



## **A portfolio for award of the degree of PhD**

Approved by the Faculty Board at March 22, 2021

This version is from November 26, 2021. Will be updated to reflect the new Doctorate Regulations and the introduction of plagiarism control

### Introduction

The instructions in this document, the document on 'Assessment of the quality and scope of the PhD thesis' and the document on 'Rules for the PhD Thesis' outline for the candidate, the supervisor and the members of the Doctorate Committee<sup>2</sup> the requirements that the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam imposes on a PhD thesis. For the FSS, the instructions supplements, replaces and clarifies the Doctorate Regulations.<sup>3,4</sup> The instructions established by FSS are valid for dissertations defended at Vrije Universiteit under the responsibility of the Dean of FSS.<sup>5,6</sup>

The portfolio is partly composed by the supervisors<sup>7</sup> and partly by the PhD candidate, and in total approved by the supervisor. The portfolio is submitted to the Graduate School at the time the supervisors have approved the thesis in Hora Finita.

The Dean, assisted by the GSSS director (and the GSSS staff) as authorized representative, checks whether the portfolio meets the requirements. The chair and the members of the Doctorate Committee receives the portfolio for inspection upon request.

---

<sup>1</sup> The approved document has been split in two documents. This document is specifically about the portfolio. The other document is on 'Assessment of the quality and scope of the PhD thesis'. A third relevant document is on 'Rules for the PhD Thesis'.

<sup>2</sup> In Dutch: promotiecommissie (VU Promotiereglement, 1 juli 2019) of beoordelingscommissie (Hora Finita).

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise stated, we refer to the Doctorate Regulations dated July 1, 2019, including all articles and the procedural regulations. To be retrieved from <https://vu.nl/en/research/more-about/doctorate-regulations>.

<sup>4</sup> Formulated in Article 21.

<sup>5</sup> The rules also apply in the case of a 'double doctorate graduation' (Article 33) as for a 'joint doctoral graduation' (Article 34)<sup>5</sup>; in both cases a separate agreement shall be drawn up, approved by the Rector Magnificus, which, if different, shall take precedence over the requirements set by FSS.

<sup>6</sup> When a project involves collaboration between researchers from different faculties (or institutes), the framework of the faculty where the approval and graduation takes place is guiding. This may therefore mean that two theses in one project defended at different faculties will look (somewhat) different because the faculties involved have different rules and customs. However, when it comes to assessing the quality of the research, it is usually possible to come to a common understanding, within the rules and assessment framework of the faculty where the approval and graduation takes place. Not every part of the rubric will always fit exactly to the concrete situation of a dissertation research – interpretation is then needed (and that is where recognizing and dealing with diversity and autonomy come in). If there are nevertheless too many or too great differences between faculties, it is desirable to consult the Dean.

<sup>7</sup> We use the singular form. This pertains the first and the second supervisor and includes co-supervisors (Article 22, paragraph 1).

### Portfolio section 1. Compliance with rules for the implementation of the investigation

- Reporting by the PhD candidate; assessment by the supervisor. For data management, the FSS data steward is available for assistance.
  - Relationship to the Doctorate Regulations: part d (ethics review) and e (data management) are an elaboration of Article 5; part f (duration of the research) follows from Article 11, paragraph 4.
  - Explanation: It is generally recognized that more attention should be paid to the ethical aspects of research. At the moment, only the endorsement of Article 5 (by signing the register, and mentioning it during the PhD ceremony), confirms that the ethics have been observed. What has been done for this, however, is not documented. Through this section the documentation is provided. If ethical aspects have received adequate attention throughout the research, it is sufficient to collect this information for the purpose of this portfolio. In that case it will cost the candidate some, but limited time, and the supervisor little or no time.
- a) Ethics review. Each part of the research has been subject to ethics review.<sup>8</sup> In practice, this means that data collection for each article (or combination of articles when they are based on one dataset), or in case of a monograph data collection for the thesis as a whole, has been reviewed. The determination of this requirement is done for an article-based thesis by including a footnote to the title of each article with information about the ethics review. For a monograph this information is placed on a page at the beginning of the thesis. The portfolio includes the correspondence with the FSS Research Ethics Review Committee and, if relevant, other correspondence.
- b) Data management. A data management plan has been written and followed for each part of the study. We do not describe all the ins and outs of this procedure here; we limit ourselves to the main points and do not give all the exceptions and particularities.<sup>9</sup> When data have been collected, they are stored in a data archive accessible to the public. Following the policy agreed upon by the Dutch deans of social sciences to provide a data package with each publication, each empirical article, or in case of a monography the thesis as a whole, contains a link to a repository containing de-identified data and code that produce the results reported.<sup>10</sup>
- c) Duration of the research. The doctoral thesis has been submitted for approval to the supervisor at the latest on the date agreed at the start as the intended end date.<sup>11</sup> The intended end date is registered in Hora Finita. If a delay has occurred, it may be caused by and proportional to long-term illness, pregnancy and childbirth, caused by conversion of a full-time appointment into a 0.8 or 0.9 fte appointment as an employee PhD candidate, or caused by (other) personal circumstances. This must be justified. If a delay has occurred due to other causes, such as the impossibility of carrying out a planned data collection, the extent of the delay will be explained and an explanation will be given of how the thesis was attempted to be completed on time or why this was not possible. In all cases, it is important that timely completion is seen as an outcome for which the supervisors are responsible.

---

<sup>8</sup> Article 5. The FSS procedure is outlined at <https://fsw.vu.nl/nl/onderzoek/research-ethics-review/>.

