

Checklist for Supervisors: final steps of the PhD process at SHE

Preparing the final phase (>6 months before thesis submission)

- Send [examples of SHE PhD dissertations](#) that you really like to your PhD candidate
- Alert your PhD candidate to the [“SHE Checklist for PhD candidates”](#) in the SHE PhD Guide. Additional sources are the [UM Doctoral Regulations](#) and the [Frequently Asked Questions about the PhD defense](#) at Maastricht University
- Make sure your candidate starts planning the completion of the PhD thesis for the assessment committee:
 - Introduction and discussion chapter
 - Research chapters
 - Impact paragraph (check the requirements^A)
 - English summary
 - A table of contents needs to be included, as well as a title page and a page that lists the names and affiliations of supervisors and assessment committee members
 - A Dutch summary and the Propositions are **not** required for the assessment committee version of the PhD thesis
- Advise your candidate to start compiling a list of Propositions^B that needs to be added to the dissertation.

Entering the final phase (3-6 months before thesis submission)

- The principal supervisor (promotor) informs the SHE PhD office (Nicky Verleng) **at least three months** before the manuscript is ready for submission that the project has entered the final phase
- The supervisory team discusses and selects potential assessment committee members. The promotor is responsible for the selection, but it is a joint decision of the team, and the candidate is typically involved in these discussions. Check the requirements for assessment committee members^C
- The promotor invites the assessment committee members to take place in the committee, and collects details from the assessment committee members (and can already start adding them to TRACK). Check the required details^D
- Make sure your candidate contacts the SHE data manager (shedata@maastrichtuniversity.nl) to [store their research data on Dataverse](#)

The thesis approval phase (thesis submission & assessment)

This phase takes 4-8 weeks

- The supervisory team approves the final version of the thesis and makes sure that the candidate sends the final version to the SHE PhD office (Nicky Verleng), with the supervisory team in CC
- When the thesis is ready for submission, the promotor adds the assessment committee members' details in TRACK and **submits a formal approval request for the composition of the assessment committee to the Dean**. See instructions^E. Inform Nicky Verleng when you have completed this step!
- The approval decision will be shared with the promotor, the committee members, and the SHE, FHML and UM PhD offices. Within two weeks of the Dean's approval (this time limit is a requirement), Nicky Verleng sends the thesis and instructions to the assessment committee members. After four weeks of reading time (longer during summer or Christmas break), the chair of the assessment committee will inform the promotor, the Dean and the SHE and UM PhD office about the decision of the assessment committee^F
- While waiting for the committee's decision, guide your candidate in finalizing the remaining parts of the dissertation:

- Propositions (check the requirements^B). The supervisory team needs to approve the propositions
 - Dutch summary. Non-Dutch-speaking PhD candidates can make use of online tools – make sure to check the translation
 - Other parts to be added: CV, acknowledgements, SHE dissertation series, if applicable: ICO dissertation series
- The promotor informs the PhD candidate about the assessment committee decision and can share the anonymized assessment forms with the candidate and supervisory team
 - Possibly: help your candidate to incorporate feedback from the assessment committee

Planning the PhD defense (after thesis approval, 3-6 months before PhD defense)

- Make sure the PhD candidate contacts the UM PhD office to set a defense date (alternatively one of the supervisors can do this; discuss within the team who will be responsible). The defense needs to take place within six months of the assessment decision.
 - The candidates first consults within the supervisory team for three suitable options
 - Then the candidate checks these options with the UM PhD office (phone +31 43 388 3096, email phd-office@maastrichtuniversity.nl)
 - The promotor shares these two or three options with the assessment committee members and asks for their preferences
 - Once a date has been set, the PhD candidate informs the UM PhD office and Nicky Verleng
 - The promotor informs the defense committee members!
- Complete, sign and send two Model Letters to the UM PhD office (the letters will be shared by the UM PhD office with the PhD candidate and promotor)
 - Model Letter 7: Admission to Public Defense & Approval Title Page. Fill out this letter together with your PhD candidate. The formal title page (including date of the defense) and reverse title page (names and affiliations of supervisors and assessment committee members) need to be included. **Send this to the UM PhD office (and CC to Nicky Verleng!) for formal approval, at least 3 months before the defense date!**
 - Model Letter 8: Composition Defense Committee & Order of Opposition. **Fill out this letter and send it to the UM PhD office (and CC to Nicky Verleng)**
- In case less than five assessment committee members can make it on the selected date, the promotor needs to invite additional members for the PhD defense committee. Check the requirements for the defense committee members^G

