



VRIJE  
UNIVERSITEIT  
BRUSSEL

## VUB PHD SURVEY

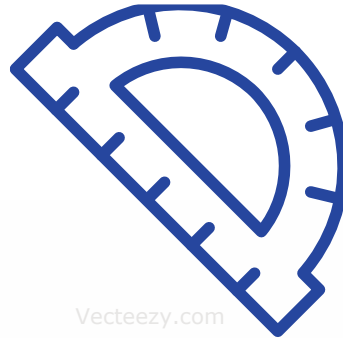
ANAÏS GLORIEUX, THEUN PIETER VAN TIENOVEN & BRAM SPRUYT (BRISPO)

HANNELORE DE GRANDE, LOREN PAUWELS (RTDO)



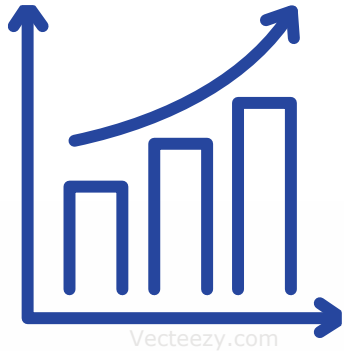
## GOALS

1. Monitor instrument to **evaluate** the job satisfaction and to map out all aspects of a doctoral trajectory
2. Chance for PhD candidates to indicate where support is lacking and to provide **input for policy innovations**
3. A **self-evaluation** tool for PhD candidates
4. Informing PhD candidates about **available services** in case of problems (e.g., ombudspersons, reporting point, etc.)



## MEASUREMENT

- Yearly survey
- Average response rate of **43.6%**
- 2285 individuals  
slightly over half participated more than once
- Topics related to:
  - Supervision and support
  - Work conditions (infrastructure, competition, harassment...)
  - Research progress (perceived obstacles, feeling on the right track...)
  - Intrinsic characteristics (self-efficacy, motivation, perceived time pressure...)
  - ...



## HISTORY

- 2017** Pilot study in three faculties
- 2018** Yearly online survey across all faculties
- 2020-2021** COVID-19 module
- 2022-2023** Supervisor survey
- 2024** Qualitative research (focus groups)