<sup>9</sup> We expect that FSS will develop further instructions. The UK 'Dissertations and their data: Promoting research integrity in undergraduate projects' provides a nice example, but has to be adapted:

[www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/media/622144/dissertations\\_and\\_their\\_data\\_promoting\\_research\\_integrity.pdf](http://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/media/622144/dissertations_and_their_data_promoting_research_integrity.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Currently at FSS it is not mandatory to follow the principles of 'open science'. Several researchers, including PhD candidates, apply these principles in their research. Open science is "the practising of science in a sustainable manner which gives others the opportunity to work with, contribute to and make use of the scientific process. This allows users 'from outside of the science world' to influence the research world with questions and ideas and help gather research data." [www.openscience.nl/en/open-science](http://www.openscience.nl/en/open-science)

<sup>11</sup> Article 11, paragraph 4.

## Portfolio section 2. Quality of the PhD candidate as researcher

- Reporting by the PhD candidate; assessment by the supervisor.
  - Relationship to the Doctorate Regulations: part g (plagiarism) elaborates Article 5; part h (presenting and discussing the research) and part i (scientific attitude) follows from Article 21.
  - Explanation: The final attainment levels require not only an assessment of the thesis, but also an assessment of the quality of the candidate as a researcher. This judgment can only be up to the supervisor, although at the moment it seems formally that the Doctorate Committee also judges the level of academic skills beyond what is shown in the thesis.<sup>12</sup> This section makes it clear (a) that only the supervisor is assessing the quality of the candidate as a researcher beyond what is shown in the thesis, and (b) that it has been assessed. The supervisor assesses a number of aspects and provides a brief explanation. It is expected that this can be done well within thirty minutes.
- d) Check on plagiarism. The policy is not yet fully developed, but is likely to be as follows. The plagiarism check is part of the scientific integrity course. The goal is to increase candidates' awareness of scientific integrity and prevent plagiarism in dissertations. The Go / No Go product and components of the thesis will be tested for plagiarism. A report of the work done and findings is submitted as part of the portfolio.<sup>13</sup>
- e) Presenting and discussing the research. The candidate can communicate with peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about the areas of expertise<sup>14</sup>. In most trajectories, several of these actions have been performed. Usually one or more parts of the thesis research have been presented by means of a poster or orally at a scientific congress or similar gathering. Dissemination activities such as giving a lecture to a professional or lay public, or other valorization activities, are also showing the ability to communicate results of research. The determination of this requirement is done by listing the relevant characteristics, such as the occasion, and the topic, date, setting and audience reported. Another way to fulfill this requirement is that one or more parts of the thesis research (other than the GNG product) have been submitted to external, double blind peer review, for example, when an article has been submitted for publication in a journal.; the results of this review have been incorporated in an improved version and a response letter to reviewers' concerns. External means outside the circle of the supervisor, members of the scientific department, and others who have been involved in setting up the research. The determination of this requirement is done by delivering the reviewers' report and the response letter.
- f) Scientific attitude. In terms of making judgements the PhD candidate has acquired a scientific attitude by showing evidence of:
- i. the capability of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;
  - ii. an open mind and willingness to deal with critical reviews;
  - iii. willingness to (re)consider arguments and conclusions in light of empirical results or counter-argumentation;
  - iv. willingness to structurally monitor research developments and innovations in the social sciences;
  - v. willingness to participate in relevant debates in society.
- The determination of this requirement is done by a statement by the supervisor.

---

<sup>12</sup> The Doctorate Committee is not in a position to assess quality of the PhD candidate as researcher to its full extent: members are unlikely to have attended, for example, conference presentations, radio interviews, and so on. They only see the dissertation. Through the portfolio, it can be made plausible that activities have been performed and that the supervisor rates this as sufficient.

<sup>13</sup> The university's policy and its implementation is still to be determined.

<sup>14</sup> Article 21e.

### Portfolio section 3. Training followed by the PhD candidate

- Assessment by the Graduate School.
  - Relationship to the Doctorate Regulations: part j follows and elaborates Articles 14 and 15.
  - Explanation: This has been introduced in the Doctorate Regulations effective April 1, 2015, and practiced since then. There is no need for additional efforts by the candidate or the supervisor.
- g) Training. The PhD candidate has followed the training agreed at the start of the project or approved after modification (usually 30 European Credits)<sup>15</sup>. The training plan should be designed such that PhD candidates develop their knowledge, expertise and skills in the following three areas. Area 1: Social scientific content and theory. These courses aim to support PhD candidates to assess and build theories and obtain relevant social scientific knowledge at a doctoral educational level both within and beyond the boundaries of their own discipline. Area 2: Social scientific methodology, methods and techniques. These courses focus on research design and methodology, and provide hands-on experience with advanced methods of analysis. Area 3: Academic and transferrable skills. The main focus in these courses is on the development of academic and transferable skills, aimed at improving the necessary skills for current and future practice as an academically educated researcher. The exact mix of courses and the distribution over these three areas depend on the (educational and professional) background and previous training of the PhD candidate and is composed individually and tailor made for each PhD trajectory. Only one course is mandatory because of its crucial importance for conducting any type of research: Research Integrity and Responsible Scholarship, including the Research Data Management workshop. Dispensation or a waiver of credits is possible on an individual basis, depending on previous educational and professional background and training. The training is specified and adjusted in Hora Finita.

---

<sup>15</sup> The Graduate School's policy on the scope of training is set out elsewhere.