

How satisfied are PhD candidates about their PhD trajectory?

Quantitative research among PhD candidates on behalf of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam



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Research Methodology



Background and purpose of the research



Background

- > Since 2016, VU conducts surveys to evaluate how PhD candidates experience their PhD trajectory.
- > Several questions in this PhD survey are the same as in PhD surveys conducted at other Dutch Universities. This allows for a comparison of the PhD candidates' experiences relating to working conditions, supervision, educational opportunities, work pressure and career perspectives of PhD candidates at the national level.
- > This research is one of the tools VU has to find out about the experiences of PhD candidates. The results, as presented in this report, will assist in further developing PhD policy at VU to improve PhD trajectories at VU.



Research question

- > The goal of the survey is to evaluate how PhD candidates experience their PhD trajectory, and therefore gain insight in how to further improve working conditions, facilities and regulations. The VU PhD survey addresses several topics, including (but not limited to) questions about wellbeing, supervision, education opportunities, progress of the PhD trajectory, work environment, and whether PhD candidates are involved in teaching and supervising. This research focuses on the following main question: *How do VU PhD candidates view their current PhD trajectory?*
- > Areas of attention:
 - *How satisfied are PhD candidates with their PhD trajectory?*
 - *Where are the areas for improvement in the PhD trajectory?*



Reason and purpose of the research



Method and target group

- > The quantitative study was conducted online.
- > A total of 672 PhD candidates completed the questionnaire in its entirety. This is 22% of the PhD candidates that have been contacted for this survey.
- > This survey's target group consisted of PhD candidates at VU Amsterdam.
- > The questionnaire was sent to all PhD candidates registered in Hora Finita, the PhD tracking system at VU.
- > The sample is representative by VU faculty. The share of PhD candidates per faculty in the entire population (Hora Finita) corresponds to the share of PhD candidates in the group of respondents in this report (see page 59).



Reading guide

- > In this report we refer to the participants in the study as 'PhD candidates'.
- > Answers to open questions were analysed qualitatively. We will discuss the answers mentioned most often and the answers that we believe are important in terms of content.
- > We illustrate results with relevant quotes from participants, which are shown in italics.
- > In the analysis, we considered all the participants as a single group. We examined the differences between subgroups from different types of employment, and PhD phases.
- > We tested the differences between subgroups for significance.
- > The percentages in the report have been rounded off. As a result, the total can incidentally add up to more or less than 100%.

Management summary



Management summary (1)

The general well-being of half of the PhD candidates is fairly good

- > Just over half of the PhD candidates (58%) rate their general well-being as (very) good.
- > 13% of the PhD candidates rate their well-being as (very) poor.
- > For 39% of the PhD candidates their research project has a positive impact on their well-being. However, for 36% their research project has a negative impact on their well-being.

Experiences differ when it comes to onboarding

- > 39% of the PhD candidates are satisfied with the onboarding process they received.
- > 31% of the PhD candidates are dissatisfied with the onboarding process.
- > For most of the PhD candidates (73%) their promotor or co-promotor was part of their onboarding process. For almost half (46%) of the PhD candidates, their daily supervisor was (also) part of the onboarding.

PhD candidates are fairly satisfied with the research facilities, but they feel less integrated into the research community

- > PhD candidates are fairly satisfied with the research facilities offered by VU. They are mostly satisfied with their access to the library (70%). Just over half of the PhD candidates are also satisfied with the computer and software, general research facilities, and the workplace.
- > When working on their research project, most PhD candidates (56%) have contact with other researchers at least once a week.
- > Over half of the PhD candidates (58%) feel that integrity issues can be discussed openly within their research group.



Management summary (2)

Two-thirds of PhD candidates are (very) satisfied with the supervision they receive

- > On average, PhD candidates have 2.6 supervisors in their supervision team. They receive, on average, 4.8 hours of supervision per month from their supervision team.
- > In general, two-thirds of PhD candidates (67%) are (very) satisfied with the general supervision they receive. 17% of the PhD candidates are (very) dissatisfied with their supervision.
- > Majority of the PhD candidates (86%) are satisfied with the ownership they are allowed to take on their own research project.
- > Almost three-quarters of PhD candidates (72%) are satisfied with the feedback they receive from their supervisor.
- > Two-thirds of PhD candidates (66%) feel safe enough to provide their supervisor with feedback.
- > Another two-thirds of PhD candidates (65%) feel that their supervisor knows what is expected from them as a supervisor.

Two-thirds of PhD candidates are aware of the availability of a confidential advisor

- > 67% of the PhD candidates are aware of the availability of a confidential advisor. Almost a quarter (23%) is still unaware of this.
- > 39% of the PhD candidates know there is a PhD psychologist available. 40% are not aware of this. The VU also offers other features to support their PhD candidates. The offered courses, symposia, workshops, etc. are deemed relevant to most PhD candidates.

Management summary (3)

The majority of PhD candidates (94%) have access to one or more educational activities, only 46% have sufficient time to participate in these activities

- > Almost all PhD candidates (94%) have a Training and Supervision Plan (TSP).
- > Over a third of the PhD candidates (35%) do not think that the TSP will contribute to a smooth progress of their research project. Another 30% are indifferent to its contribution to their research project.
- > Almost all PhD candidates (94%) have access to one or more educational activities. Most have access to seminars and conferences and a scientific integrity course.
- > Over half of the PhD candidates (57%) who have access to educational activities are satisfied with the activities.
- > Two-thirds of the PhD candidates (67%) feel that the educational activities have contributed to the completion of their research project.
- > 60% of the PhD candidates are encouraged by their supervisor team to participate in educational activities. Less than half (46%) have sufficient time to participate in these activities.
- > Over a quarter (28%) feels that the educational activities are not sufficiently preparing them for their career within science/academia. Another quarter (26%) feels that they do prepare them sufficiently for their career within science/academia.
- > A third (35%) feels that the educational activities are not preparing the PhD candidates enough for a career outside of science/academia.

For two out of five PhD candidates, teaching and supervising is part of their contract

- > 43% of the PhD candidates have teaching and supervising agreements in their contracts.
- > For just over a third of the PhD candidates (36%) teaching and supervising is not part of their contract.
- > PhD candidates spend around 7% of their time teaching and 7% of their time supervising. Most of their time is spent on their research project (75%).



Management summary (4)

Almost half of the PhD candidates have fallen behind on their schedule and half of the PhD candidates also experience a (too) high workload

- > 39% of the PhD candidates are on schedule or ahead of schedule with their research project. Another 46% of the PhD candidates have fallen behind on schedule.
- > Two out of five PhD candidates that are behind schedule are expected to be delayed by more than 9 months.
- > Project-related reasons, in particular Covid-19 problems, are mentioned most often as a reason for the expected delay.
- > Problems with experiments or data collection or a too-ambitious project have also often caused delays.
- > Over half of the PhD candidates (52%) indicate experiencing a (too) high workload.
- > The high workload is often caused by project-related reasons. The amount of work (75%) is most often mentioned as a reason for their high workload.

Almost a quarter of the PhD candidates have experienced some form of undesirable behaviour in the past 12 months

- > 22% of the PhD candidates have experienced undesirable behaviour in the past 12 months. This undesirable behaviour mostly involved their supervisor (42%).
- > Most PhD candidates (44%) who have experienced undesirable behaviour, do not want to indicate what type of undesirable behaviour they have experienced.
- > Almost a quarter (23%) indicates it was gender related.
- > Two out of five (42%) did not take any actions after experiencing undesirable behaviour. A third does not want to disclose whether they feel protected or supported by the VU after experiencing the undesirable behaviour. 44% did not feel supported and/or protected after experiencing undesirable behaviour.
- > Just over a quarter (27%) do not (always) feel their contributions are valued regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, etc.

Management summary (5)

Most of the PhD candidates have discussed the scientific requirements of their PhD thesis

- > Most PhD candidates have discussed the scientific requirements of their PhD thesis with either their supervisor and/or other people. Only 12% of the PhD candidates have not (yet) discussed the requirements.
- > The requirements of the PhD thesis are (rather) clear for 62% of the PhD candidates. One in five (21%) finds the requirements a bit unclear.
- > When asked what type of career they aspire after completing their PhD track, 44% of the PhD candidates indicate they aspire a career as a researcher at the university. Another 40% would want to pursue a career as a researcher outside of the university.



Results

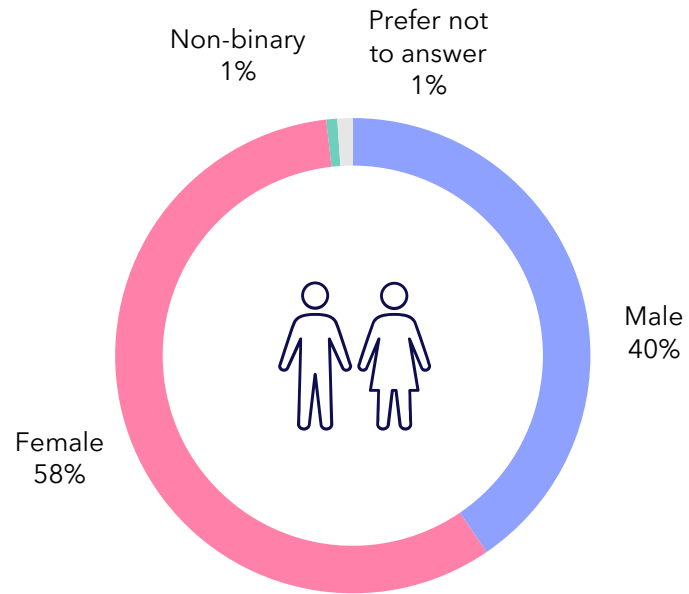


Profile respondents

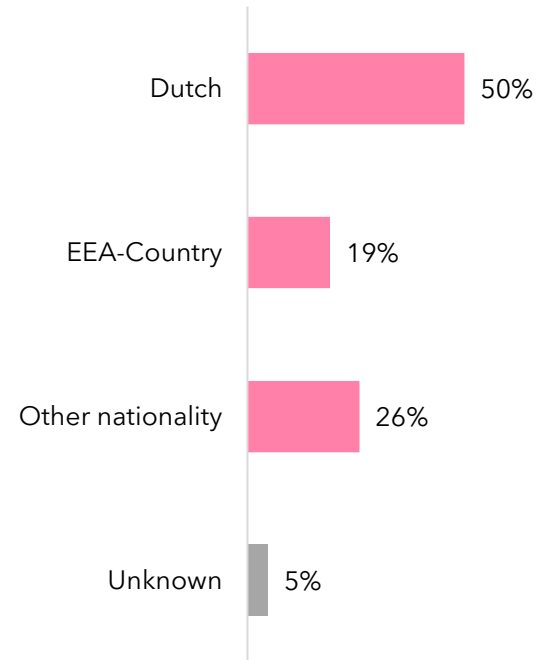


Profile respondents (n=672)