Final steps of the final phase (after thesis approval, 0-6 months before PhD defense)

- Only after approval of the title page and reverse title page, the candidate can print and distribute^H the thesis (at least three weeks before the defense date)
- The candidate needs to send a digital version to the UM library with a Statement of Approval signed by the promotor (three weeks before defense ceremony at the latest). The candidate can find details [here](#).
- Advise or help your candidate to organize a mock PhD defense^I to practice their presentation (max 15 minutes) and how to address the opponents and answer their questions
- Provide feedback on the presentation and discuss strategies and tips for answering questions from the opponents
- Support and reassure your candidate
- Enjoy the PhD defense!

NOTES

- **A: The impact paragraph**
- **C: Requirements for propositions**
- **B: The composition of the assessment committee**
- **D: Details to be collected from the assessment committee members**
- **E: TRACK instructions for submitting assessment committee proposal**
- **F: The assessment decision**
- **G: The composition of the defense committee**
- **H: Printing and distributing the thesis**
- **I: The mock PhD defense**

A: The impact paragraph

The impact paragraph is a reflection of 500 to 2000 words, in layman's terms (for a wide target group), on the scientific impact of the results of the research described in the thesis, as well as, if applicable, the social impact anticipated or already achieved. If the impact of the results of the research is also discussed elsewhere in the thesis, the candidate can come back to it in the impact paragraph. The paragraph must be written in the same language as the thesis.

Scientific impact is the short- and long-term contribution of the results of scientific research, to a shift in understanding and to advance science, method, theory and application within and across disciplines. Scientific impact has a wide variety of manifestations: from conferences for a scientific audience to contributions to publications, (open) data, infrastructure or education.

Impact on society is the short- and long-term contribution of the results of scientific research to changes in, or development of societal sectors and to societal challenges. Examples of societal sectors include the economy, culture, public sector and healthcare. Impact on society has a wide variety of manifestations: from communicating science to the wider public to contributions to government policy, patient care or innovation in the industry or business sectors.

Four questions are provided that can serve as a guideline for drafting the impact paragraph:

- (Research) What is the main objective of the research described in the thesis and what are the most important results and conclusions?
- (Relevance) What is the (potential) contribution of the results from this research to science, and, if applicable, to social sectors and social challenges?
- (Target group) To whom are the research results interesting and/or relevant? And why?
- (Activity) In what way can these target groups be involved in and informed about the research results, so that the knowledge gained can be used in the future?

B: Requirements for propositions

At Maastricht University PhD candidates are required to submit a set of *propositions* (in Dutch: *stellingen*) alongside their dissertation. These are short, well-reasoned statements that reflect the candidate's ability to think critically, argue concisely, and connect their research to broader scientific or societal contexts. They are intended to stimulate discussion, show that the candidate can engage thoughtfully with topics beyond the focus of the research, and can formulate defensible positions and back them up with clear reasoning.

A minimum of 8 and a maximum of 11 propositions or statements should be added to the PhD thesis (only required for the final dissertation, not for the assessment committee version). Four propositions must be related to the subject of the dissertation. Three propositions must be related to the candidate's discipline, with the exception of the subject of the thesis. One proposition must be related to the impact of the results of the research for science and/or society. Any other propositions do not have to be related to the subject or the discipline. Find examples (attached to SHE dissertations) [here](#).

The team of supervisors must approve the final list of propositions. It is advisable that candidates start in time with thinking about the propositions; preferably they collect them during the course of the project. During the PhD defense, questions can be asked about the propositions. Candidates should be able to defend them.

A good proposition is:

- Concise: Usually 1–2 sentences, no long explanations.
- Debatable: Avoid facts everyone agrees on; instead, make a claim that requires reasoning.
- Grounded: Supported by evidence, logic, or expert consensus (even if not everyone agrees).
- Relevant: Linked to the dissertation, the field, or a broader societal theme.
- Memorable: Phrased clearly and, if possible, elegantly.

