safety and Security** offered by ISS prior to their fieldwork.
- PhD candidates may only conduct fieldwork after obtaining a letter of approval from the Research Ethics Committee

In case candidates do their fieldwork in areas coded orange by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, training is compulsory. In that case, a risk analysis and information sheet must be provided by the candidate and approved by the supervisors.

In case candidates do their fieldwork in areas coded red by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, RDC must be consulted before permission of fieldwork can be given. This is conditional upon the quality of the risk assessment and mitigating measures taken.

Supervisors have to prepare their candidates well; among other by insisting on the safety and security workshop and by referring to the necessary practicalities, like the travel insurance arrangements of ISS.

Supervision of non-residential candidates

All PhD candidates are entitled to the same level of supervision and support. As non-residential candidates are on a distance, and do not knock on their supervisors' door on a daily basis, it is even more important to explicitly agree on expectations and agreements on communication and feedback.

In case of trouble

In case of problems, including delays, illness or problems of a personal nature, the supervisory team is the first port of call to address these. In case further assistance is required, candidates or supervisors can call on the RDC, the PhD support office, the PhD adviser, the diversity team or the confidential counselor. These can also refer to specialized services within or outside ISS/EUR. The PhD wiki lists all details.

4. Interaction with the candidate

Giving and receiving feedback concerning effective and pleasant collaboration:

PhD candidates are academics at the start of their career, and at the bottom of the academic hierarchy. They depend on their supervisors, who are (very) experienced researchers and are virtually at the top of the hierarchy. This sometimes makes it difficult to discuss matters, especially if intercultural aspects play a role.

Feedback, preferably in the form of constructive criticism, is essential. Investing in the relationship with PhD candidates will always pay back, one way or the other: higher productivity, better cooperation and more work pleasure. But how do you ensure that this feedback produces the desired results?

- Create safety and trust in the relationship. If that is not (yet) the case, work on that first.
- By observing the rules of giving and receiving feedback, you make room for improvement and you will learn the most from each other

Rules for giving feedback

Before giving feedback, try to analyse the purpose of the feedback and make sure you know whether the recipient of the feedback is open to receiving it.

A valued way of giving feedback is through these 4 steps:

- first describe the behaviour you observe (not presenting it as a general, accepted truth)
- then the effect that this behaviour has on you
- describe the feeling it evokes in you
- give a description of the behaviour you would want to see

Remember that it is a dialogue. Give the PhD candidate the opportunity to respond and to ask questions for clarification. Apart from giving feedback, it is also encouraged to ask feedback from PhD candidates.

Rules for receiving feedback

This is also subject to rules. Only this way does feedback have maximum effectiveness. There are in fact only two basic rules:

- Do not be afraid of criticism, do not defend your behaviour, just listen and ask questions for clarification.
- Have the right attitude: be open and grateful, feedback is advice for free! Think about the received feedback and decide whether and how to change your behaviour. See it as an opportunity to grow as a person.

Concepts: listen carefully to your conversation partner, ask for explanation, thank him or her for the comment, think about it carefully and then do something with the feedback. Express why and how you will or will not do something with (parts of) his or her feedback.

Providing feedback on written texts

PhD candidates usually respond better to feedback on texts when:

- There are also positive remarks on what is good
- Critical comments provide concrete suggestions on how to improve

Working together on research and writing a thesis

How do you help the PhD student to become an independent researcher?

A (daily) supervisor is a content expert, but also a researcher, coach and assessor. Transferring knowledge is only a minor part of the process.

- Positive attitude:

To achieve high-quality research and manuscript within an acceptable period of time, a candidate needs, among other things, talent and perseverance. Supervisors can help the candidate with a dose of confidence, by focusing on what goes well and the qualities of the candidate that stand out. Pay attention to that, positive feedback is the best incentive. Instead of burning down the effort and poor results, discuss with the candidate how to improve.

- Identify situations in time that prevent the candidate from being productive.

Give advice to the candidate on how to improve the situation or refer to the PhD Advisor.

- Communicate about mutual expectations

This is an underrated topic. Express to each other concretely and clearly what you expect from the other. Make agreements that are realistic and stick to them. Nothing can frustrate the cooperation as much as misunderstandings on this issue.

5. Monitoring progress

Hora Finita

Hora Finita is the support service for PhD candidates of Erasmus University Rotterdam and Erasmus MC. All processes related to the PhD trajectory, from admission to the programme and the public defence of the dissertation, are supported by this service.

Hora Finita is an important tool in monitoring progress. The Hora Finita system will send an automatic mail to the supervisors, if an action or decision from their side is needed

The Hora Finita system will have the full portfolio of the candidate in one place, including the TSP arrangements, finalised coursework, planning and agreements etc.

Seminars

There are three compulsory seminars in the duration of the PhD. The most important seminar is the Dissertation Design Seminar and there are no exceptions or exemptions with regard to this seminar.