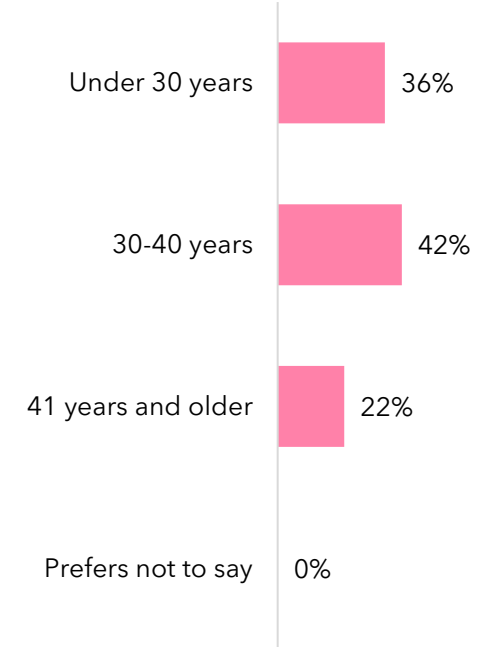
Gender



Nationality

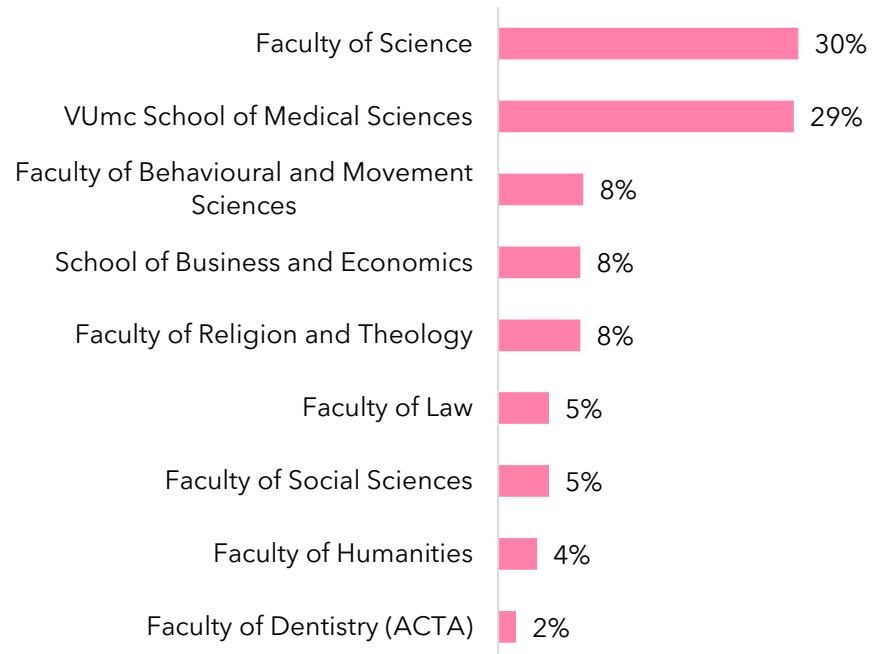


Age



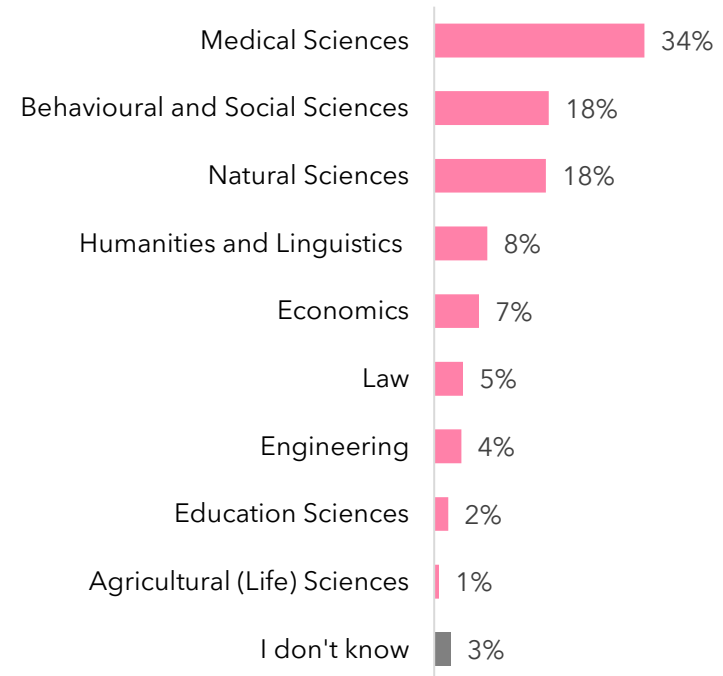
Profile respondents (n=672)

Faculty¹



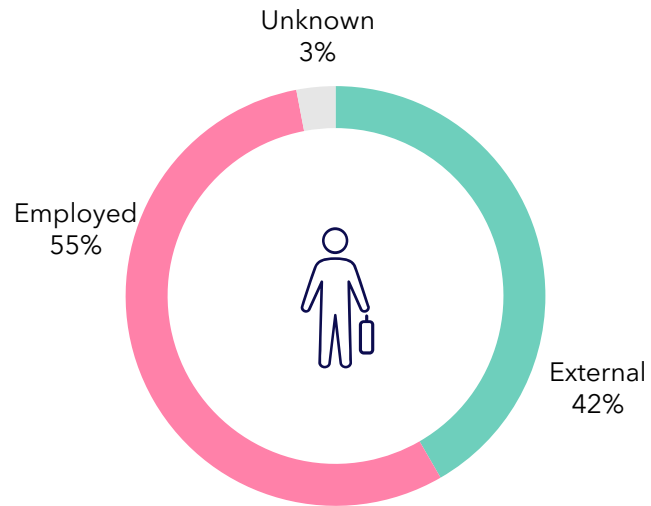
¹To view the comparison of the distribution of the total population compared to the distribution of the research population see slide 59.

Academic domain

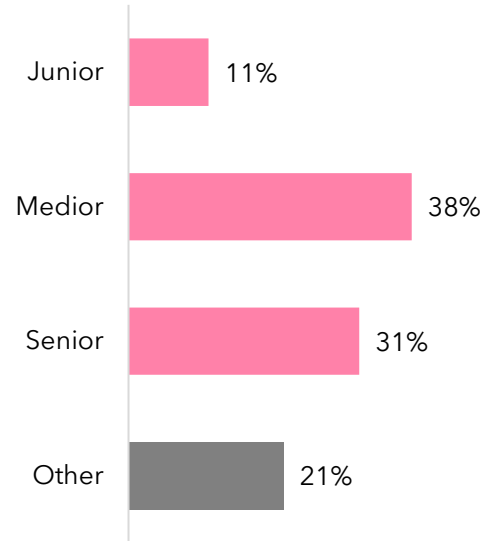


Profile respondents (n=672)

Type of employment

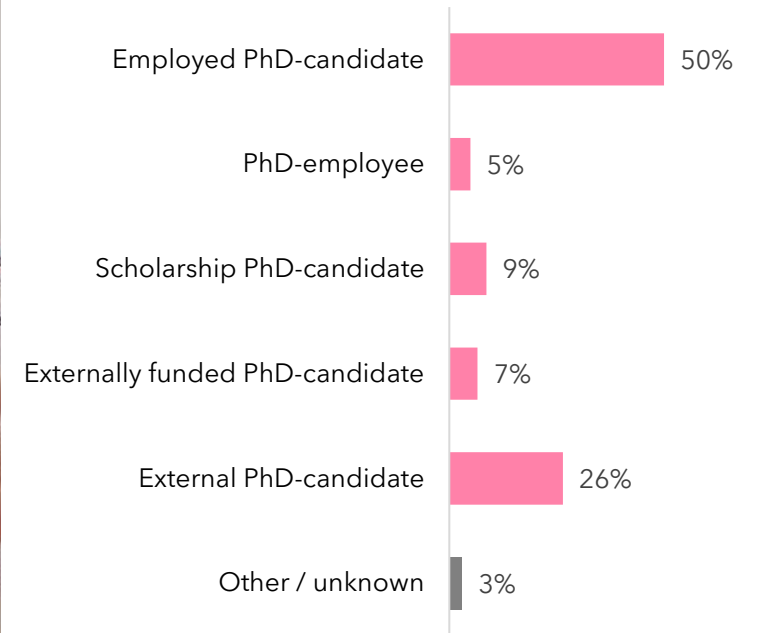


PhD phase*



*PhD candidates have different PhD phases depending on whether they are employed or not. In this graph we have combined these phases.

Type of PhD candidates*



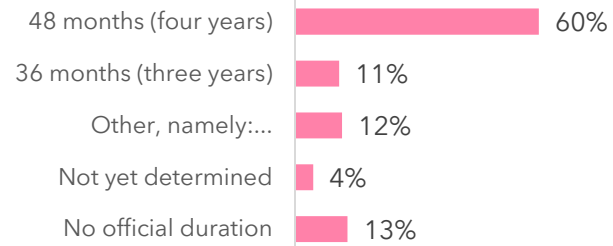
*Registration according to the UNL-types of PhD candidates in the PhD tracking system Hora Finita is leading. See also UNL-flowchart [here](#).

Profile respondents (n=672)

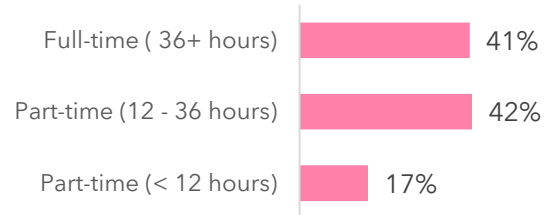


Duration PhD project

What is the official duration of your PhD project as agreed upon at the start?

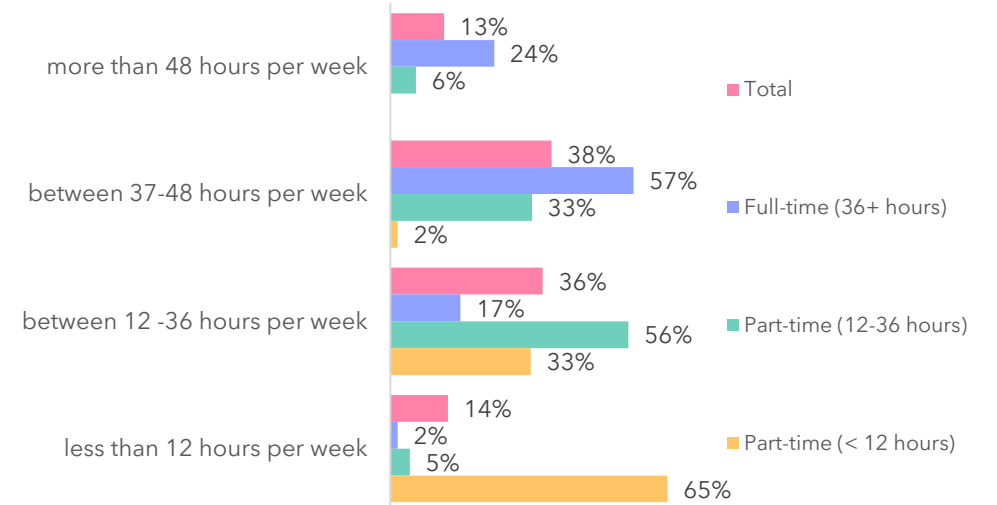


How many hours per week do you have to work on your PhD project, according to your contract or training and supervision plan?



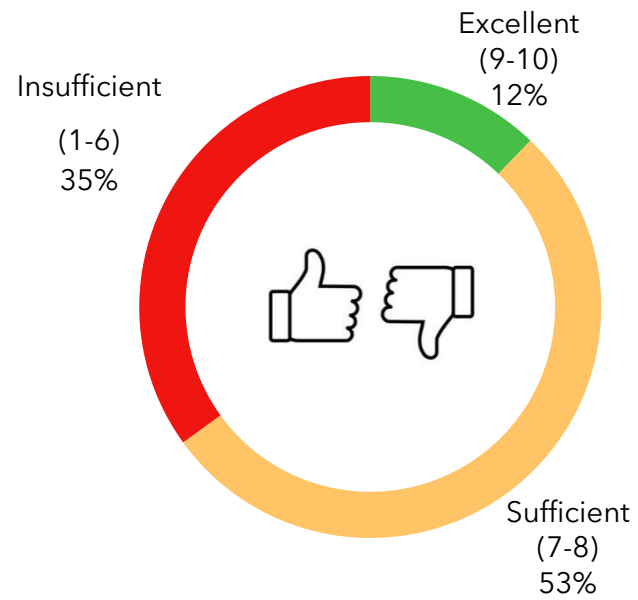
Duration PhD project

In an average week, how many hours do you actually work on your PhD project?



Profile respondents (n=672)