Types of propositions include research-focused, methodological, theoretical, policy-oriented, ethical, educational, societal, or light and personal (but defensible). Contact the SHE PhD coordinator if candidates require a step-by-step writing guide.

C: The composition of the assessment committee

Requirements:

- The committee consists of 4-5 members representing different scientific views
- The chair is a UM full professor with ius promovendi
- At least two members are full professors or emeritus professors who have the ius promovendi. An international professor should demonstrably be a full professor!
- At most two members are experts without the ius promovendi. They should have a PhD degree
- Two members are not attached to the UM. A person with some sort of UM relation will be regarded as an internal (UM) member
- Ideally the committee includes at least 1 female and 1 male member
- A member cannot be a (co)supervisor, co-author, or partner/family member of the candidate up to the 2nd degree

D: Details to be collected from the assessment committee members

This is needed for the approval procedure in TRACK

Role	Chair	Member	Member	Member	Additional member
Email address					
Initials					
First name					
Last name					
Gender					
Academic title (em.Prof/Prof./Dr. /Ir./Mr.)					
Title of the Chair (in English)					
Affiliation (UM/MUMC+/ other)					
Ius promovendi (yes/no)					
Department / Institute					
Mobile phone number					

E: TRACK instructions for submitting assessment committee proposal

Note that this can only be done by the principal supervisor (promotor)

Instructions:

- In TRACK, go to the **Dashboard** and search for the PhD candidate.
- On the left-hand side, click on the **thesis title** and open the **Assessment Committee** section.

- You can now either **assign** a committee member or **add** a new committee member.
 - First, check whether the committee member is already listed in TRACK via assign.
 - If yes, select **Assign**.
 - If not, select **Add** to include the committee member.
- Complete the **Committee Regulations Checklist**. All questions must be answered before submitting the committee for review.
- Click **Submit Proposal for Review**.
- The proposal will then be assessed by the Dean, and you will receive a decision within **two weeks**

F: The assessment decision

The assessment committee will assess the quality of the thesis and will decide whether the thesis is of sufficient quality to be defended at Maastricht University. The assessment committee has the possibility to approve the thesis or to ask for minor revisions, which will be executed under supervision of the supervisor (i.e. the thesis will not be resubmitted to the committee). In very exceptional cases, the committee may reject a thesis, after which the candidate can resubmit a new version within six months.

G: The composition of the defense committee

Requirements:

- The Defense Committee consists in principle of the supervisors, and all members of the Assessment Committee, and possibly one or more professors and persons with a doctorate. Persons without a doctorate with recognised expertise in the field of the thesis subject can, with the consent of the Board of Deans, be appointed as a member.
- The Defense Committee, apart from the supervisors, must consist preferably of 5-7 members, but of at least 4 members.
- If applicable, the experts invited for Cum Laude assessment of the thesis must be invited to sit on the Defense Committee.
- The first supervisor ensures that in principle at least half of the members of the Defense Committee are attached to the University and that in principle at least half of the members of the Defense Committee are professors or emeritus professors.
- The partner and family members up to the second degree of the doctoral candidate cannot be members of the Defense Committee.
- The defense committee members will not be paid any fees or travel costs to participate in the PhD ceremony by SHE. If travel of an external member needs to be covered, the PhD candidate must find financial resources themselves.

H: Printing and distributing the thesis

The candidate needs to reserve 20 copies for SHE (this includes 6 for UM PhD office, 3 for supervisory team, 5-7 for assessment committee, 4-5 for SHE). PhD candidates not based in the Netherlands can address the printed thesis to Nicky Verleng, who will distribute it for them (Details about this are available in the checklist for PhD candidates)

I: The mock PhD defense

A possible approach to the mock defense:

You could schedule a 90-minute session with the candidate, supervisors, other PhD candidates, and/or colleagues to do a mock PhD defense. Ideally (most of) the attendants are aware of the expectations for PhD defenses at Maastricht University. In the first hour of the session, the candidate could present their 15-minute presentation, and practice the 45 minutes of discussion with opponents. For this purpose, you could ask 4-6 session attendants to prepare a question about one of the chapters from your thesis. The last half hour of the session could be used to discuss feedback on the presentation and tips & tricks for answering questions.