- The Dissertation Design Seminar is to be held within two months before the envisaged start of the fieldwork. Candidates should aim to hold the DDS within 12 months after starting the PhD programme, part-time PhD candidates within 18 months.
The DDS is meant to provide a Go-NoGo moment, on the basis of the dissertation design and one sample chapter. It should be held as soon as these two documents are completed. Details are available in the PhD Rules & Regulations document and on the PhD Wiki.
- The Mid-Term Seminar; to be held within four months after the completion of field work (so within 28 months of registration). Part-time PhD candidates need to give the seminar within 36 months of registration.
The supervisor can request exemption for the MTS to the RDC (through the PhD support office). A substantiated waiver request is needed. Details are available in the PhD Rules & Regulations document and on the PhD Wiki.
- the Full Draft Dissertation Seminar is to be held when the full draft of the PhD dissertation is completed, and within 15 months after the Post-Fieldwork Seminar (so within 43 months of registration). The Full Draft Dissertation Seminar for part-time candidates shall be held within 66 months of registration. The supervisor can request exemption for the FDS, for exceptional reasons, to the RDC (through the PhD support office). A substantiated waiver request is needed. Details are available in the PhD Rules & Regulations document and on the PhD Wiki.

Yearly progress meeting

Each year an evaluation moment takes place between the PhD candidate and the supervisory team or daily supervisor. This meeting is meant to discuss the process, the collaboration the progress and well-being of the candidate as well as the planning for the coming year. The progress meeting form is to be used as a guideline, so that all parties can be sure that the most important issues are on the table. If desired, the (chair of the) RDC, the PhD Advisor, the diversity team or the confidential counselor can be consulted in case there are differences of insights or in case there are reasons why a transparent discussion cannot take place.

Monograph or articles?

Within ISS, a thesis can be a monograph or a collection of articles, whether or not already published, as stated in the [EUR Doctoral Regulations](#)

The articles must form a coherent whole and must be published no longer than five years before submission of the dissertation for the defence. At least one substantive chapter needs to be single-authored. The coherence is shown in an introduction and the conclusion and summary. In case of co-authorship, the promotor needs to make a statement on this.

It is also possible to work with hybrid options. This means that the manuscript consists of a mixture of published and non-published chapters; or that chapters represent longer or different versions of published articles. The latter can be considered, for example, when the candidate wants to incorporate more empirical data than possible in a journal article.

The choice to produce a monograph or a manuscript based on articles, depends on several factors, including the topic, the organization of the research, disciplinary variation and personal preference. Ultimately, it is the choice of the candidates which form to take, as long as the quality of the thesis is guaranteed by the supervisory team and is in line with the requirements of the EUR Doctoral Regulations.

In the case of articles, supervisory teams can agree on a division of labour about who guides and possibly co-authors particular chapters.

Text matching and referencing

Documents that are submitted for the monitoring seminars, DDS (sample chapter and design document) and FDS (full draft), go through a text matching software. Currently at ISS, this software is Turnitin. The PhD Support Office uploads the mentioned documents in the software system. They then forward the report to the supervisor.

Turnitin does not indicate plagiarism, it only shows similarities of texts. The percentage of text matching, as indicated by Turnitin, is only an indication of the similarity with other texts. Therefore, it is important for the supervisor as she/he is the expert regarding referencing and plagiarism, to provide his/her analysis of the Turnitin results in a report to the RDC. For example, instead of plagiarism careless referencing could be the issue.

It is important to note that for PhD candidates the requirements for referencing are even stricter than for MA students. Detailed information you can find on the [PhD Wiki](#). Supervisors are responsible for identifying academic fraud and must be aware of the differences in correct referencing between MA students and PhD candidates. If you want to know more about the Turnitin software, please check their site: <https://www.turnitin.com/>

6. Practical information and tools

- ISS PhD Rules & Regulations: <https://www.iss.nl/en/media/2019-01-phd-rules-and-regulations>
- Training and Supervisory Plan Form (TSP): <https://www.iss.nl/en/research/phd-programme/phd-rules-regulation-and-other-documents>
- PhD WIKI on the ISS Intranet Myeur > ISS site > services > PhD Support > programme: <https://my.eur.nl/en/iss-employee/services/phd-support>
- Guidelines Monitoring Seminars: PhD WIKI op Myeur > ISS site > services > PhD Support > programme: <https://my.eur.nl/en/iss-employee/services/phd-support/programme/monitoring-seminars>
- EUR Doctoral regulations (including protocol for the Public Defence): <https://www.eur.nl/en/media/2020-10-en-promotiereglement-2020oct0>
- Progress Monitoring Form: <https://my.eur.nl/en/iss-employee/services/phd-support/programme/monitoring-progress>
- Guideline Hora Finita for Supervisors: <https://my.eur.nl/en/eur-employee/supervisors-and-co-supervisors-hora-finita>

7. Relevant literature on Supervision

Below follows a list of recommendable books and articles:

- [Teaching, Supervising, and Supporting PhD Students: Identifying Issues, Addressing Challenges, Sharing Strategies.](#) by Siltanen J, Chen X, Doyle A, Shotwell A **Canadian review of sociology** 2019 May; 56(2): 274-291
- [How to supervise international PhD students: A narrative inquiry study](#) by Hussain M., Ali H. **International Journal of Higher Education** v8 n5 (2019): 143-156
- [Developing research writing : a handbook for supervisors and advisors](#) by Susan Carter, Deborah Laurs eBook 2017 ISBN: 9781134888115
- [Kearns, H. and J. Finn \(2017\) Supervising PhD Students. A practical guide and toolkit. Adelaide: Thinkwell.](#)
- [Helping doctoral students understand PhD thesis examination expectations: A framework and a tool for supervision](#) by David Hodgson **Active Learning in Higher Education** (2017): 146978741774202