

VU PhD Survey 2023: Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why should I participate in the VU PhD Survey 2023?

By completing the survey, you can influence the quality of your own PhD trajectory and that of other PhD candidates in the Netherlands. The data from the survey will be used for quality policy within VU. Your participation helps VU to improve its PhD programs, both for current and future PhD candidates. Some of the questions in the questionnaire are also part of PhD surveys at other universities (see point 4). By comparing the same questions, a broader picture can be obtained of how PhD candidates assess PhD programs at Dutch universities.

2. What will VU do with the results of the VU PhD Survey?

We will use your feedback as an important tool to evaluate your education, supervision, facilities and work environment and to decide what we should focus on in the coming years. The previous VU PhD Survey has been held in 2021.

3. What has been done with the results of previous surveys?

The results of the previous (2021) VU PhD Survey can be found here <https://vu.nl/nl/onderzoek/meer-over/phd-monitor-2023>.

4. What will be done with the results of the national project?

Some of the answers and some pseudonymized personal data will be compared with answers and information provided by PhD candidates from other Dutch universities. All data processing will take place in a secure environment of the University of Groningen (RUG). By comparing answers, a national picture will emerge of how PhD candidates evaluate various aspects of their programme, such as supervision, work environment, wellbeing and career prospects. Nationwide insight into how satisfied PhD candidates are with these aspects and the challenges that PhD candidates and universities face is important to be able to make and adjust government policy. The national results will be shared with the *Universiteiten van Nederland* (UNL), the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW: *Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap*; via UNL), the Dutch Network of PhD candidates (PNN: *Promovendi Netwerk Nederland*) and all Dutch universities. The results at university level are only made available to the participating universities. The results will not contain any personal data.

5. Who will be invited to participate in the PhD Survey 2023?

All PhD candidates who are registered in Hora Finita will be invited to participate in the VU PhD Survey. You will receive a personal link, sent by the research agency that conducts the survey (Ruigrok), in your e-mail.

6. Which topics will be included in the PhD Survey 2023?

The survey covers all aspects of your PhD trajectory. The first few questions will be about your prior degree, your PhD project and your affiliation with VU. There will be questions about education opportunities, the supervision you are receiving, the progress of your project, your work environment, and whether you are involved in teaching and supervising. You will also be asked questions about your well-being and social safety. The final topic is what you plan to do after you obtain your PhD.

7. Which questions will be compared with other universities?

Please send an email to phdmonitor@vu.nl if you would like to receive an overview of the questions that are also asked in the surveys held at other universities.

8. Which personal data will be registered?

Personal data will be included in categories, namely university, gender (male, female, other/prefer not to say), age group (<30, 30–40, >40), nationality group (Dutch, EEA, non-EEA), phase of the PhD trajectory (starters (first year) and seniors), type of appointment (according to the UNL criteria) and research fields (according to the HOOP categorization). Results will be compared for nationality group, phase, PhD candidate type and university.

9. How will the university safeguard my privacy?

Your answers cannot be traced back to you as a person because names and e-mail addresses are removed before the answers are analyzed. Personal data such as age, gender and nationality are converted to categories and open answers are not displayed in reports. By converting personal data into categories, the traceability (due to the combination of data) becomes very small. Within VU, the data is only accessible to persons who need access in the context of data analysis and writing of reports. Group results will only be presented for group with a minimum group size of 15 people.

10. How will my privacy be safeguarded in the national project?

The answers (excluding open answers) to the national questions and some pseudonymised personal data (see point 8) are combined with information from other universities. Because personal data has been converted into categories, it is virtually impossible to trace answers to a particular person. Each university supplies a uniform database that is combined together in a secure working environment from the University of Groningen (RUG). The combined file is analyzed in the secure environment and cannot leave this environment. The secure environment is only accessible for maximum of two policy researchers. Group results are only presented for groups larger than 15 people.

11. Can I withdraw my participation after I have completed the survey?

Yes, you can, until a certain date. A unique key code (Hora Finita registration code) will be stored in the VU database to enable participants to exercise their right to be forgotten. The VU can trace your answers back to you by using this code. The Hora Finita registration code and your name will be stored in a secure environment, separate from your survey answers. If you want your details to be removed from the database, please submit a written request to this effect to Fernie Maas (PhD policy advisor, Institutional Affairs), f.g.t.maas@vu.nl, no later than 1-6-2023. After this date, your answers to the shared questions will be included in the national PhD database, without your unique code. It will then no longer be possible to remove your answers.

12. Until which date can I complete the survey?

The survey will be available until May 7, 2023. You will receive an invitation in your inbox (preferred address as listed in Hora Finita) with a link to the survey. We recommend that you complete the survey right away!

13. How long does it take to complete the survey?

Depending on your situation, it will take you anywhere between 20 and 30 minutes to complete the survey.

14. Can I save my half-completed survey and return to it later?

Yes, this is possible. If you click on the link again, you will automatically go back to where you left off.

15. Can I complete the survey on my smartphone or tablet?

Yes, this is possible, but we recommend using a laptop or desktop.

16. What should I do if I have not received an invitation email?

All PhD candidates who are registered in Hora Finita will be invited to participate in the VU PhD Survey. If you fall into this category but have not received an email, please send an email to phdmonitor@vu.nl to request a link for participation.

17. Why is the VU PhD Survey 2023 only available in English?

The VUPhD Survey is a tool to measure the experiences of all VU PhD candidates, some of whom have an international background.

18. Who manages the VU PhD Survey 2023?

The VU PhD Survey 2023 is managed by the Department of Institutional Affairs of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

19. Is participation in the PhD Survey 2023 confidential?

Yes, participation in the VU PhD Survey is confidential. Your feedback will be combined with that of all the other VU PhD respondents, and your name and email address will be removed. Personal data that is included in the national PhD database will be divided in categories, and no open answers will be included. The results of the survey will be discussed in reports, but can never be traced back to individuals. See the Privacy Statement for more information.

20. Where and when will the results be presented?

The results of the VU PhD Survey 2023 will be made available in late 2023/early 2024. The national results will be presented in Spring 2024 at the website of the *Universiteiten van Nederland*: [Promovendisurvey \(universiteitenvannederland.nl\)](https://promovendisurvey.universiteitenvannederland.nl).