

2016

# ProVU Nota

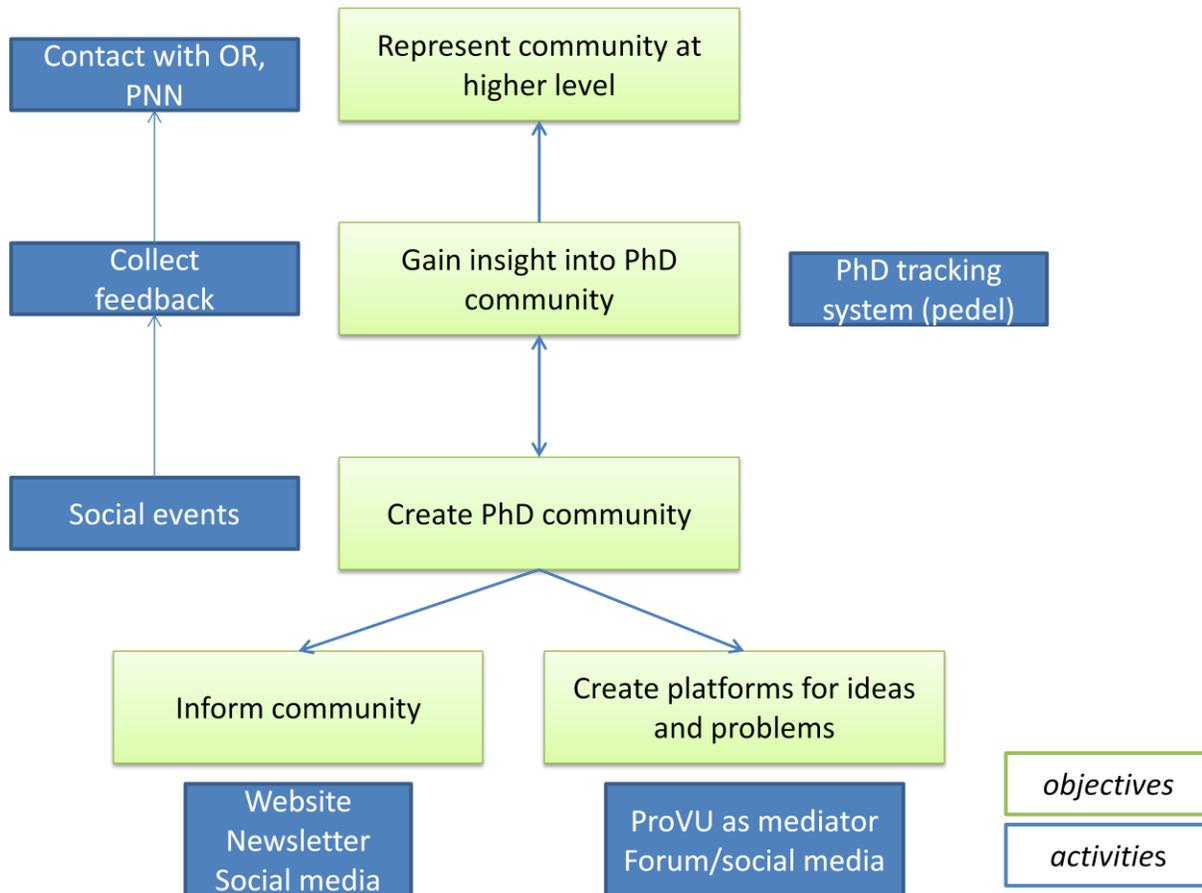
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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## ProVU: Vision and mission



**Figure 1. General overview of ProVU's objectives and activities**

### *Vision*

At the VU University, employees and students come together with a common goal: to provide high-quality research and education to our society. PhD candidates and postdocs are especially key to achieving this goal, as they contribute substantially to the research output, teach courses and supervise bachelor and master theses. ProVU believes in a university that demonstrates a desire to deliver independent and critical thinkers to society as these young researchers are the next generation of innovators, developers, philosophers and leaders within the academia and beyond. To achieve this we want to help these young researchers to get the most out of their PhD trajectory at the VU.