Satisfaction with PhD trajectory

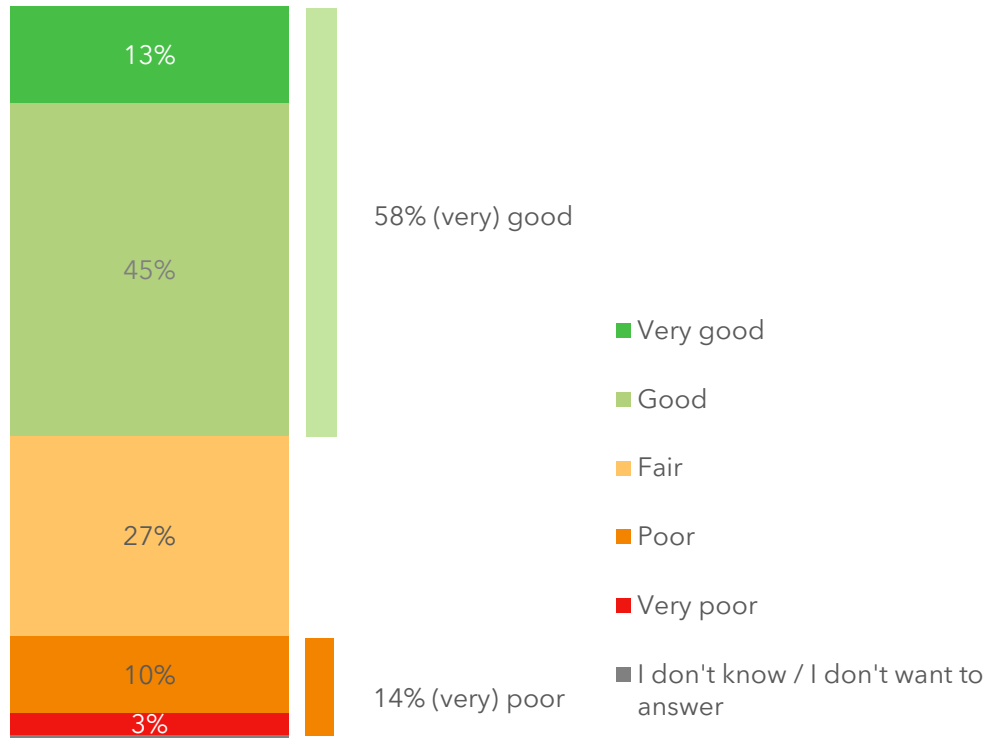


Well-being

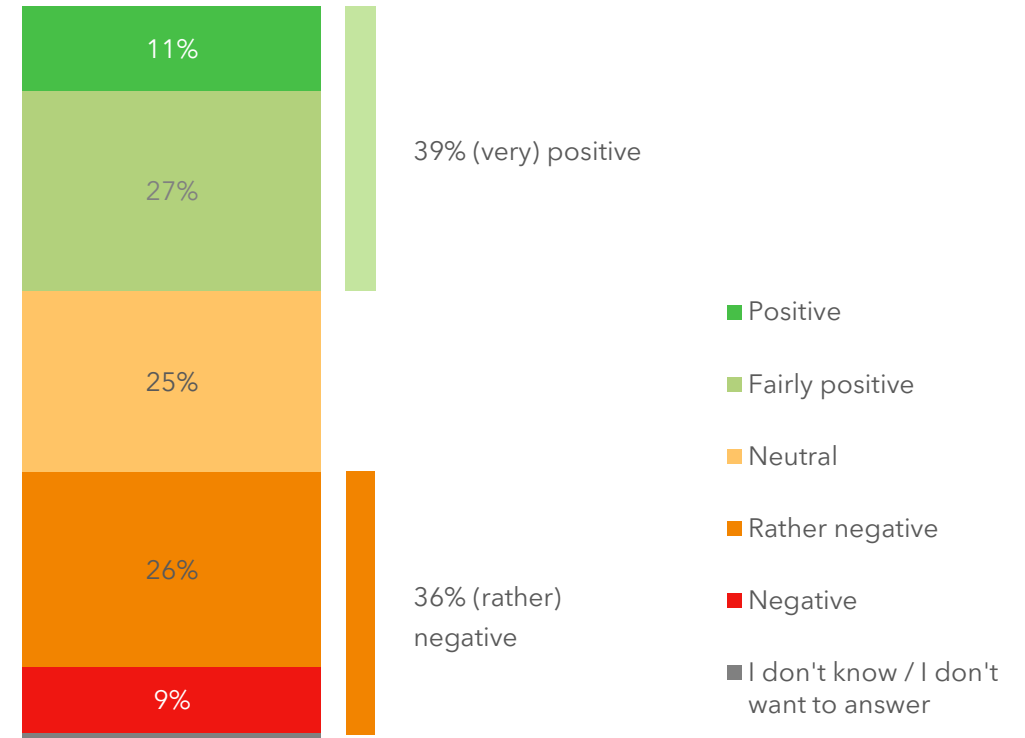


58% rate their general well-being as (very) good. Over a third experience a (rather) negative impact from their PhD project on their well-being

How would you rate your general well-being?
Base: all (n=672)



Overall, what impact does your PhD project have on your well-being?
Base: all (n=672)



> General well-being is rated more positively among external PhD candidates compared to employed PhD candidates (64% vs. 55% (very) good). Impact of a PhD project on well-being is rated more negatively among external PhD candidates (42% (rather) negative) than among employed PhD candidates (26% (rather) negative).

> Junior PhD candidates rate their well-being more positively than their medior and senior colleagues (junior 71%, medior 56%, senior 57% (very) good). Medior and senior PhD candidates rate the impact of their project on their well-being more negatively than their junior colleagues (junior 13%, medior 36%, senior 38% (rather) negative).

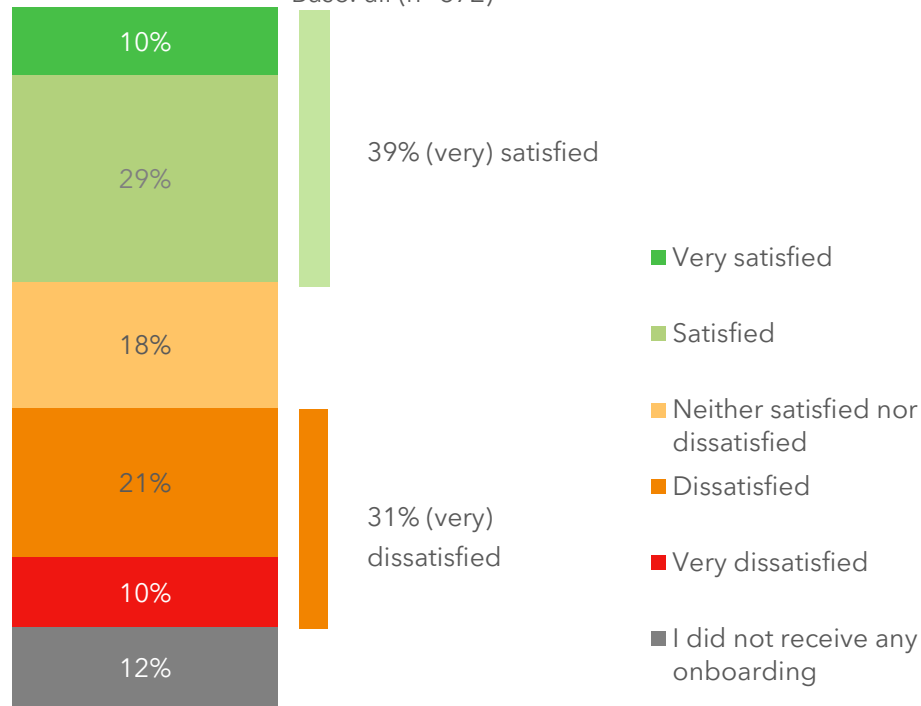
Onboarding



Experiences differ when it comes to onboarding. Only 39% are satisfied with the process

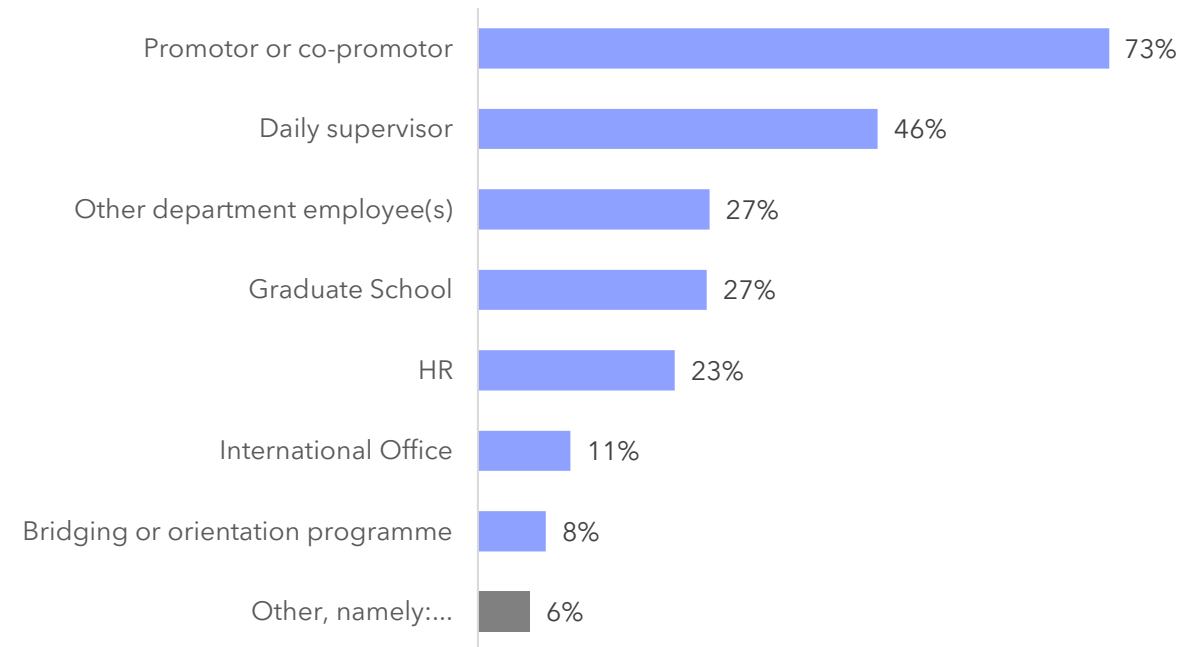
Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the onboarding you received at the start of your PhD trajectory?

Base: all (n=672)



Who was part of your onboarding process?*

Base: all who received onboarding (n=594)



*On average 2.2 parties were part of the onboarding.

- > Onboarding is rated more positively among external PhD candidates compared to employed PhD candidates (46% vs. 35% (very) satisfied).
- > For employed PhD candidates daily supervisors (55%), other department employees (34%), and HR (32%) were more often part of the onboarding process than for external PhD candidates (34%, 16%, and 12% respectively).

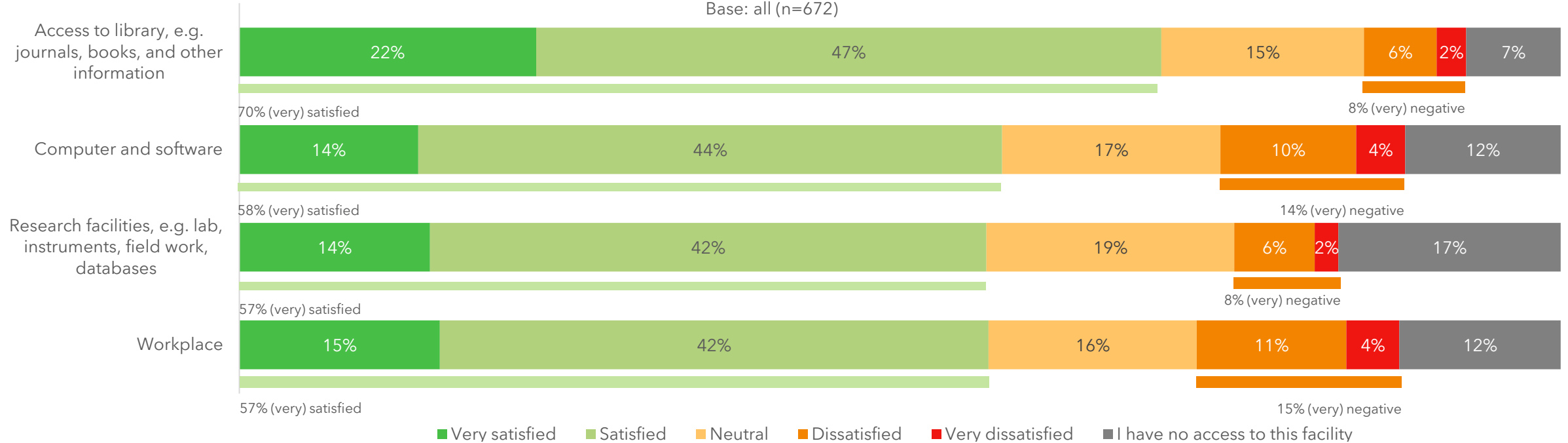
Research Environment



PhD candidates are fairly satisfied with the research facilities. They are most satisfied with the access to the library

The following questions concern your research facilities.
Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following facilities?

Base: all (n=672)



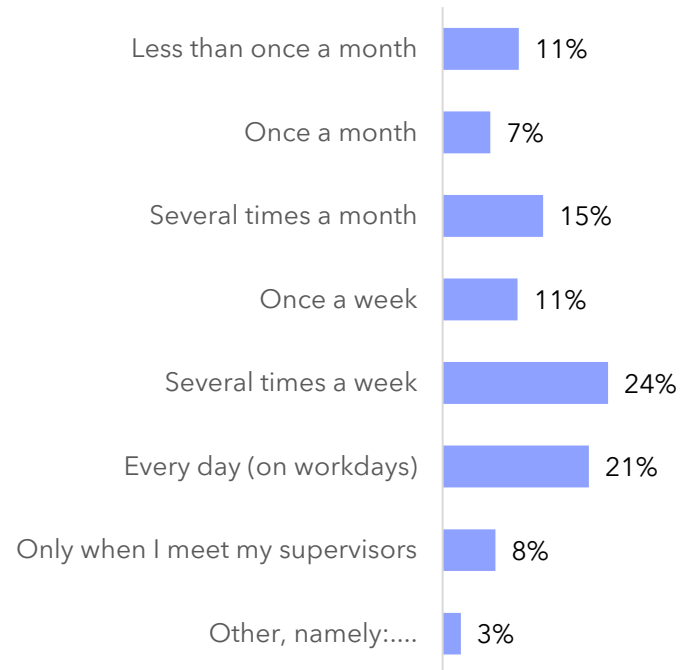
> Employed PhD candidates are more satisfied with the access to the library than external PhD candidates (79% vs. 58% (very) satisfied), more satisfied with the computers and software (70% vs. 43% (very) satisfied), more satisfied with the research facilities (67% vs. 42% (very) satisfied), and also more satisfied with their workplace (61% vs. 50% (very) satisfied).

> Juniors are more satisfied with their workplace compared to seniors (72% vs. 50% (very) satisfied).