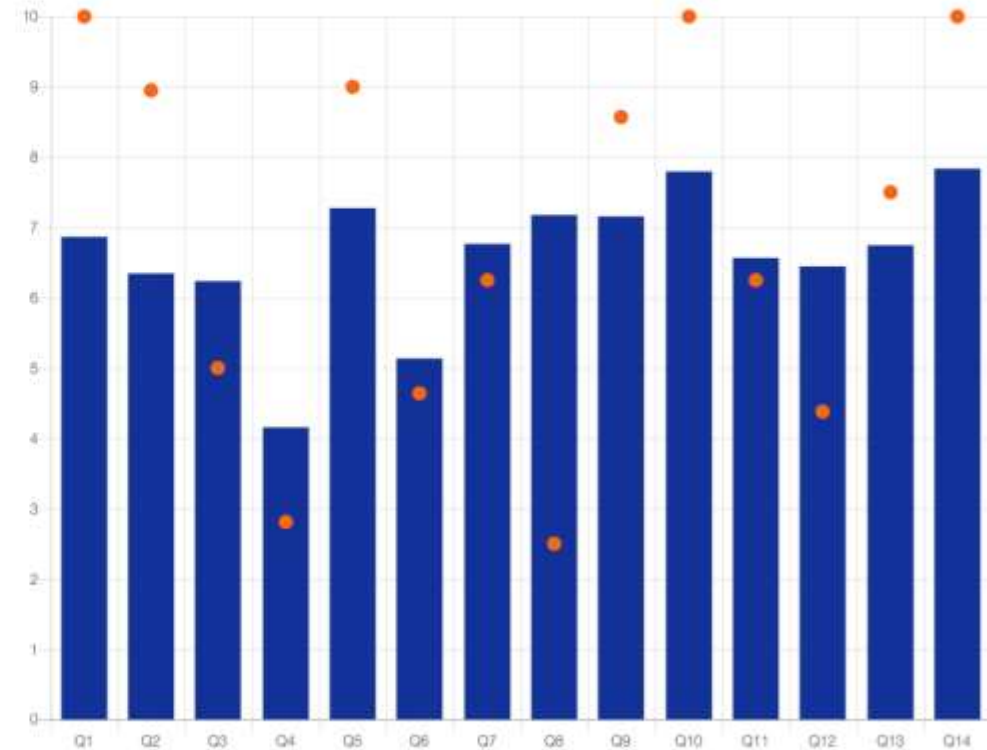
OUTPUT

- Annual descriptive reports
- Facts & Figures
  - Doing PhD research during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 through 2021)
  - Harassment among PhD candidates (2021 through 2023)
  - Selection and expectations of PhD candidates by their supervisor
  - International mobility
- 4 scientific articles
- Policy recommendations for VUB
- Results in newsletters for PhD candidates and supervisors
- Personal feedback for respondents

Based on the answers you gave in the survey, we constructed variables that say something about your work experience and satisfaction. In the graph below you can find your personal score, and compare it to the overall average of other PhD candidates.

Note that the higher the score on an item, the more positively this item is evaluated. Consequently, a lower score indicates a more negative evaluation.

Question	You	Overall
Q1. Self-efficacy	10,00	6,88
Q2. Professional motivation	8,95	6,36
Q3. Intellectual motivation	5,00	6,25
Q4. Time pressure	2,81	4,17
Q5. Satisfaction with work family balance	9,00	7,29
Q6. Experienced competition in the workplace	4,64	5,15
Q7. Satisfaction with personal work conditions	6,25	6,78
Q8. Satisfaction with impersonal work conditions	2,50	7,19
Q9. Satisfaction with support of supervisor	8,57	7,17
Q10. Satisfaction with freedom of supervisor	10,00	7,81
Q11. Belief in personal capabilities	6,25	6,58
Q12. Belief in research	4,38	6,46
Q13. Feeling of being on the right track	7,50	6,76
Q14. Estimated chance to submit successfully	10,00	7,85