### *Mission*

ProVU is an independent, critical and young organization that represents and champions all PhD candidates of the VU University and VU University Medical Center (VUmc). ProVU focuses especially on the role young academics play in the university and what ProVU can mean for these researchers. ProVU is convinced that enabling the success of these young researchers will benefit the whole university. ProVU provides a community of fellow PhD candidates, and aims to build a social infrastructure for all young researchers. ProVU hopes to adequately represent and support PhD candidates at the VU and VUmc at different levels.

## Micro level: The PhD Candidate

The Training and Guidance Plan, developed by both PhD candidate and his or her direct supervisor, should be the main starting point of every PhD project. It should list the expectations of both parties and provide a time line by which these expectations must be met within the preliminary budget. **To achieve this, every PhD candidate should have insight in their budget and expenses.** This Training and Guidance Plan should be discussed and, if necessary, revised every year at the annual review.

In order to manage, control and review all Training and Guidance Plans, ProVU advises the VU University and VUmc to resume all preparations regarding the PhD Tracking System. This system will monitor the status of the Training and Guidance Plans and will allow for strict time management and early discovery of problems. For example, the annual review might be able to reveal early problems, but only when it is consistently scheduled and adhered to. The tracking system can help employees focus on their research, because it takes care of much of the administration for them. In addition, this Tracking System may as well be used for creating a VU/VUmc-PhD alumni network. ProVU warns however, not to create an Orwellian state, in which employees are monitored too closely.

Temporary contracts have become increasingly common for many employees in recent years. This causes young researchers to be uncertain about their future. ProVU wants to bring more attention to this problem. A full time PhD candidate should have a PhD contract (instead of a series of positions as a (junior) researcher with the possibility of not getting a contract extension) according to the correct collective labor agreement. Furthermore, we believe that more tenure track positions (after obtaining the PhD degree) for young researches can provide a balance between the employee's need for security and the university's desire to reduce the number of permanent contracts. Furthermore, after their PhD, a lot of employees turn away from the academic world, not only because of a higher salary that can be acquired in other commercial organizations, but also due to the increasing negative spiral in the academic world. The declined funding by the government creates a situation in which people are confronted with an increase in competition, which will lead to researchers spending their time on writing grant proposals, instead of doing research.

Researchers should also have ample opportunity to improve beyond the scope of their research. A desire to take part in committees or platforms should be encouraged. ProVU would like to support these employees in organizing events, workshops or meetings for all the PhD candidates and postdocs who are working in graduate schools or research institutes.

## Meso level: The Graduate School/Research Institute/Faculty

### *Organization and representation*

At the moment, PhDs may be part of a graduate school organized at different levels: the research institute level, faculty level, university level or even national level (including several universities). Graduate schools often clarify the research structure of the faculties and facilitate PhD candidates in their research. It also allows current employees to advance in their careers and creates jobs for new employees. A graduate school can manage courses that may be of interest to these researchers, can monitor the progress of a PhD or postdoc project (whether or not using the PhD tracking system) and can appoint a PhD/postdoc coordinator. The graduate school (and the VUmc research institutes) may be the designated institute to monitor the quality of the PhD and postdoc projects and the quality of the supervision of these projects. Finally, graduate schools often have their own PhD council which organizes social activities and represents PhDs at a higher level.

Many PhD candidates, however, do not fall under the structure of a graduate school. It is, therefore, also important for PhD candidates to be better organized at the level of the research institute or faculty. Currently the VU is aiming to create a representative body of PhDs at the faculty level. ProVU will do its best to guide this process. **Our aim for the coming year is to ensure that all faculties will have at least one PhD candidate in the ODC.**

### *Communication*

To improve the communication of organizational changes regarding PhD candidates (e.g. changes in the doctoral regulations) it is of utmost importance that faculties are able to forward all important news to their PhD candidates. **This means that a proper database, including all email addresses of PhDs, should be set up and maintained.** In addition, several faculties are now working on improving the faculty website, so that information relevant for PhD candidates can be easily found.

### *PhD education*

As now PhDs are expected to fulfill 30 ECTS worth of coursework, it is important to aid PhDs, especially those who do not belong to a graduate school, with choosing the right courses. This means that faculties who are not organized within the structure of a graduate school already, should put extra effort into portraying the availability of courses that can be followed and also ensure that PhDs have access to the financial means to meet the 30 ECTS criterium.