Most PhD candidates have contact with other researchers at least once a week

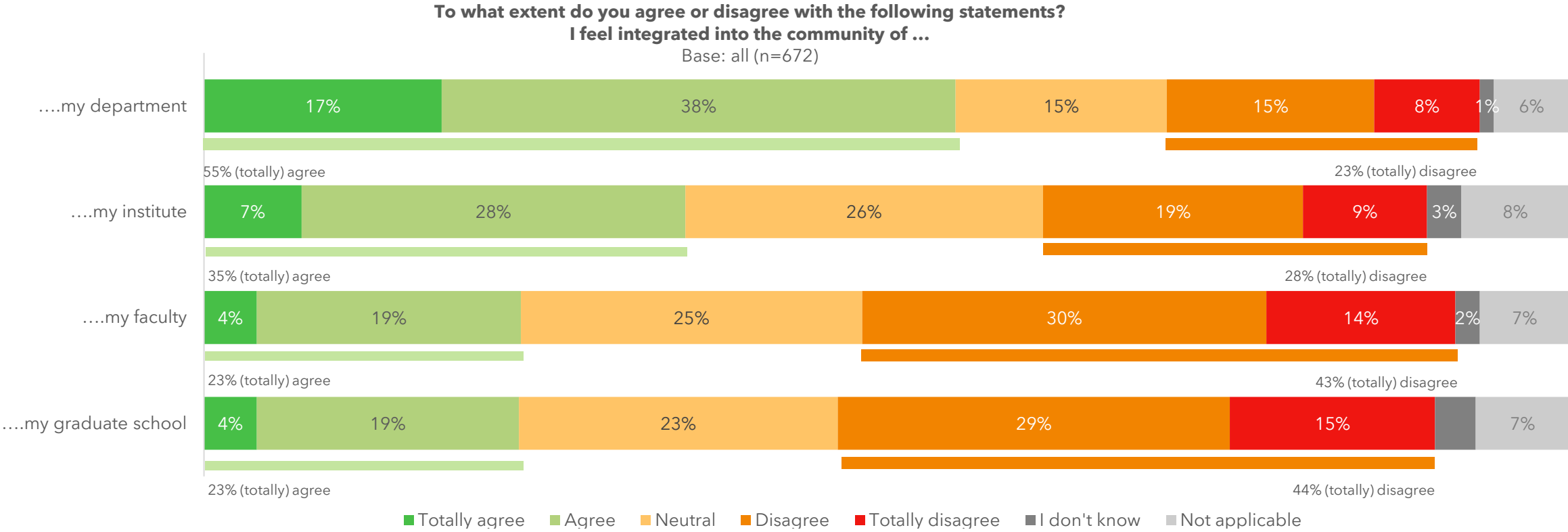
To what extent do you have contact with other researchers when working on your PhD project?

Base: all (n=672)



> 75% of the employed PhD candidates have contact with other researchers at least once a week. Compared to only 33% of the external PhD candidates. Juniors have more contact with other researchers compared to seniors (67% vs. 54%)

55% feel integrated into the community of their department. PhD candidates feel less integrated into their institute, faculty, and graduate school

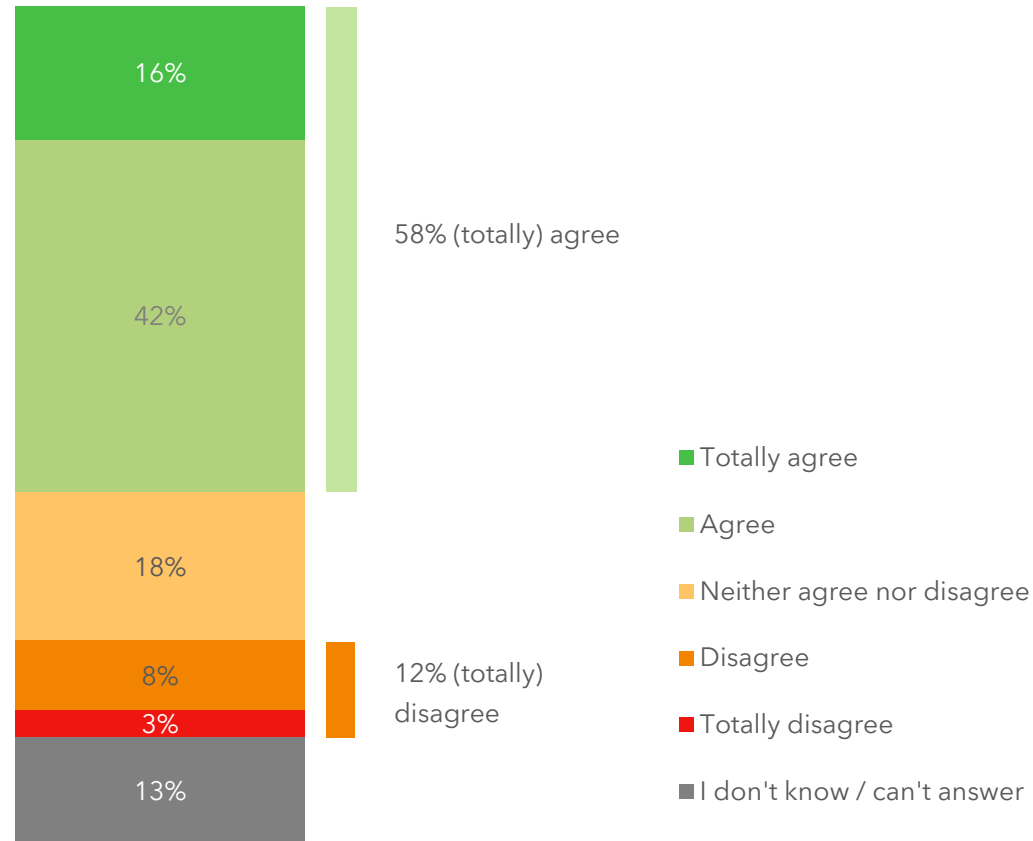


- > Employed PhD candidates feel less integrated into the community of their graduate school (47% vs. 38% (totally) disagree) and faculty (46% vs. 38% (totally) disagree) than external PhD candidates.
- > Employed PhD candidates feel more integrated into the community of their department than external PhD candidates (67% vs. 39% (totally) agree).
- > Medior and senior PhD candidates overall feel less integrated into the community of their department (19%, 30% vs. 8% (totally) disagree), their institute (26%, 32% vs. 14% (totally) disagree), their faculty (43%, 50% vs. 22% (totally) disagree) and their graduate school (47%, 43% vs. 26% (totally) disagree) than junior PhD candidates.

Over half of the PhD candidates agree that integrity issues can be discussed openly within their research group

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
In my research group research integrity issues are discussed openly

Base: all (n=672)



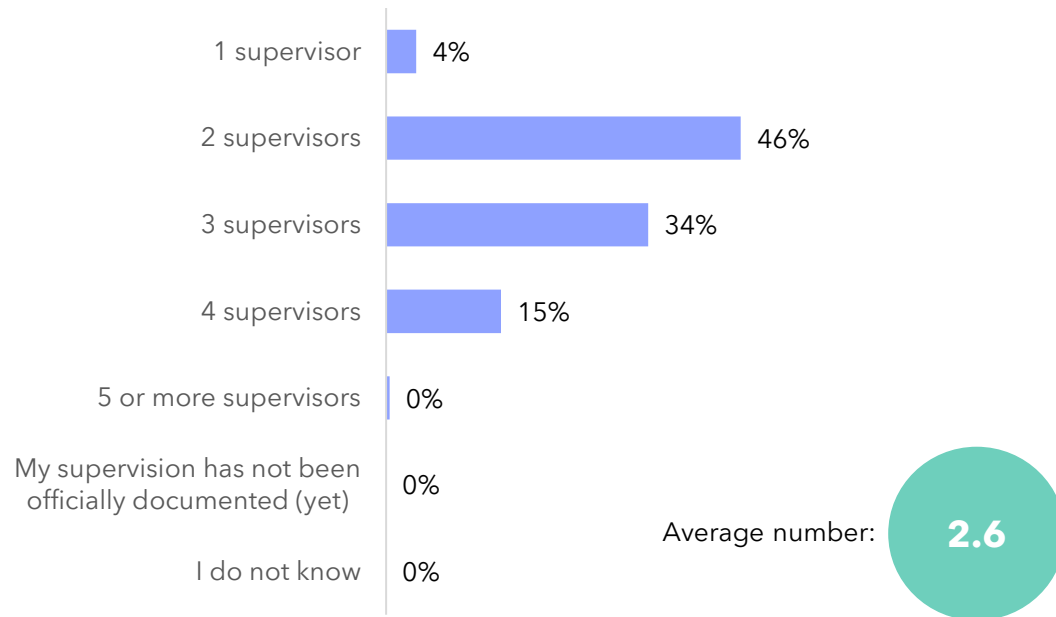
Supervision



On average PhD candidates have 2.6 supervisors of which they receive 4.8 hours of supervision each month combined

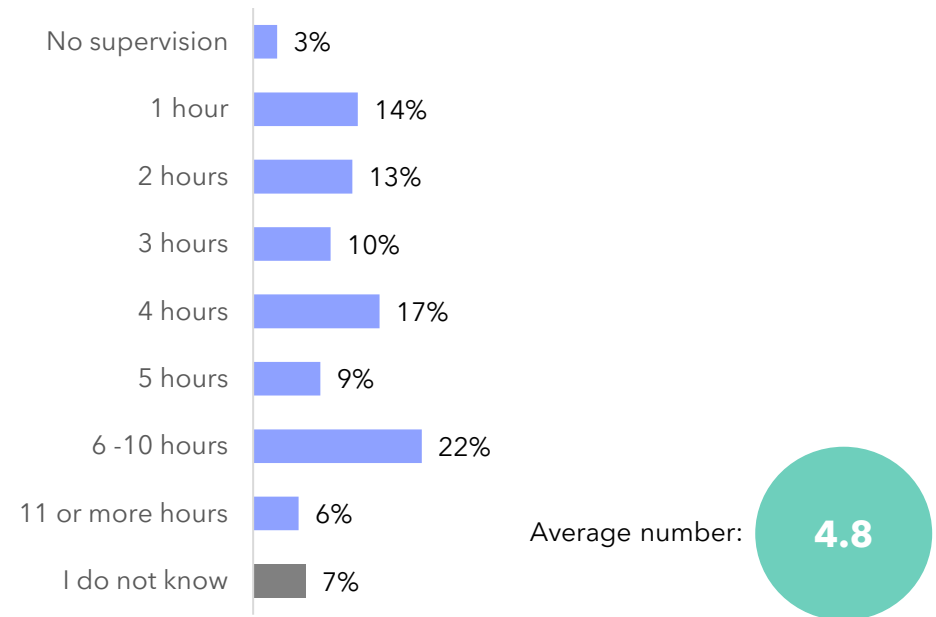
Please state the number of people who are officially part of your supervision team.

Base: all (n=672)



In an average month, how many hours supervision do you receive (from all your supervisors combined)?

Base: all (n=672)

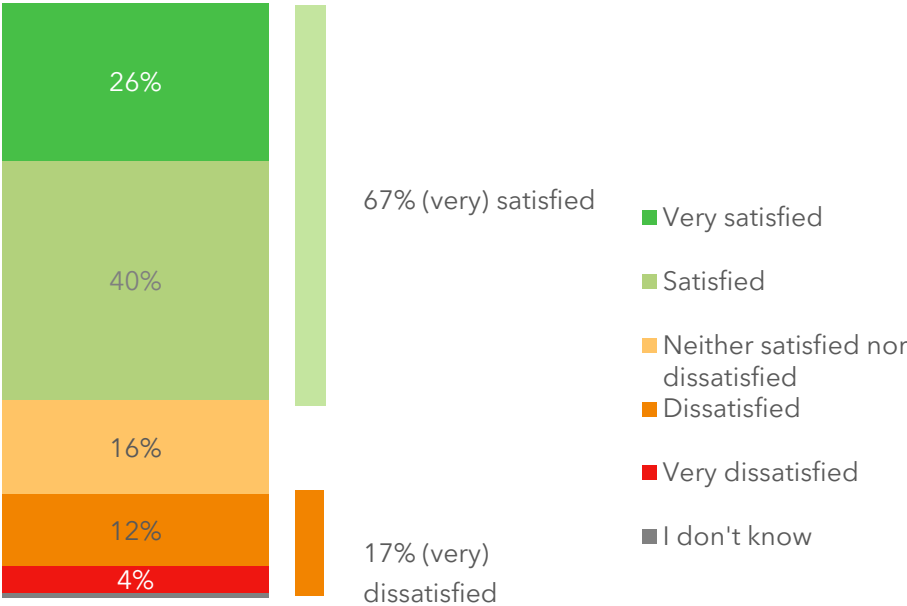


- > On average employed PhD candidates have more hours of supervision per month than external PhD candidates (5,1 vs. 4,2 hours).
- > Juniors have on average more hours of supervision per month than senior PhD candidates (5,8 vs. 4,7 hours).

Two-thirds of PhD candidates are (very) satisfied with the supervision they receive in general

In general, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the supervision you receive?