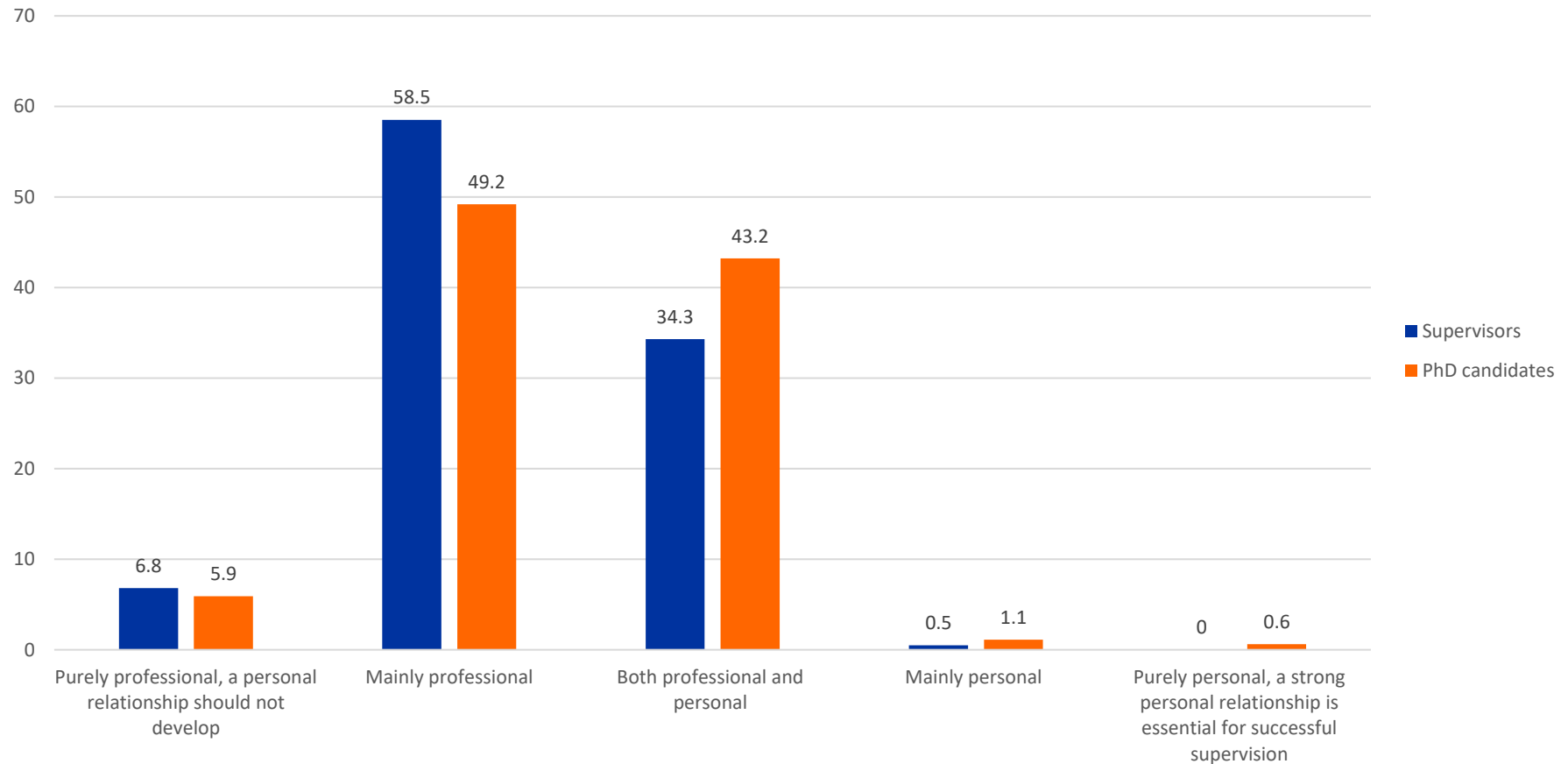




## MAIN FINDINGS

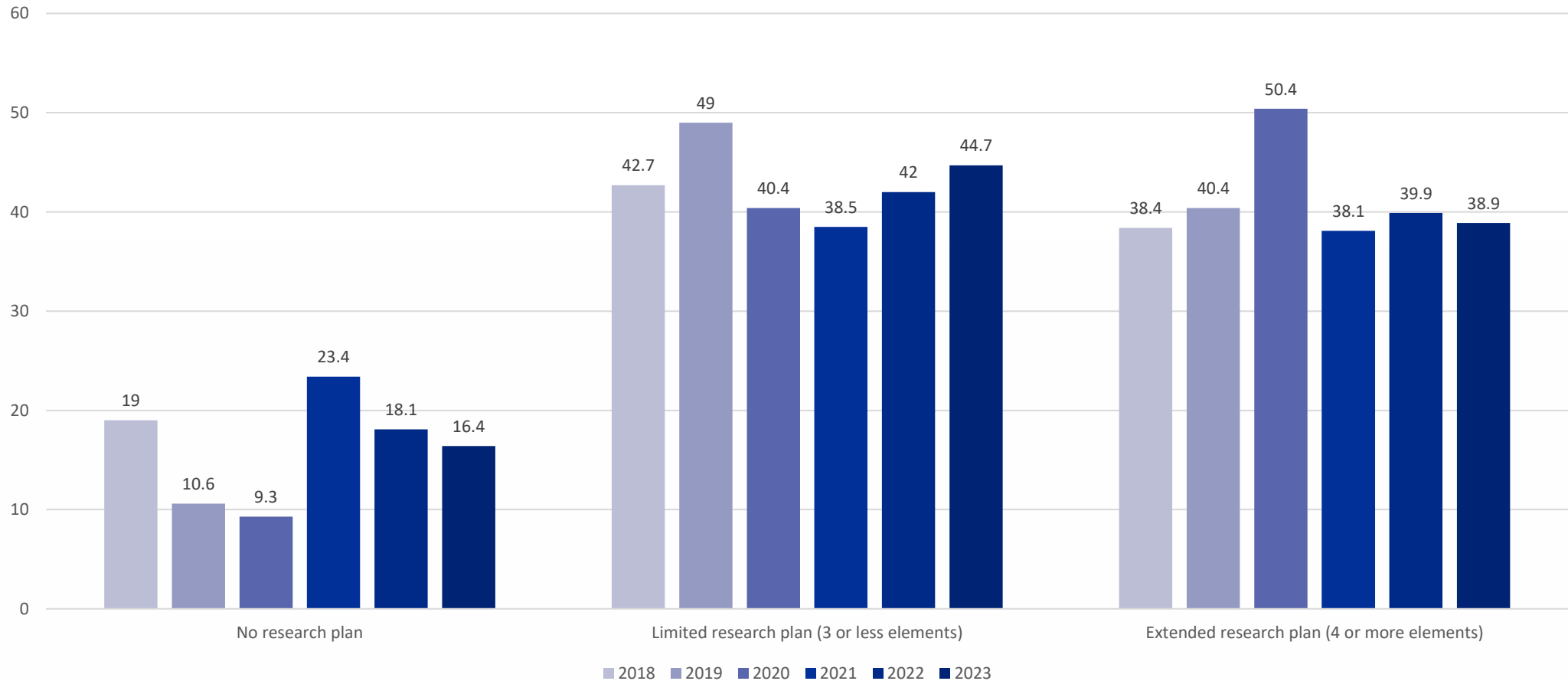
- Supervisor is key actor in PhD process. PhD candidates want a mentor rather than a boss
- Having a comprehensive research plan is essential, yet implementation remains difficult
- Supervisor support, time pressure and passion for research can predict dropout. The importance of these variables differs between disciplines (Glorieux, A., Spruyt, B., Minnen, J., & van Tienoven, T. P. (2024). Calling it quits: a longitudinal study of factors associated with dropout among doctoral students. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 1-19.)
- Identification of clusters
  - Moderate cluster
  - Satisfied, insecure cluster
  - Unsatisfied, insecure cluster
  - Satisfied, confident cluster

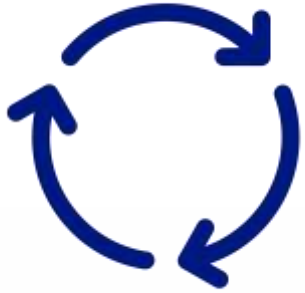
# IDEAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHD CANDIDATE & SUPERVISOR





# EVOLUTION RESEARCH PLAN





## TRANSLATION INTO POLICY & COMMUNICATION

- Yearly presentation in each faculty – conversation starter around several topics (supervisor support, research group support, educational tasks,...)
- Input for other VUB services (HR department, team wellbeing, infrastructure)
- Input for HRs4R new action plan (submitted 1/2/24), a.o. concerning selection of PhD candidates & Wellbeing plan
- Input for communication plan concerning doctoral training
- Input for our supervisor training (webinar, elaborate training, intro for starting supervisors – *work in progress*)
- Input for regulations & charter, i.e. Elaborate research plan is made compulsory in Central PhD regulations at the start of the PhD (since 2021)

## REFERENCES

- Glorieux, A., Spruyt, B., te Braak, P., Minnen, J., & van Tienoven, T.P. (2024). When the student becomes the teacher: determinants of self-estimated successful PhD completion among graduate teaching assistants. *Sage Open*, 14(2).
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- van Tienoven, T. P., Glorieux, A., Minnen, J., & Spruyt, B. (2023). Caught between academic calling and academic pressure? Working time characteristics, time pressure and time sovereignty predict PhD students' research engagement. *Higher Education*, 1-20.
- van Tienoven, T. P., Glorieux, A., Minnen, J., Te Braak, P., & Spruyt, B. (2022). Graduate students locked down? PhD students' satisfaction with supervision during the first and second COVID-19 lockdown in Belgium. *Plos one*, 17(5), e0268923.