## Macro: The VU/VUmc

### *Organizational level*

Every employee at the VU University and VUmc should have the chance to get involved in and be informed of the affairs of the VU and VUmc. Not only social and cultural events, but also VU-wide decision making is relevant for PhD candidates and postdocs. Therefore, a concise language policy is needed. ProVU recommends that the VU University should switch its default language from Dutch to English. All meetings and corresponding minutes should be in English. This is especially important if PhD candidates and postdocs are to be fully included and represented in the co-decision bodies of the university. In addition, all announcements regarding social and cultural events should be in English, as well as official VU ceremonies such as the Dies Natalis and the Opening of the Academic Year. VU webpages and other forms and information that are only in Dutch or provide only a short English summary should be updated.

Currently the VU lacks insight into the numbers and spread of PhD candidates within the university. Without such an overview it is impossible to get a grip on the issues PhD candidates are facing and to properly represent them at a higher level. **One of our priorities for the coming year is therefore to convince the VU board to create an overview of- and systematically track the number of PhD candidates at the VU/VUmc.** By establishing a database at faculty level, such a PhD tracking system should be feasible.

Fortunately, many PhDs have organized themselves already at a lower level: PhD councils at the graduate school, research institute or faculty level are now becoming more common. As ProVU is an overarching institution, it is important to gain insight into the whereabouts of these councils and keep track of their activities. **With the help of the faculty representatives, a second priority for next year is to map out the PhD councils in each faculty and maintain close contact with them.**

### *Collaboration with other universities/PhD councils*

Finally, numerous collaborations between the University of Amsterdam (UvA), Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (HvA) and VU are taking shape in the Amsterdam Academic Alliance (AAA), such as the Amsterdam Beta Cluster and the merging of the VUmc and Academic Medical Centre (AMC). This will have a lot of consequences for PhD candidates and postdocs. ProVU wants to make sure that their projects will not be hindered, but that these new collaborations will benefit PhD candidates and postdocs, for example by the collaborations resulting in more graduate courses. In addition ProVU will strengthen the contact with the PhD councils at the University of Amsterdam.

### *Representation at national level*

ProVU maintains close contact with the national PhD council (PNN, Promovendi Netwerk Nederland) to represent PhDs at the national level. ProVU considers obtaining a PhD as a first step in the academic career and believes that this step must be accompanied by full-employment status, including pension rights and professional supervision, annual reviews and the right to additional training. ProVU believes that teaching experience is important to a PhD candidate's career, but that he/she must receive sufficient teaching training (for example the possibility to get a BKO: *Basis Kwalificatie Onderwijs*) and that the PhD candidate's research must always remain the university's first priority. It is vital to ProVU that the VU University ensures that PhD candidates are not negatively impacted by reorganizations in their faculties.

## Agenda for 2016

Following our previously stated mission and vision, this sections summarizes what we aim to achieve over the course of 2016

### **PhD representation & communication**

To properly represent PhDs at a higher level, we will ensure that all faculties have at least one PhD representative in the ODC. This faculty representative will also act as a spokes person for all the PhD councils in the faculty and attend the general member meetings organized by ProVU.

Following this we will advocate the establishment of a PhD database at faculty level, which should give insight into the numbers and spread of PhD candidates within each faculty and also facilitate the communication of organizational decisions to PhDs.

We will set up regular meetings with the VU board.

We will improve and update our own website.

### **PhD training and education**

Following the change in the doctoral regulations, i.e. the obligation of following 30 ECTS, we aim to ensure that i.) the availability of relevant courses is properly communicated to PhDs and ii.) that PhDs have access to the financial means to follow these courses. All faculties are currently updating their websites to improve the visibility of courses. With regard to the second point, we advocate the inclusion of an educational budget, to be explicitly agreed upon between PhD candidate and supervisor, in the Training and Supervision Plan.

### **Collaboration with other universities**

Given the increasing collaboration between the UvA and the VU, we will strengthen our ties with both UvApro and Approve.

### **Coordinate events and create platform for start-ups**

ProVU itself will organize two large social events per year: a new year's drink and a summer BBQ. Smaller events may be organized by ad-hoc committees, such as the social committee, for which budget will be made available.

In addition we would like to support ideas for organizing events concerning the skills, research and careers of PhD candidates. ProVU can coordinate and facilitate such events by providing PhDs with the relevant contacts (e.g. speakers at an event, but also sponsors) and by creating a platform for sharing ideas between PhDs.