

Position of the PhD trustee (confidential counselor for PhD candidates)

October 1, 2020; Approved by the Faculty Board

This version is from November 19, 2021

The tasks of the PhD trustee include:

- Acting as a contact point for PhD candidates who experience a problem or conflict with regard to training, supervision and/or assessment, or any other problem related to the PhD research and functioning as a PhD candidate which they would like to discuss in a confidential setting; for a problem or conflict we use the term 'issue';
- Being visible as PhD trustee;
- Advise the PhD candidate on the issue at hand;
 - In case of a personal issues of the PhD candidate, if necessary, and in consultation with the PhD candidate, approaching the most appropriate officials or organizations to deal with the issue, or to stimulate and facilitate the PhD candidate to contact appropriate officials or organizations to deal with the issue;
 - In case of an issue in the working relationship between the PhD candidate and supervisor(s) the PhD trustee should not approach the supervisors or the head of department, but should stimulate and facilitate the PhD candidate to work according to the 'Procedure for PhD candidates and supervisors in case of an issue in a PhD trajectory';
 - If the PhD candidate suspects that a scientific employee of the Vrije Universiteit or VUmc has violated the academic integrity rules (e.g. by plagiarism, or by manipulation or manufacturing of research data; <https://vu.nl/en/employee/social-sciences-getting-started/misuse-and-misconduct-of-research-data-fss>), the PhD trustee should advise the PhD candidate to contact one of the confidential advisors (<https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/more-about/academic-integrity-at-vu-vumc>);
 - In case the PhD candidate has experienced sexual harassment or other forms of undesirable behavior (violence, intimidation, aggression, bullying; <https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/more-about/safety-at-vu-amsterdam>), the PhD trustee should advise the PhD candidate to report it (<https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/more-about/safe-social-setting-on-campus>) and to contact one of the confidential counsellors (vertrouwenspersonen.personeel@vu.nl).
- Providing solicited and unsolicited advice to the dean and the director of the Gradual School on bottlenecks and possible solutions in PhD trajectories in general;
- Providing an annual report to the dean and the director of the Gradual School about the activities of the PhD trustee and an identification of recurrent issues that deserve improvement and the attention from the Graduate School, the Faculty and the departmental management; when referring to PhD candidates and supervisors, this is done anonymously;
- To collaborate with other (PhD) trustees at FSS and VU.

Other provisions

A PhD candidate under the supervision of the PhD trustee is advised to approach the FSS Confidential Counsellor for Academic Integrity Issues (<https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/more-about/academic-integrity-at-vu-vumc> > More information on academic integrity > Confidential Counsellor). There may also be another reason for a PhD candidate to approach a person other than the FSS trustee. The website mentioned above lists several other individuals to whom she/he can turn.

The PhD trustee carries out her or his work without any other instructions from or consultation with other FSS staff.

The PhD trustee is appointed by the FSS faculty board for a term of three years.

It is advised that the PhD trustee has received training to enhance her or her functioning and that she/he participates in the VU 'decentraal-centraal' (decentralized-central) consultation of trustees. Please contact vertrouwenspersonen.personeel@vu.nl.