

# Netherlands

## I. General information and application procedure

### Which institutions award doctoral degrees?

Only accredited universities may award doctoral degrees. Formally, the responsibility lies with the Board of Promotions of these universities, chaired by the Rector.

### What forms of doctorate attendance are available?

Contracts can be full-time or part-time. Often, there is no formal requirement on actual hours worked, although most contracts are for 38 hours for four years (i.e. 4 years full time).

### What is the formal length of time foreseen for completing a doctorate?

There is no legal minimal or maximal length. The collective labour agreement states that contracts may be extended for as long as desired by both parties.

### What is the status of the doctoral candidates<sup>2</sup>?

Doctoral candidates can have different statuses, either as employees, students, or otherwise.

Employees are employed under the Collective Labour Agreement (CLA) of their respective institution, and derive their protected rights from them. This is the most common status for doctoral candidates paid by universities or government-sponsored grants.

Bursary candidates (i.e. those who are paid a scholarship rather than a salary) have a student status, and cannot derive rights from the CLA or any other legal protections for employees. For tax purpose, however, they are considered to be employees (but for tax purposes only). There is currently one large-scale experiment with bursary candidates funded by university (where employee status is the standard) at the University of Groningen. Contract candidates are employed by an industrial partner, and considered as employees there.

External candidates are registered as doctoral candidates at the university, but have are not contractually employed by any party in relation to their doctorate.

### What are the social benefits for doctoral candidates with student status?

Compared to employees, bursary students do not receive payment towards their pension

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<sup>1</sup> **Doctorate** is understood as the institutional frameworks and processes geared towards the completion of a doctoral degree.

<sup>2</sup> **Doctoral candidate** is a person enrolled in a doctorate.

scheme, nor holiday and end-of-year bonuses.

They might qualify for health insurance, child care, or housing benefits, but this is dependent on not reaching an income threshold and has been a point of contention for multiple candidates with student status funded by foreign grants.

### **How are doctoral candidates financially supported?**

Employees receive salary as per the CLA, ranging from 2222 Euro pre-tax (approximately 1700 after tax) in the first year to 2840 Euro (approximately 2100 after tax) in the fourth, receive additional holiday and end-of-year payments (one month's salary each), and the usual unemployment benefits and payments towards a pension scheme.

Bursary candidates receive a scholarship from the university or their sponsor (often foreign government, such as the Chinese Scholarship Council). Bursary students funded by universities receive a scholarship of 2099 pre-tax (1750 after tax - this is slightly more than the net amount for employees due to mandatory pension payment) per month.

### **What are the admission requirements for a doctorate?**

In principle a Master's degree is required. There are no additional exams. When funding is provided, a typical application process (resume, cover letter, recommendation from past supervisors, etc) is followed with interviews. Starting dates are freely chosen by both parties. Comprehension of English language is typically a requirement, which can be met through standardised tests (e.g. TOEFL) or English-language degrees.

## **II. Progression**

### **How is a doctorate organized in your country?**

Universities are largely sovereign in awarding doctorate degrees, and there are no state-run exams or doctoral programmes.

Universities are free to set their doctoral education programme. Typically, courses must be attended, ranging from 15 days' worth to 30 ECTS depending on university and doctoral candidate's status. Course types range from Masters level courses to soft skills and research-related summer schools.

On a departmental level, education for doctoral candidates is often shared between universities through the establishment of "research schools", which have no official status but are funded by the participating university departments, whose staff members teach courses aimed specifically at doctoral candidates.

### **How is doctoral supervision provided?**

Doctoral candidates are formally supervised by one or more promoters (senior associate or full professors), but daily supervision may be delegated to co-promoters (including postdoc). As a general principle, at least two persons must be involved in the supervision of a doctoral candidate, although it is not necessary that both are involved in daily supervision. Promoters

must have the *ius promovendi* (right to promote), which is limited to full professors and associate professors deemed suitable (criteria may include successful supervision as co-promotor, or having obtained certain grants).

### **What are the main obligations of doctoral candidates?**

The main obligations consist of publishing in journals/conferences, writing a dissertation (which may be a separate monograph or a collection of previously-published papers). Teaching varies per university, research group, and doctoral candidate.

### **Is any mobility compulsory?**

There is no compulsory mobility.

### **How are courses in transferable skills provided?**

University Graduate Schools (tasked exclusively at ensuring education for doctoral candidates is available and up to standards within a university) or research schools (see above) typically offer such courses. They may be either voluntary or mandatory, but in the former case there is usually a minimal requirement on how many courses to attend. Online courses may be taken as a replacement.

### **How is the progress of the doctoral candidate evaluated?**

Doctoral candidates should be evaluated on a yearly basis at least. This evaluation involves a discussion with the doctoral candidate and the supervising team of the plans for the next year, both for education and research, an evaluation of the previous year, and the outlook for the remaining time in the doctoral programme.

After one year, most universities use a formal evaluation moment where non-supervising staff members may be invited to determine whether the doctoral candidate is suitable to continue their research for the remainder of their contract.

### **Is it possible for doctoral candidates to change supervisor(s)?**

This is possible, and is done through the university's board of promotions.

### **Are supervisors required to have training in order to supervise doctoral candidates?**

Training in supervision of students is mandatory within the Universal Teaching Qualification (UTQ) programme, but this focuses mostly on the supervision of bachelor and master students, and is not a requirement to be appointed (but rather, mandatory to obtain within the first few years, during which students or doctoral candidates can be supervised). Training specifically for supervising doctoral candidates is not mandatory, but such training may be offered as part of the UTQ (universities are free to determine the programmes themselves) or as independent courses for staff members. Such courses (both within and outside UTQ) usually consist of a mix of 3-5 days of workshops, discussion of previous experience, or a proof of competence.

## III. Defence procedure

### **What requirements should be met to receive acceptance to enter the defence procedure?**

The doctoral defense is entered when all educational requirements have been fulfilled, and the dissertation committee has approved the dissertation. The dissertation committee consists of the supervisory team, the dean of the university (who usually delegates this), and external members from within the university or from other universities who must all hold doctorates themselves and are experts in the field.

### **What documents are required to start the defence procedure?**

The dissertation should be submitted to, and approved by, the dissertation committee. The defence procedure is mostly ceremonial, and it is virtually unheard of that a candidate does not successfully complete the defense.

### **What is the defence procedure?**

Universities are free to set requirements for their defense ceremonies. Typically, they are held in English or Dutch, public, and consist of the committee examining the doctoral candidate on the subject of their thesis and associated propositions, if any. The defense may be preceded by a layman's talk, in which the doctoral candidate explains their work to a general audience in 15-20 minutes.

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