

Viewpoints on the expectations of the supervisors and the PhD candidates

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University of Liège

9th EUA-CDE Workshop

PhD at the University of Liège

+/-2000 PhD candidates at ULg



21 domains (decree) at ULg

Art de bâtir et urbanisme – Art et sciences de l'art – Criminologie – Histoire, art et archéologie – Information et communication – Langues et Lettres – Philosophie – Sciences de la santé publique – Sciences économiques et de gestion – Sciences juridiques – Sciences politiques et sociales – Sciences psychologiques et de l'éducation – Traduction et interprétation - ...

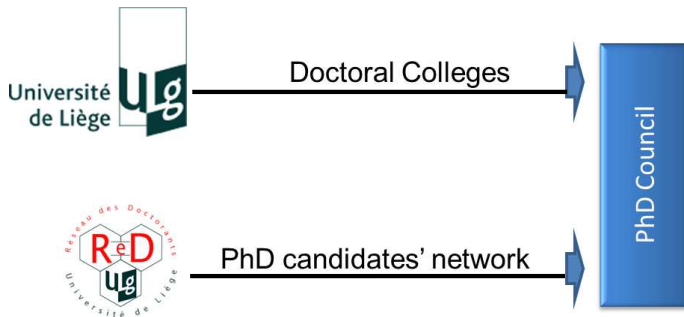


34 Doctoral Colleges at ULg

From 2 to 300 PhD
candidates/College

1 general ULg regulation, Faculty regulations, specific
regulations in each college
+ ULg guidelines for the PhD training

Doctoral Council



Its missions: organising the doctoral training, promoting PhD (internally and internationally),...

Registration as PhD candidate at ULg

Administrative
admission
procedure

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Registration as
PhD candidate

Thesis project

Supervisor

Registration as PhD candidate at ULg

Administrative
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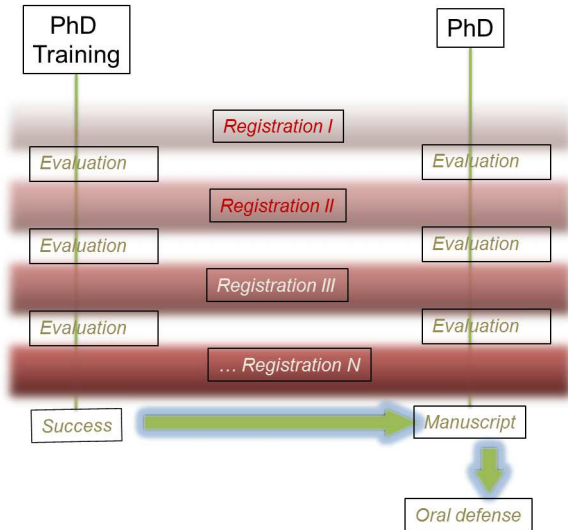
Registration as
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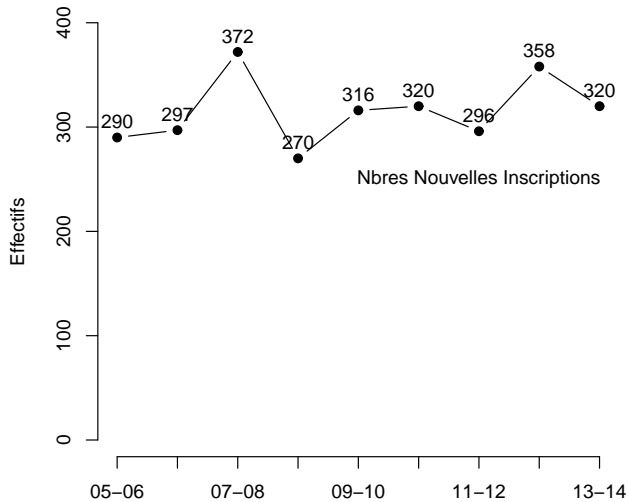
Supervisor

There is no formal discussion about the expectations, rights and duties...

PhD path



About 300 new PhD candidates each year in Liège



Success and failure rates during the i th registration year

Year	Number of PhD "at risk"	stops	Number of success	on going	Risk of failure	Chance of success
1	2839	162	6	303	5,71%	0,21%
2	2368	172	22	311	7,26%	0,93%
3	1863	105	51	238	5,64%	2,74%
4	1469	74	155	223	5,04%	10,55%
5	1017	43	305	139	4,23%	29,99%
6	530	20	164	79	3,77%	30,94%
≥ 7	267	36	120	111	13,48%	44,94%

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How to (try to) improve the situation?

In Liège, we have been acting along two main lines:

- By improving the training of the supervisors
- By expanding the consciousness of the PhD candidates

On the side of the supervisors

- Since 2011, one-day trainings (organised internally as a sharing of good practices) are offered to the newly appointed professors;
- In 2015, jointly with ULB, invitation in Brussels of H. Sonneveld (Netherlands Centre for Graduate and Research Schools) for a 3-day intensive and “professional” training in PhD supervision;
- Since then, the Doctoral council has been organising, on a regular basis and for an audience of professors, trainings and round tables on specific themes, e.g. “expectations at the start of the PhD”, “selection of a PhD candidate”, ...

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But the questions are

- Should the trainings be compulsory (e.g. for each newly appointed professor)?
- Is a training based on “experience sharings” between peers sufficiently efficient or should the universities resort to “professional” trainers?
- Are the expectations of the supervisors compatible with those of the PhD candidates?