Base: all (n=672)

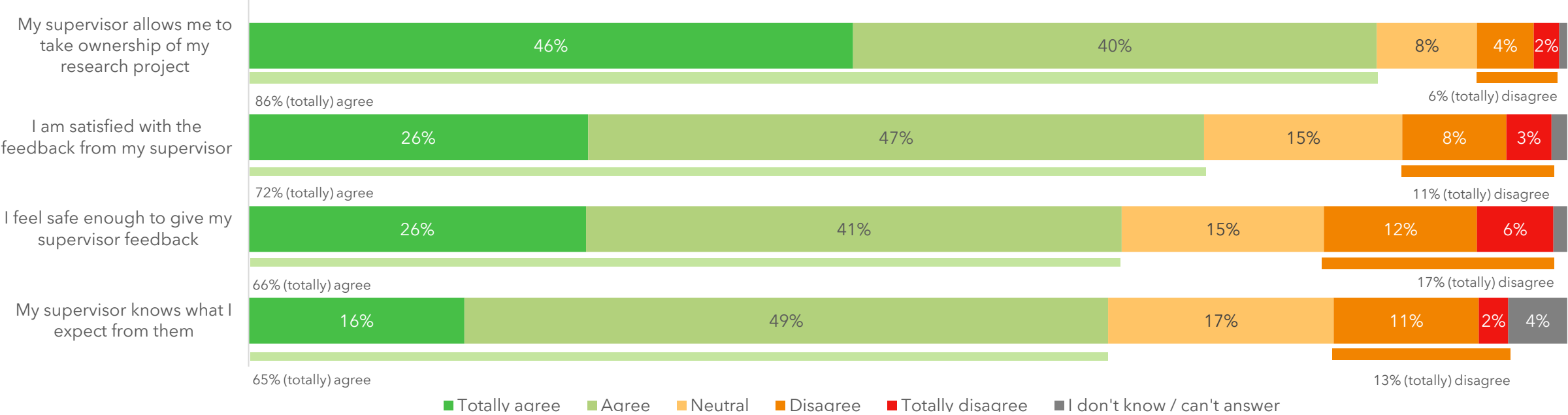


> Junior PhD candidates are more satisfied with the supervision they receive compared to senior PhD candidates (81% vs. 61% (very) satisfied).

86% of PhD candidates feel their supervisor allow them to take ownership of their research project

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Base: all (n=672)



- > Junior PhD candidates are more satisfied with the feedback they receive from their supervisor compared to medior and senior PhD candidates (90% vs. 72%, 67% (totally) agree). Juniors also feel safer giving their supervisor feedback than senior PhD candidates (78% vs. 64% (totally) agree).
- > Junior PhD candidates more often agree that their supervisor knows what is expected from them compared to medior and senior PhD candidates (81% vs. 64%, 63% (totally) agree).

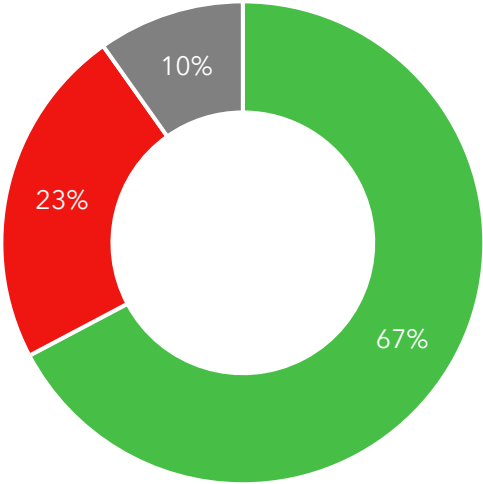
Support structures



Two-thirds are aware of the availability of a confidential advisor and only 39% are aware of the availability of a PhD psychologist

Do you know whether there is a confidential advisor available to whom you can go to when you encounter problems?

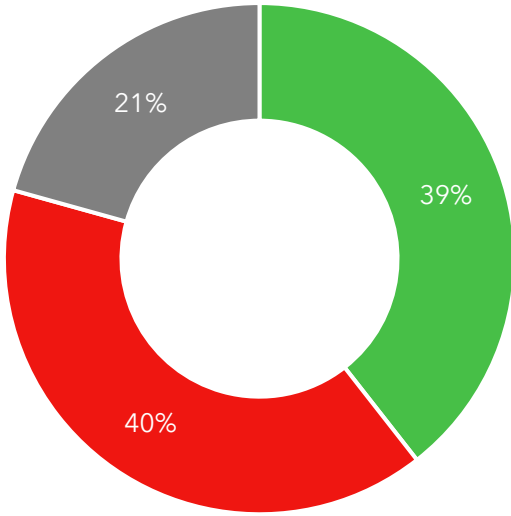
Base: all (n=672)



■ Yes, I am aware ■ No, I am not aware ■ I don't know

Do you know whether there is a PhD psychologist available?

Base: all (n=672)



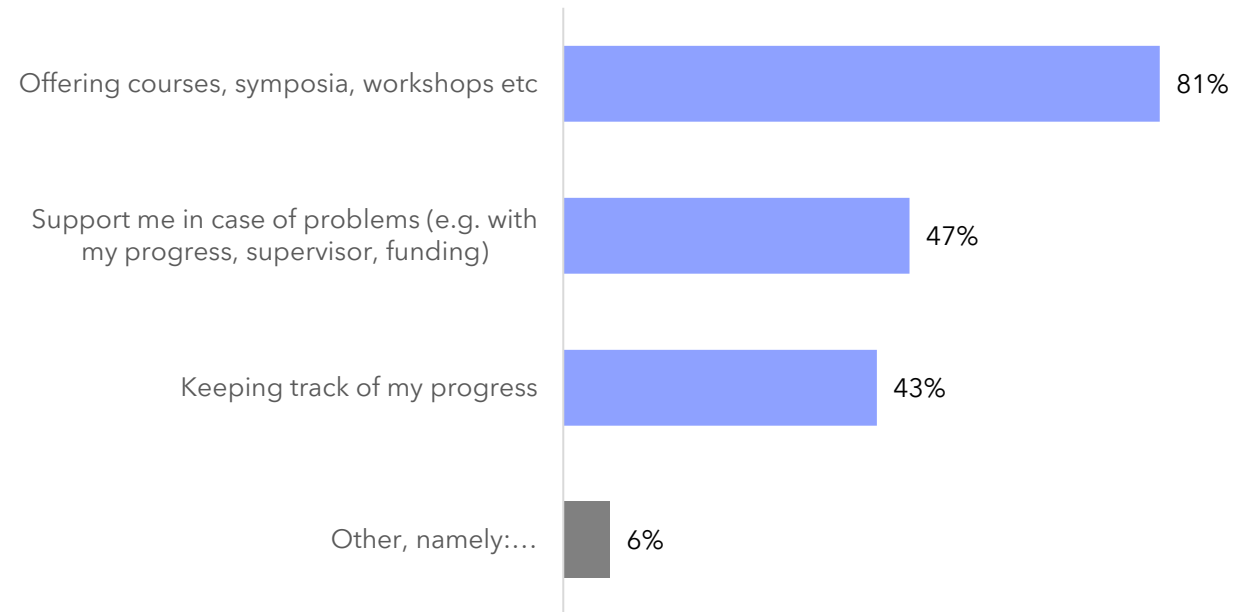
■ Yes, I am aware ■ No, I am not aware ■ I don't know

- > On average more employed PhD candidates are aware of confidential advisors compared to external PhD candidates (80% vs. 50%).
- > Employed PhD candidates are also more aware of the availability of a PhD psychologist compared to external PhD candidates (49% vs. 26%).

PhD candidates see offering courses, symposia, workshops, etc. as relevant to their PhD project

Which roles of the graduate school are relevant to your PhD project?

Base: all (n=672)



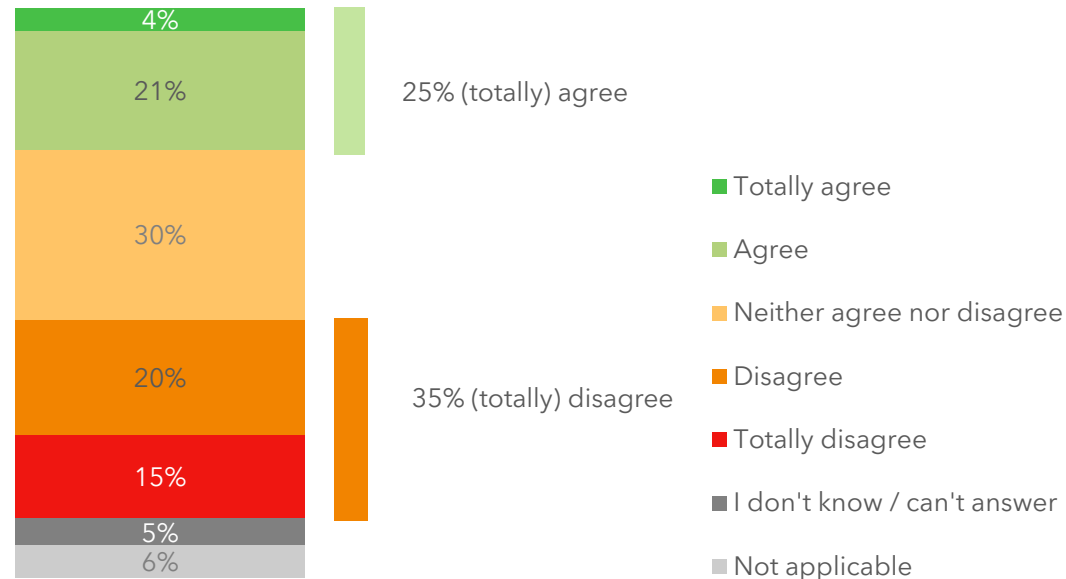
- > Offering courses are deemed more relevant for employed PhD candidates than external PhD candidates (87% vs. 72%)
- > These courses are also more relevant for juniors compared to seniors (94% vs. 80%).

Education & Training



Over a third of PhD candidates do not think TSP contributes to a smooth progress of their PhD project. Another 30% are indifferent about its contribution

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
The Training and Supervision Plan (TSP) contributes to a smooth progress
of my PhD project
Base: all (n=672)

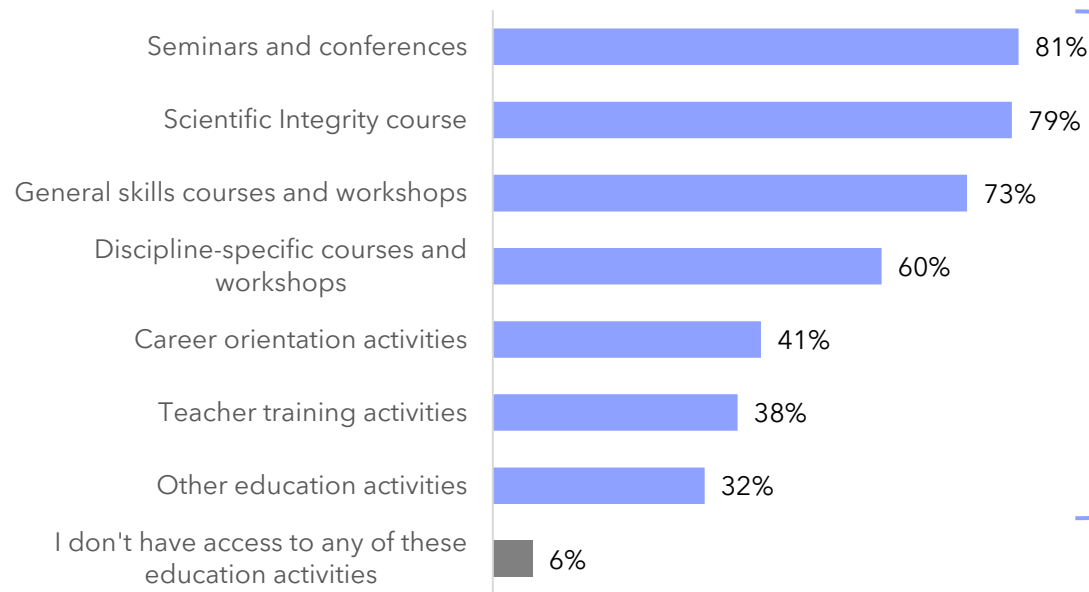


- > Employed PhD candidates more often tend to think the TSP does not contribute to a smooth progress than external PhD candidates (43% vs. 25% (totally) disagree).
- > Senior PhD candidates also more often indicate that the TSP does not contribute to a smooth progress compared to junior PhD candidates (43% vs. 28% (totally) disagree).

