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**Obtaining a PhD 2010/2011**

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# Doing your PhD in Holland

## Why do your PhD in Holland?

- Holland ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> worldwide in number of publications per researcher
- Holland ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> worldwide in impact of research publications
- Holland has excellent graduate schools
- There is a large variety of research fields
- There are 14 research universities
- A PhD is not regarded as a study but as serious research
- PhD candidates and their supervisor work in close collaboration
- There is a great amount of interdisciplinary collaboration
- PhD researchers are often paid employees

In Holland, research is carried out by research universities, research institutes and by companies. Only the 14 research universities can award PhD-degrees. However, since other research institutes generally work in close collaboration with these universities, they can also provide positions to PhD candidates.

In addition to the standard PhD-degree, the three universities of technology also offer design and technological design programmes in a number of engineering fields. These consist of advanced study and a personal design assignment. Technological design programmes require two years of study to complete and graduates obtain the degree of 'Professional Doctorate in Engineering (PDEng)'.

## What is doing a PhD in Holland like?

The aim of doing a PhD is to complete a dissertation based on original research. In Holland this requires a minimum of four years of doing research and writing. PhD research projects and dissertations must of course always be original work, as candidates are required to make an original contribution to the body of knowledge in their field.

The dissertation is made public and parts of it are often used as articles in international journals. In general Dutch dissertations are held in high esteem since they live up to the highest academic standards.

Once the research is complete the supervisor judges whether the dissertation is ready for publication and oral defence. Then a committee of professors is appointed to read and approve the dissertation and to question the candidate during the traditional, centuries old oral defence ceremony.

## Research schools and graduate schools

Doing a PhD in Holland is a hands-on activity and involves little course work. PhD students start doing research from day one. This allows them to develop their own ideas and priorities in their research while having close contact with their supervisor. All PhD students are part of a graduate school or research school. These schools provide them with an inspiring research environment. They offer tailor-made study programmes, master classes, seminars and conferences.

In research schools, multiple research universities and research institutes join their forces and knowledge. At the level of a subject area universities and institutions work closely together in offering in-depth knowledge. Within a research school, you will meet PhD candidates and advanced researchers in your field from your own and other Dutch universities.

Graduate schools, by contrast, are organizations within universities. Like research schools, they provide challenging study and network environments. They can take different shapes. Some graduate schools are interdisciplinary, other graduate schools focus on a few or one discipline.

Each PhD student is assigned a supervisor who will provide daily guidance through the entire research period. Most often this supervisor will be an associate professor or a full professor.

## Finding a PhD position

In Holland there are three types of PhD-positions.

The PhD candidate:

1. is employed by the institution;
  2. brings funding with her/him, such as a fellowship or grant;
  3. is funded by his/her external employer;
- PhD candidates in Holland are regarded as professional researchers rather than as students. The fact that the majority of the PhD candidates is employed, strengthens their status as professional researcher.

### PhD researchers often paid position

Of the total number of PhD candidates in Holland, the majority sign an employment contract with the research institute at which they do their PhD-research. There are two ways in which you can find a PhD-position: through vacancies or networks.

- in the first case a research group has created a research proposal for which they have created a PhD-position. Such positions, open for international candidates, are often advertized internationally by means of job boards such as [www.academictransfer.org](http://www.academictransfer.org), notices in scientific journals, letters to academic institutions where potential candidates study and on the website of the institution. Candidates wishing to apply should contact the institution directly.
- furthermore, research groups might have some spare budget for innovative research. If you know in which topic you want to do PhD research and you cannot find a vacancy which fits your interests, it is wise to pro-actively propose your research to

research groups of your choice. For an overview of the disciplines which are offered at the research universities and research institutes please visit the factsheets of the Dutch research universities at [www.vsnu.nl/Universities/Research-Universities.htm](http://www.vsnu.nl/Universities/Research-Universities.htm)

## Fellowship or grant

About one sixth of the PhD candidates in the Netherlands are not employed by the institution but finance their PhD research through a fellowship or grant. Often these candidates come from abroad. If you want to use this option there are two things you need to arrange:

1. find yourself a fellowship or grant. To find available fellowships and grants please visit: [www.euraxess.nl/fellowships-grants](http://www.euraxess.nl/fellowships-grants) and [www.grantfinder.nl](http://www.grantfinder.nl).
2. find yourself a supervisor at an institution. A supervisor will support your proposal and serve as the official

supervisor for your research. Try to find someone with a leading reputation in your field. You can direct your inquiry to the central information office, which can provide information about the opportunities available at the university or institute in question. The best way to find a supervisor is through international networks in your field. Your own professors and their networks can be a good source of information. Furthermore, you can also find information at alumni networks, Nuffic Netherlands Education Support Offices ([www.nuffic.nl/neso](http://www.nuffic.nl/neso)) or blogs.

## A PhD next to your job

Sometimes it is possible to obtain a PhD degree next to a (fulltime) job. If you (and your employer) are interested in this option, contact the institution of your choice for more information.

### Country comparison 1993-2006

Source: NOWT Science and Technology Indicators 2008 (CWTS/ Thomson Scientific Web of Science. Calculations: CWTS)

	Impact 1993-1996	Impact 2003-2006	Change in impact between 93-96 and 03-06 (%)
Switzerland	1.43	1.41	-1.4
USA	1.44	1.37	-5.2
Netherlands	1.19	1.34	12.1
Denmark	1.13	1.33	17.9
UK	1.19	1.24	3.9
Canada	1.14	1.22	6.8
Norway	0.93	1.22	30.5
Belgium	1.09	1.20	10.5
Sweden	1.10	1.20	8.9
Ireland	0.88	1.17	32.9

Dutch scientists are cited more frequently than average and the Netherlands ranks third in the world in terms of citation impact. The global average is '1'.



## David G. Rodríguez Rosario (31), Mexico

**PhD in Social Protection Policy,  
Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, Maastricht University**

I just started my fifth year in Maastricht and I love my life here: I have enjoyed my studies, as well as meeting people and getting to know more about Holland, Europe and other parts of the world. Before coming here, I considered several of the destinations that are most popular in Mexico for studies abroad, which include universities in countries where English is the mother tongue. I chose this university because the education system is English-based, but also innovative, flexible, demanding and fun; the environment to do research and studies is inspiring.

### **Easy to travel**

Very often you are reminded of why people say that Maastricht and Holland are located in the heart of Europe: within a few hours you can go to many places, including popular cities like Brussels, Paris and London. On the other hand, it is also possible to go for a walk or a cycling tour to Belgium and enjoy a Sunday waffles-brunch in a small town there.

### **Dutch culture**

The Dutch are friendly and welcoming people, just like Mexicans, only the way of expressing it is different. While the Dutch like to chat, exchange opinions and meet people from other countries, in general they are not as cheerful as Mexicans. Although you soon realize how convenient it is to be organized and to care about time-management, it is not always easy to follow the Dutch punctuality. They really treasure time and are proud of it.

To people who are considering coming to Holland for studies, my advice is to compare the wide array of topics that we are studying here with other options. In this country,

I have met people from, at least, 40 nationalities; with many of them, I have had discussions about music, sports, books and parties, but also about the global economy, mobility in labour markets, technological development, genome studies and many other interesting topics.

## The practical side of doing your PhD

### Admission requirements

PhD positions in Holland are of high quality, therefore candidates have to meet high standards. It is important that candidates begin with a solid background in the theory and methods of their field. You will need to have a recognized master's degree. Satisfactory knowledge of English is another requirement. Candidates from other countries generally choose to write their dissertation in English. This requires full mastery of English idiom and grammar. These language skills must be demonstrable before work on the dissertation begins.

Given these considerations, the individual university will determine whether to admit the candidate.

### Tuition fees

Some Dutch institutions charge tuition fees for enrolment and supervision. Each research university has its own way of charging for the cost of supervision and access to laboratories and other facilities. Fees also vary from one discipline to the next, depending on aspects such as whether or not expensive equipment is required.

### Euraxess

At [www.euraxess.nl](http://www.euraxess.nl) you can find all sorts of practical information useful for researchers (including PhD candidates) coming to Holland. You can read about immigration procedures, social security, taxation, healthcare insurance, etc. If you need an entry visa, you are advised to contact your institution to find out what to do in your particular situation.