

Career centre

As eighty percent of the PhD's and postdocs will not end up in academia it is important that they prepare themselves for a career outside the university during their research project. ProVU has held a survey under PhD's to see whether they are familiar with the courses and counseling offered by the career centre. The survey was held with the program EXAMINE during September – December 2008. Seventy three respondents completed the survey. The main results will be discussed below.

A significant majority is not aware of the existence of the career centre (63%) and an even larger majority did not even consider career counseling (79%). Those PhD's who were familiar with the courses offered by the career centre obtained this information via others (71%) or the information accidentally passed by (18%) whereas only a mere 12% got the information directly from the career centre.

The PhD's were asked which kind of counseling they would find desirable. Table 1 presents the results

Table 1. Responses to the question: please indicate for each of the following items to what extent you think guidance or counseling is desirable.

Type of counseling	Average score
Orientation future work possibilities	1.7
Future perspectives as a PhD	1.9
Networking with scientific staff outside own faculty	2.2
Self-development	2.5
Coping with doubts being a PhD student	2.7
Coping with work-related problems	2.7
Coaching in PhD-related problems	2.7
Improving efficiency work activities	2.7
Having evaluation/assessment talks with supervisor	2.9
Communicate with your supervisor	2.9
Time management work activities	2.9
Communicate with fellow PhD's	3.1

Note: the scale used ranges from very desirable (1) via neutral (3) to very desirable (5).

The counseling which is most desired corresponds quite well with the counseling offered by the career centre or by other providers at the VU like for example the course on effective time management. This is also the case concerning the format or the way counseling PhD's would like to have. These results are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Responses to the question: how interesting do you think the following counseling formats are?

Format of counseling	Average score
Attending individual sessions	2.3
Actively participating in sessions	2.4
Attending group seminars with other PhD's	2.5
Attending sessions only in the morning	2.8
Attending sessions only in the afternoon	3.0
Having sessions with (home) assignments	3.4
Attending all-day sessions	3.7
Attending sessions several days in a row	3.8

Note: the scale used ranges from very interesting (1) via neutral (3) to very uninteresting (5).

In general, the less intense, in terms of frequency and work load the better. ProVU also asked PhD's to what extent certain propositions apply to them (see table 3) in order to investigate whether they have budget to finance career counseling.

Table 3. Responses to the question: please indicate to what extent the following propositions apply to you.

Format of counseling	Average score
I would like to get counseling from the career centre if I had budget for it	2.6
I would like to get counseling from the career centre (not looking at costs)	2.8
I have a personal budget from my faculty which enables me to follow...	2.9
I would be willing to pay for career counseling myself	3.8

Note: the scale used ranges from definitively agree (1) via neutral (3) to definitively disagree (5).

PhD's want to have career counseling but are not willing to pay for it themselves. The PhD's appear to be neutral on the proposition that they have a personal budget which allows them to obtain career counseling (43%). This should be interpreted as that they do not know whether they have or may use their personal budget for this purpose (do not know answer category was not included in the survey). About 25% of the respondents disagreed with this proposition which means that they do not have or may not use their personal budget to finance career counseling.

Recommendation: make sure that each incoming PhD obtains information about the courses and career counseling offered by the career centre (and the VU in general) by, for example, including a folder in a welcome package. Enable each PhD to follow courses and career counseling by providing budget directly or indirectly via the department or research school or by allowing the PhD to use their own personal budget for this purpose.