Almost all have access to one or more educational activities, of which most have access to seminars and conferences and a scientific integrity course. Over half of the PhD candidates are satisfied with the educational activities offered

Please indicate to what type of education activities you have access

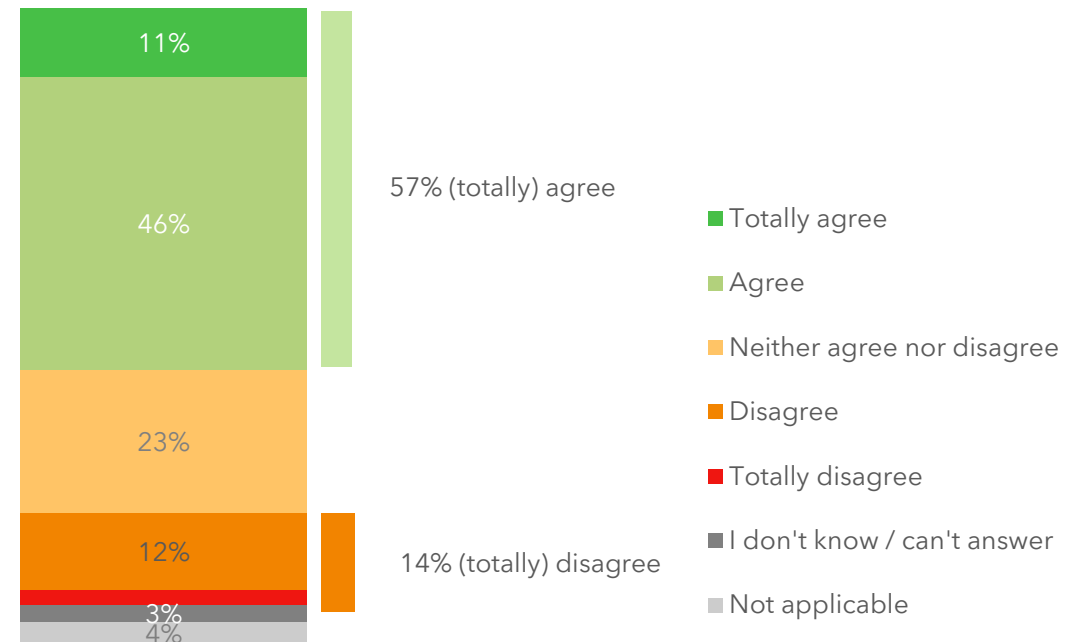
Base: all (n=672)



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

I am satisfied with the education activities that are offered at my university, UMC and/or the (national) Graduate School

Base: all who have access to educational activities (n=631)

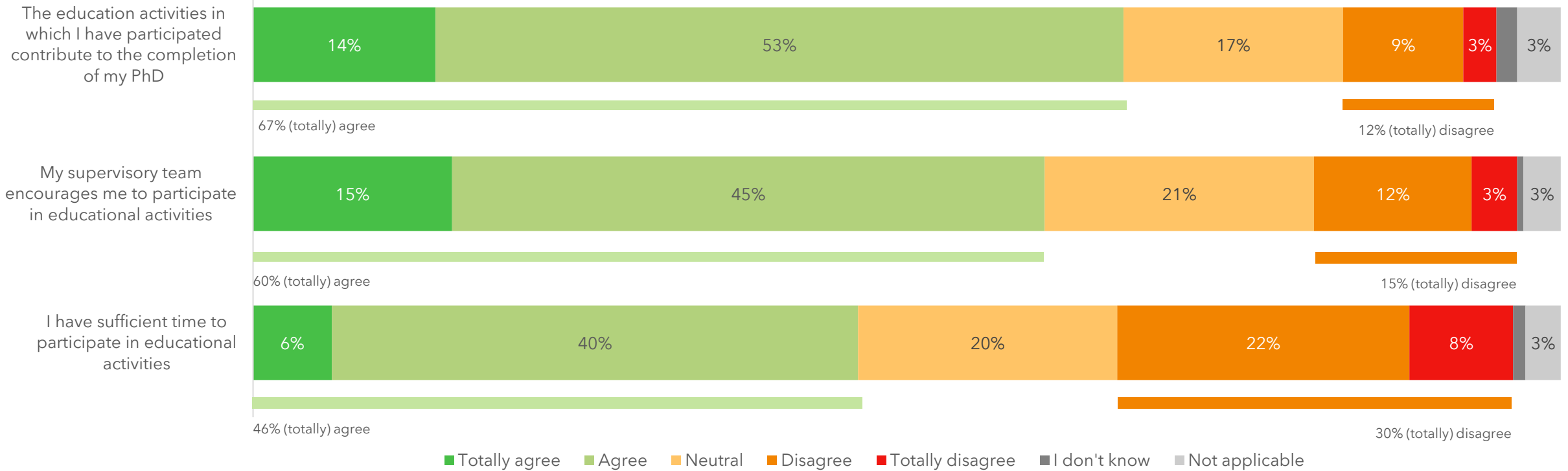


> External PhD candidates have less access to educational activities than employed PhD candidates (13% vs. 2% no access).

Two-thirds feel that educational activities contribute to the completion of their PhD. 60% feel encouraged by their supervisor(s) to participate in these activities, but the available time can be a serious barrier to participate

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

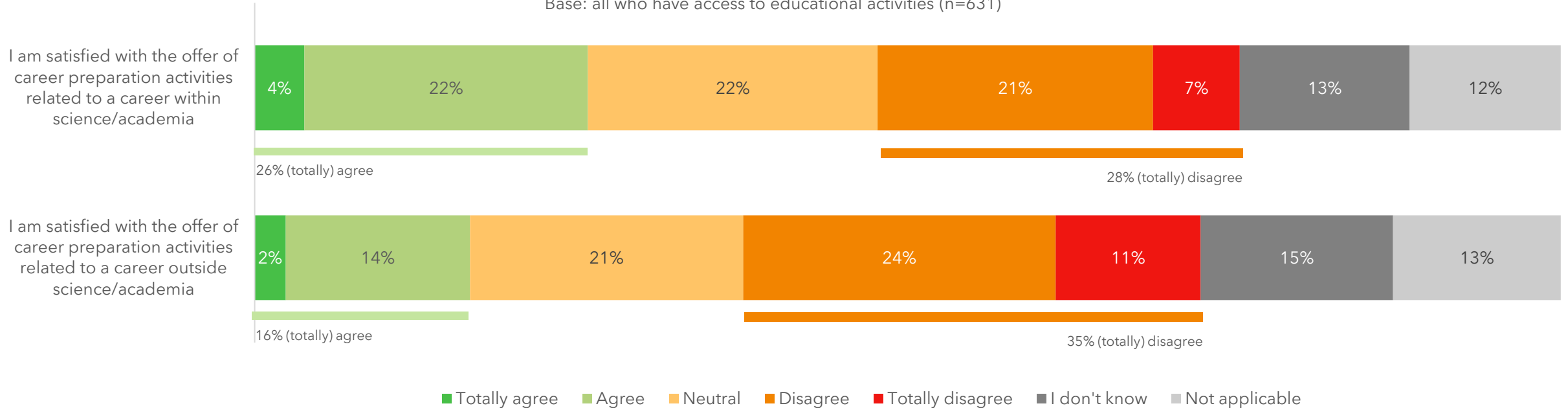
Base: all who have access to educational activities (n=631)



Half of the PhD candidates express dissatisfaction with the offer of career preparation activities

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Base: all who have access to educational activities (n=631)



- > Employed PhD candidates are less satisfied with career preparation activities within science/academia compared to external PhD candidates (33% vs. 18% (totally) disagree). Employed PhD candidates are also less satisfied about career preparation activities outside of science/academia (45% vs. 20% (totally) disagree).
- > Senior PhD candidates are less satisfied with the career preparation activities within science/academia compared to junior PhD candidates (34% vs. 19% (totally) disagree). Both mediator and senior PhD candidates are also less satisfied with career preparation activities outside of science/academia (40%, 39% vs. 21% (totally) disagree).

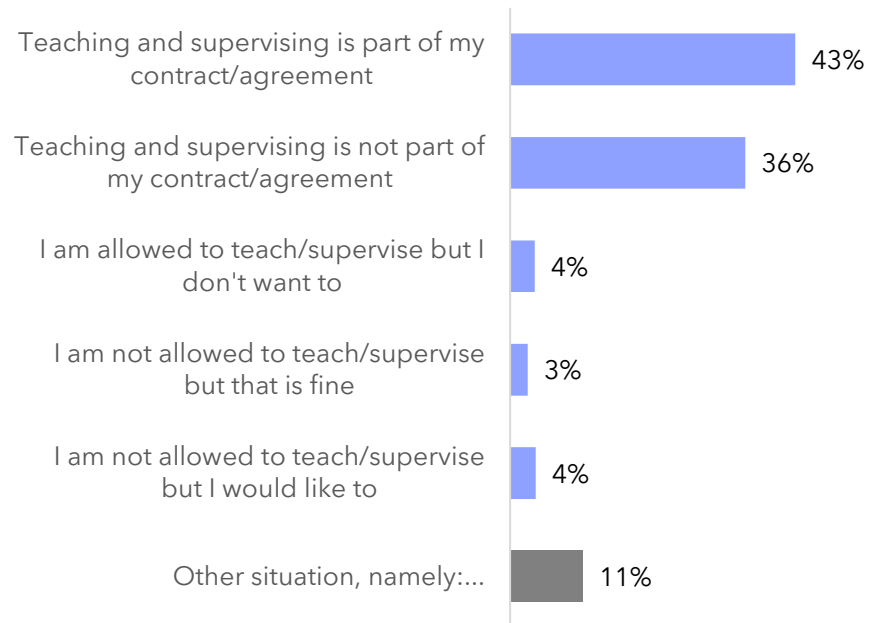
Teaching & Other duties



For 43% of PhD candidates, teaching and supervising is part of their contract. On average, they spend 7% of their time teaching and 7% supervising

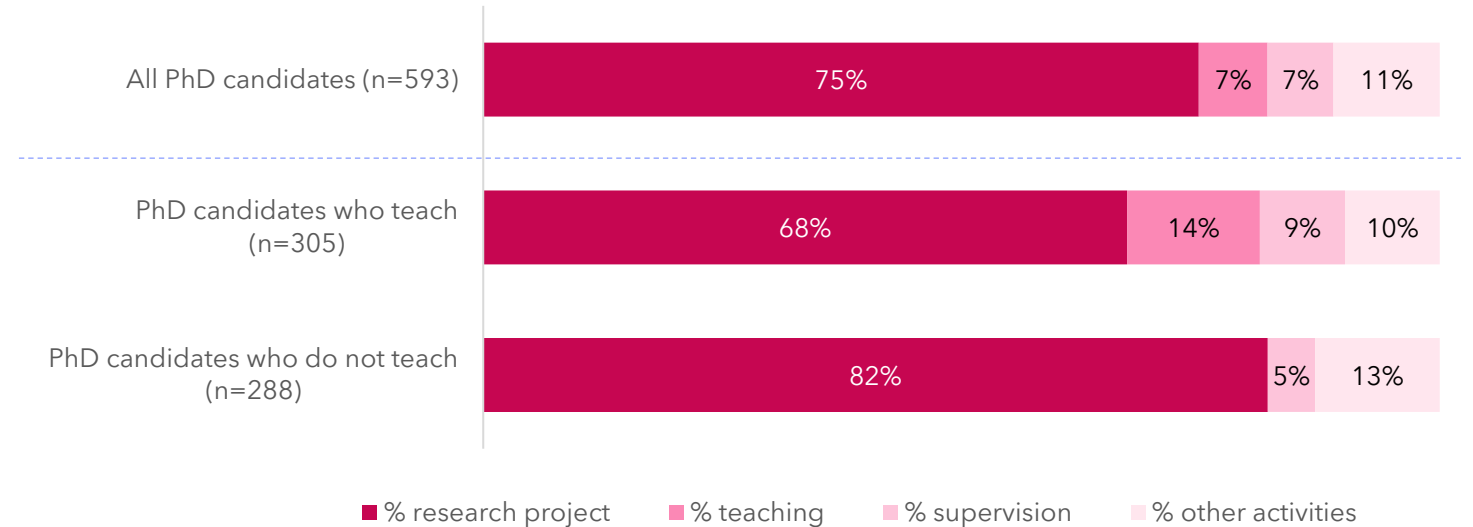
Please indicate which of the following situations applies to you.

Base: all (n=672)



Over the last 12 months, how much of the time allocated to your PhD project, did you (on average) spend on your research project, teaching, supervision, or other activities?

Base: all except for PhD-candidates who didn't know (n=593)



> Employed PhD candidates more often have teaching and supervising duties as part of their contract than external PhD candidates (62% vs. 18%).

