

## **Guidelines for the extension of PhD student-employee FHML appointments**

### **Introduction**

Under the current PhD policy, Maastricht University (UM), and with it the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML), distinguishes three categories.

- 1- PhD student-employees;
- 2- external PhD students/candidates;
- 3- PhD students/candidates.

With regard to PhD student-employees (employed on a temporary basis for the intended duration of the PhD programme, in accordance with the Collective Labour Agreement of Dutch Universities (CAO-NU)), the Faculty Board reaffirmed UM policy in October 2014 providing that a PhD candidate's appointment will be extended up until such time as the thesis committee has approved the PhD thesis. The PhD thesis supervisor is responsible for arranging funding for such an extension. The Faculty Board is of the opinion that, if a PhD is not completed within the period specified in the letter of appointment, an extension is acceptable in the interests of being a good employer, and considering the importance of completing the PhD within the intended period (in principle, four years). This does not concern situations in which a PhD candidate has meanwhile found another job or in which it can be clearly demonstrated that the delay is attributable to the employee in question. Pursuant to an initial evaluation, it has been deemed desirable to draw up guidelines for the application of this decision.

### **Basic premises**

The duration of the PhD track is intended to allow for the completion of the PhD within the predetermined period agreed upon in the PhD candidate's appointment. Responsibility for completing the PhD within the designated period is shared by the PhD candidate and the PhD thesis supervisor/supervision team. For the purposes of these guidelines, the end of the PhD track and of the PhD candidate's temporary appointment is defined as the moment when the thesis committee approves the PhD thesis. The PhD candidate's performance must be assessed and documented on an annual basis. One of the topics/core activities to be discussed is the schedule and progress of the PhD track. In the event that an extension is under consideration, the director of FHML will determine the duration of the extension after having heard the PhD thesis supervisor and on the basis of the work still to be carried out.

### **Effectuation**

It is vital that the schedule and progress of the PhD track are carefully monitored from the outset with the aim of ensuring that the PhD is completed within the agreed period. As stated, this is a shared responsibility of the PhD candidate and the PhD thesis supervisor/supervision team. The option to extend the appointment must not result in a relaxation of progress monitoring. Communication with PhD candidates and supervisors should make it clear that the extension is conditional. The progress evaluation and PhD Track questionnaire are useful tools for monitoring progress, as are the Research Plan progress reports. Progress and the planning schedule form a fixed topic of discussion during a PhD candidate's annual assessment (formal assessment interview), pursuant to which, if necessary, corrective measures will be agreed and followed up. The following questions are to be addressed during the assessment interview:

- Is the project on schedule? Yes/No.
- If the project is not on schedule, is this due to factors outside the PhD candidate's intentions and actions? Yes/No.  
If yes, provide an explanation of the factors attributable for the delay and a substantiated explanation of the steps that will be taken to remedy the delay, or establish that the contract may be extended in view of the delay. If no, provide a substantiated explanation, also specifying corrective efforts. *From a legal standpoint, there is no exhaustive list of behaviours to which a delay may be attributed. The behaviour must be assessed in the broad context of the PhD candidate's circumstances (personal or otherwise). Some examples include: regularly arriving late, not meeting agreed deadlines, an attitude not conducive to learning, a 'bad' attitude towards colleagues or management, culpable errors leading to a delay, not meeting criteria (e.g. competences) applicable to the position.*

The above questions will be included on the standard PhD assessment form.

With regard to the decision whether or not to extend an appointment, the possible options are set out below:

- 1- The appointment will be extended if in the aforementioned discussions it is established and explicitly documented by the PhD thesis supervision team that the PhD project has been delayed due to unforeseen circumstances beyond the PhD candidate's control. This also includes delay due to pregnancy and maternity leave, parental leave and/or appointment to an administrative post. The appointment can be extended full time or part time.
- 2- If records of the annual assessment interview show that the delay is wholly or mostly attributable to the PhD candidate's performance and that the agreed corrective measures and goals have been unsuccessful, the appointment will not be extended or it may be decided to terminate the appointment prematurely (after the first year).
- 3- If the PhD candidate has accepted another job to follow immediately after the UM appointment, the appointment will not be extended.
- 4- The PhD candidate and/or the PhD thesis supervisor may for substantive reasons decide, for example, to add articles or conduct additional research which serve to prolong the PhD track. In such situations, the supervisor is responsible for arranging funding for the extension of the appointment.

Instructions with regard to establishing the duration of the extension:

- The reference point is the date on which the PhD thesis is approved by the thesis committee.
- The duration of the extension is determined by the director of FHML after having heard the principal supervisor and consulted with the supervision team and the PhD candidate.
- A substantiated clarification of the status of the PhD thesis and the activities still to be completed, together with a realistic time frame, must be appended to the appointment request