On the side of the PhD candidates

Since its creation, the PhD candidates' network has been organising informal discussions with PhD candidates on diverse themes

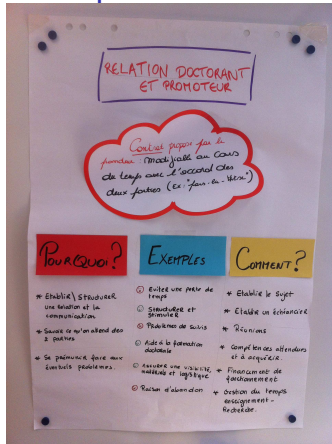
- What kind of transversal (or “soft”) skills need to be offered to PhD candidates in order to increase their future employability?
- What are the expectations of the PhD candidates at the start of the PhD?
- How to best evaluate the research output in the PhD process?
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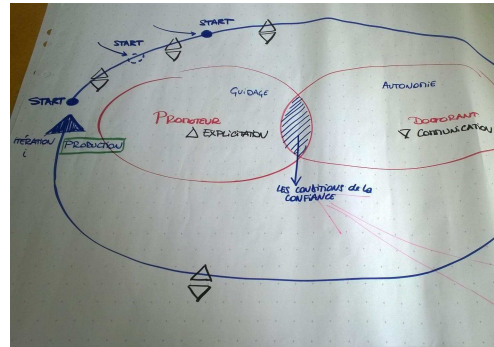
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Viewpoints of the supervisors and the PhD candidates on the expectations

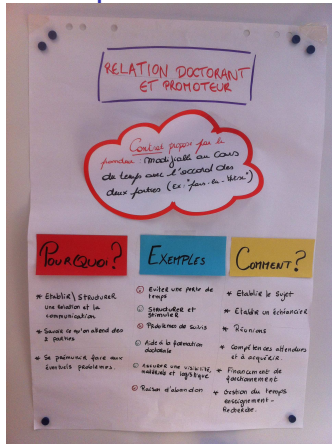


PhD poster

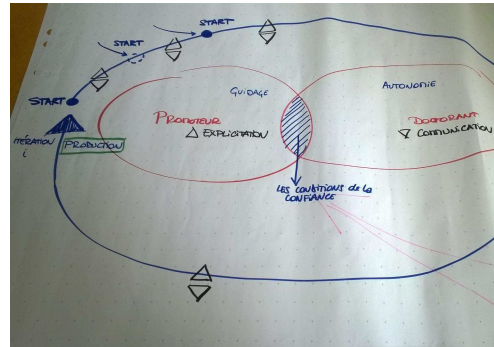


Professor poster

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PhD poster



Professor poster

Having discussed the same theme about expectations separately among PhD candidates and among supervisors, the proposal of the PhD candidates was discussed with the supervisors.

Proposal of the PhD candidates

Objective: start the PhD on good atmosphere of mutual understanding and set the foundations for a strong relationship

Tool: “Mutual agreement contract” proposed by the supervisor:

- Establish and structure the relationship
- Know what is expected of both parties
- Protect oneself against potential problems before they occur

Experiment

From previous discussions and following the proposal of the PhD candidates, a checklist of points that would be interesting to discuss was written down and suggested to the new PhD candidates and their supervisors.

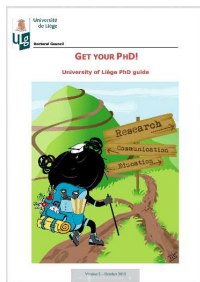
More specifically, for each of the following items, the supervisor and the PhD candidate are asked to discuss about their expectations and to try to find an agreement that is acceptable for each one of them:

- Initial perception about the PhD process
- Thesis plan and project, content of the PhD training
- Supervision scheme
- Material and financial resources
- Intellectual property and ethics

Leaflet “Get your PhD”

A call for volunteers among supervisors was launched in order to test the checklist and about ten supervisors agreed to welcome their new PhD candidates with such a formal discussion.

The checklist is also widely available via the leaflet “Get your PhD”



It is highly advisable to become familiar with your supervisor's method of working so as to understand their guidance style. It is in the interests of all parties to ensure that your supervisor is able to make optimum use of the time they can devote to you. It is therefore crucial to prepare the meetings thoroughly: summarise the questions to be asked and the topics to be discussed (ideally in writing), and make notes of the oral comments formulated by the supervisor. Of course, it may also be beneficial to send an overview detailing the progress of the work performed prior to the meeting and a summary note afterwards.

It is best to discuss one's mutual expectations from the start and agree on the frequency of meetings (while planning them) as well as how these meetings are to take place, in line with the agenda of each party. The annual meeting with the thesis committee needs to be planned in a timely manner as well.

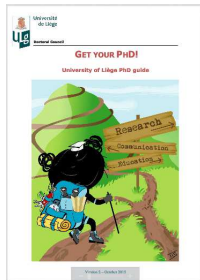
Misunderstandings and even conflicts may sometimes arise from insufficient clarification of mutual expectations. It is therefore advisable to make one's wishes and requirements explicit. To help you, a checklist of topics to be discussed between a supervisor and a PhD candidate is provided by the Doctoral Council and IFRES.

<http://www.ulg.ac.be/books/en/pars-en-these/>

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But still very few supervisors see the necessity to discuss those points at the start of the PhD...

Conclusion

- No formal discussion is required in Liège; some tools (checklist,...) are widely available;
- A formal agreement, reviewed on a regular basis, would be appreciated by the PhD candidates;
- The professors do not always understand why the PhD candidates would appreciate a formal agreement.