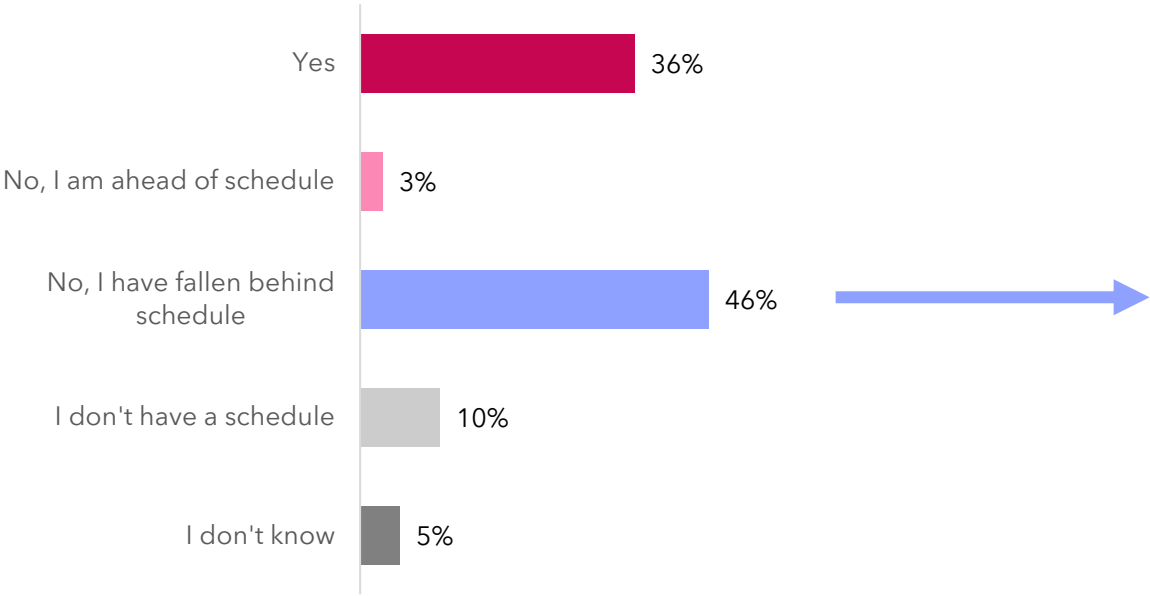
Progress & Workload



Almost half of PhD candidates has fallen behind schedule. Over a third of them expects a delay of more than 9 months

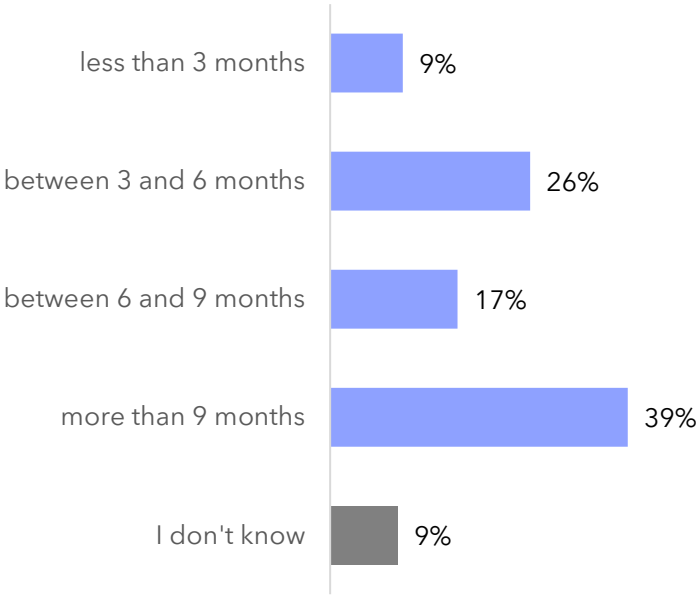
Are you currently on schedule with your planning?

Base: all (n=672)



How long is the expected delay?

Base: all who have fallen behind schedule (n=306)

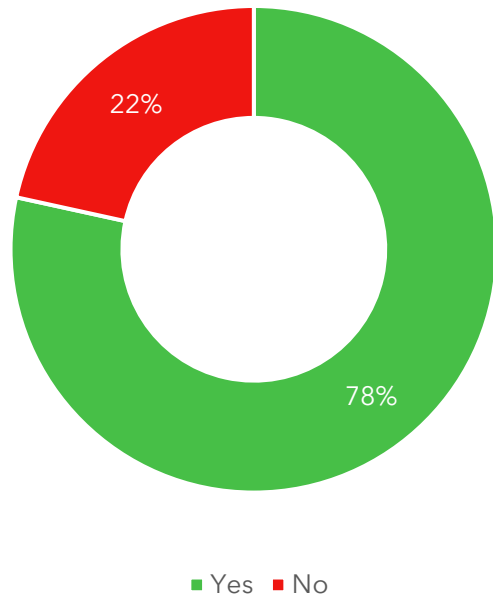


- > Employed PhD candidates are more often behind schedule than external PhD candidates (49% vs. 41%).
- > When behind schedule, external PhD candidates are more often expecting a longer delay, more than 9 months, than employed PhD candidates (46% vs. 33%).

78% discussed their delay with their supervisor(s). Extension possibilities and planning and scheduling were most often discussed

Did you discuss your delay with your supervision team?

Base: all who have fallen behind schedule (n=306)



You have indicated that you have an (expected) delay in your PhD project and that you have discussed this delay with your supervision team. Please write down what is discussed with your supervision team:

Base: all who have discussed their delay

Promovendi who have discussed their delay on their PhD project mostly talked with their supervisor(s) about the possibility to **extend their current project** with a few months. For some PhD candidates, the delay is partly caused by the high **workload**, therefore their **planning and schedule** is discussed. Or they still experience the delay incurred during the **COVID-19** pandemic.

Discussing possible extensions:

- > "I discussed the possible extension of my project, and the extra work I have done for them."
- > "The discussion resulted in me knowing that a guest contract extension can be given but there is no available funding for my extension."

Planning and scheduling:

- > "We discussed the reasons for the delay and possible alterations of the planning."
- > "Prioritizing tasks and deadlines, saying NO to tasks that are not directly related or value-adding to my PhD."

COVID-19:

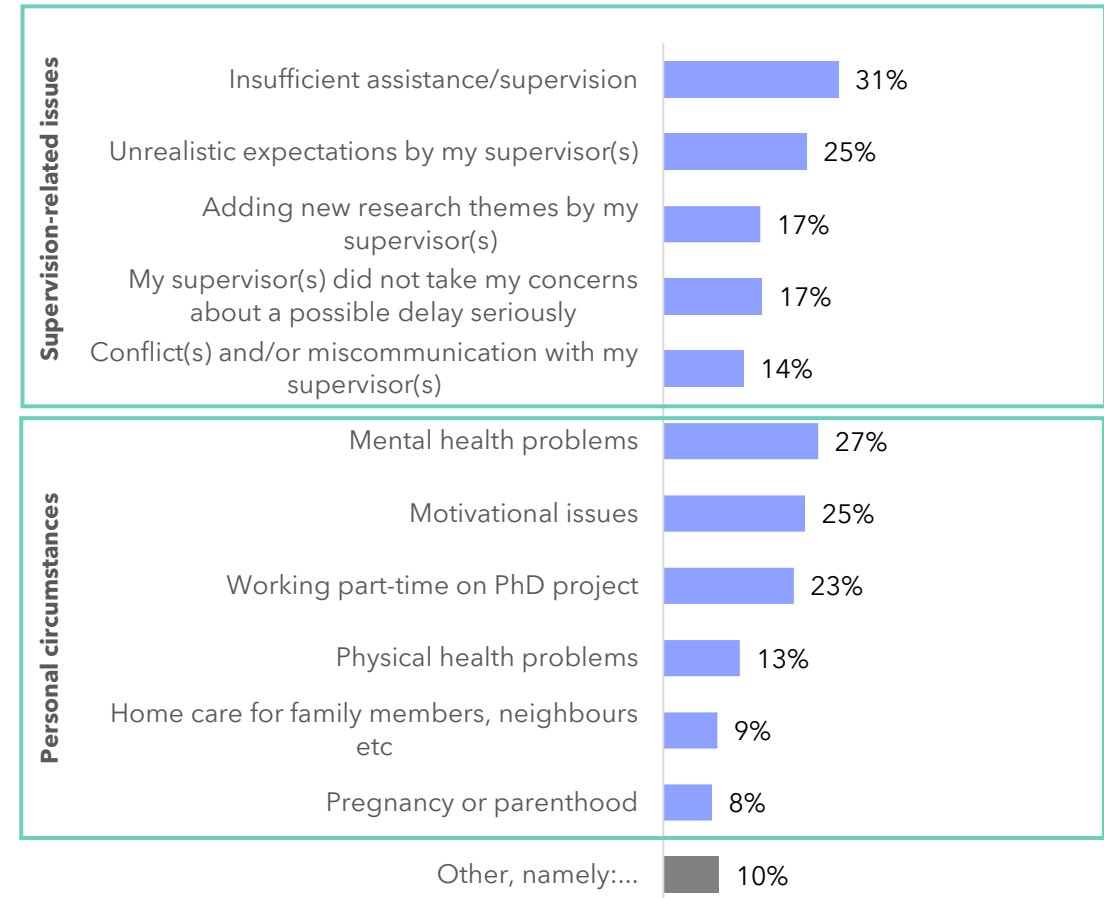
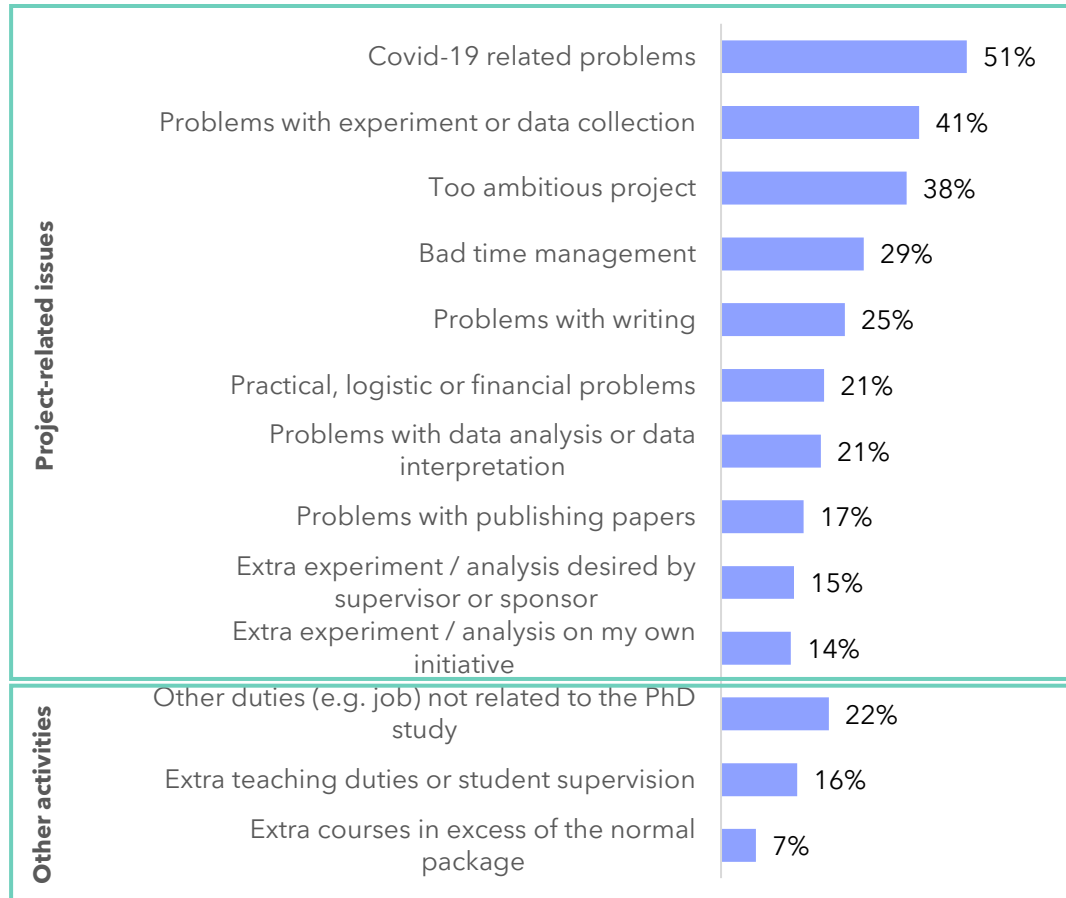
- > "Due to the Covid 19 pandemic I had to change my topic which caused the delay."
- > "Due to sickness with Covid, I became 3 to 6 months off schedule."

> Seniors are more likely to discuss their delay than junior and medior PhD candidates (91% vs. 50%, 60%).

Reasons for their delay are mostly project-related issues, like Covid-19, problems with data collection, and taking on a too-ambitious project

What are/were the main reasons for your delay?

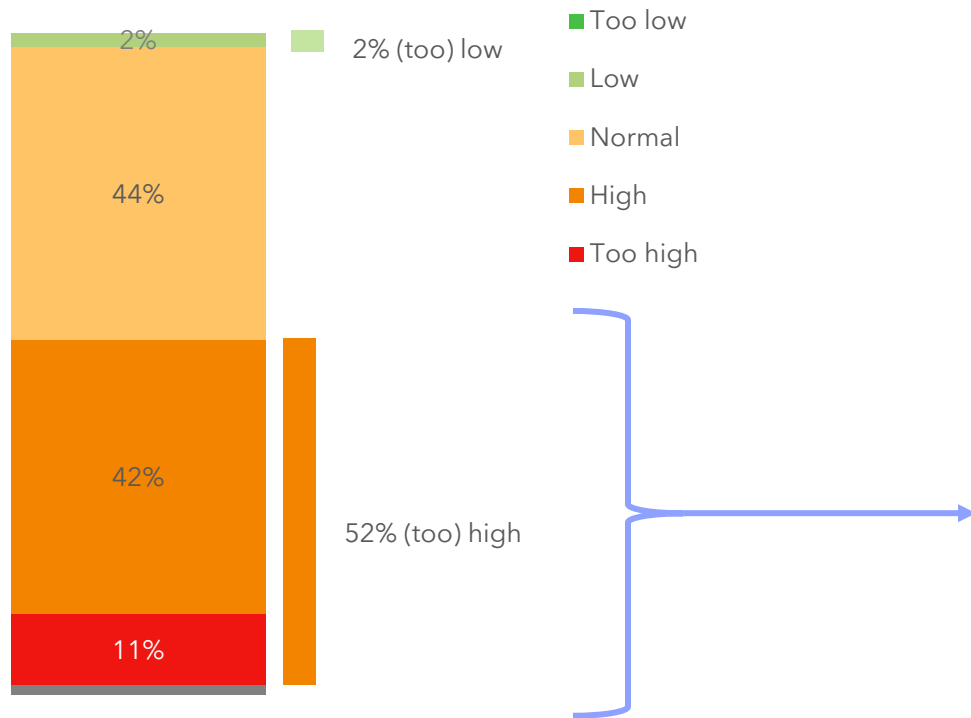
Base: all who have fallen behind schedule (n=306)



44% of PhD candidates experience the workload as normal. Whereas over half experience it as (too) high, mostly because of the amount of work

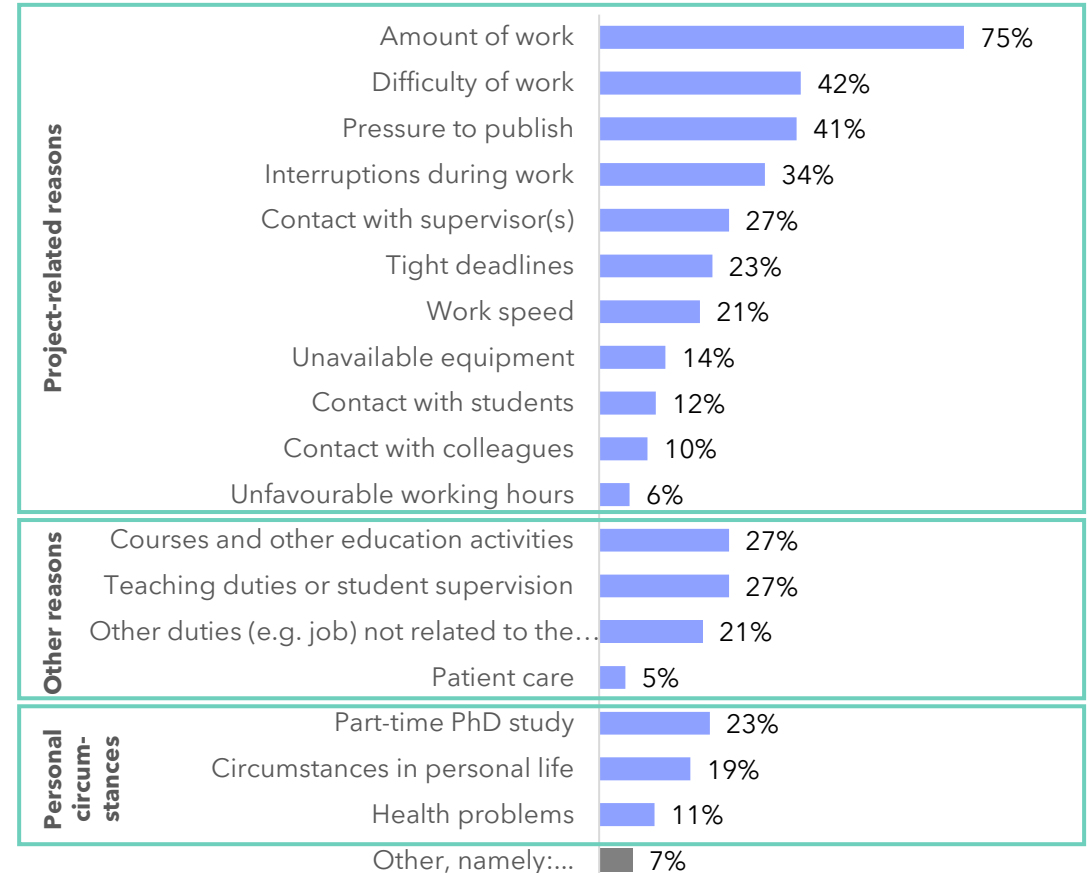
How would you describe the workload in your PhD project?

Base: all (n=672)



What, or who, is responsible for your high workload?

Base: all who have a (too) high workload (n=351)



- > Employed PhD candidates experience a higher workload than external PhD candidates (58% vs. 44% (too) high). For employed PhD candidates, the high workload is more often project-related.
- > Seniors experience a higher workload than juniors (58% vs. 42% (too) high).

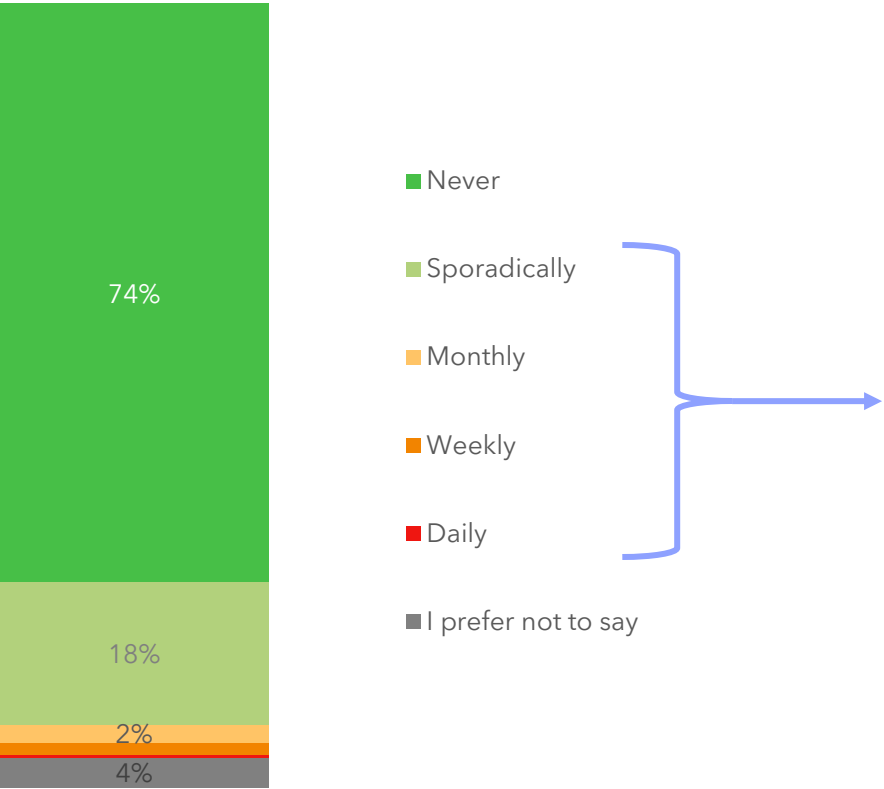
Social Safety



22% of PhD candidates have experienced undesirable behaviour in the past year. People involved in this undesirable behaviour were mostly supervisors

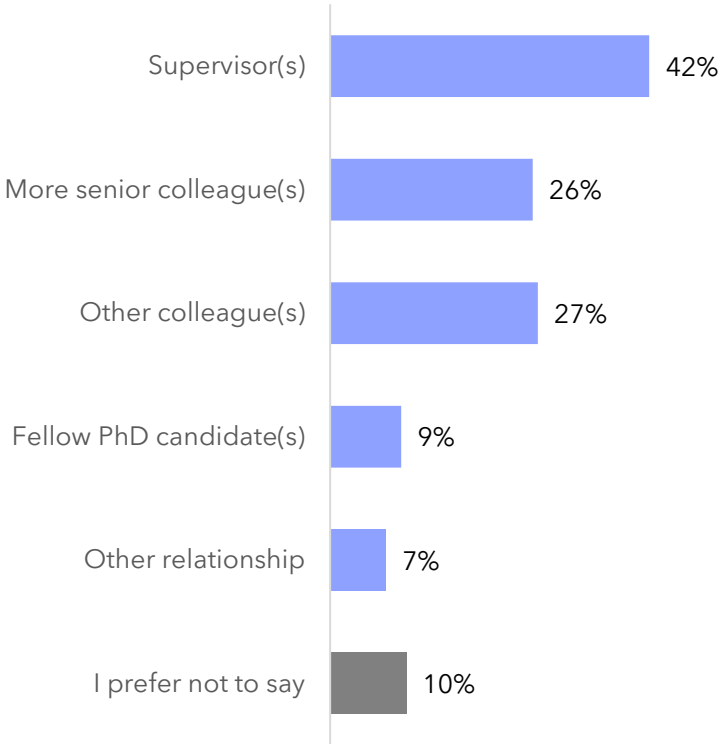
Have you yourself experienced any undesirable behaviour in the past year?

Base: all (n=672)



What was your relation with the people involved in the undesirable behaviour?

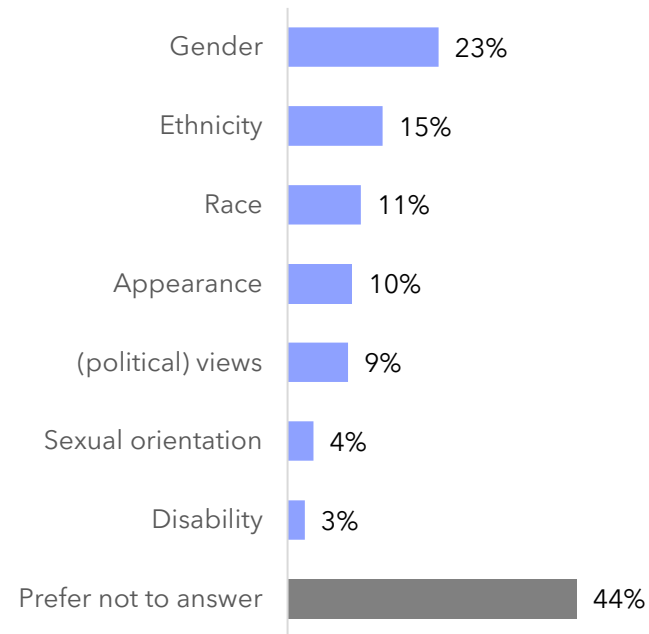
Base: all who have experienced undesirable behaviour (n=151)



44% of PhD candidates prefer not to disclose the type of discrimination they have experienced. Almost a quarter indicates it was gender related

If you have experienced discrimination, it was because of:...

Base: all who have experienced undesirable behaviour (n=151)

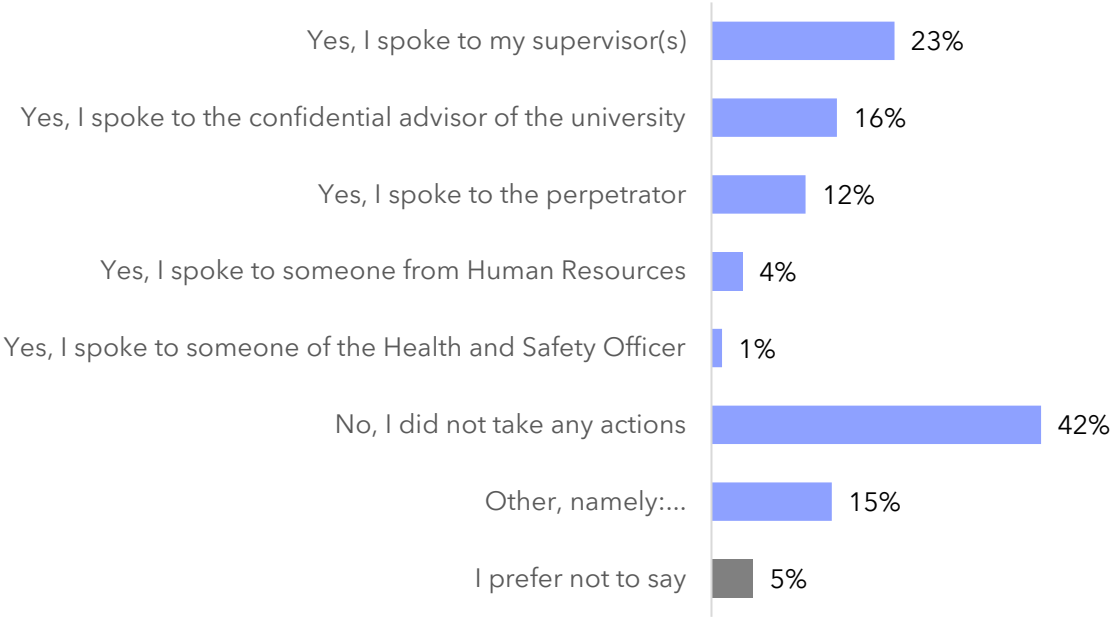


> External PhD candidates are more likely to experience discrimination because of race than employed PhD candidates (22% vs 5%).

42% of PhD candidates did not take any action after experiencing the undesirable behaviour

Did you take any actions after experiencing undesirable behaviour, and if so, what actions did you take?

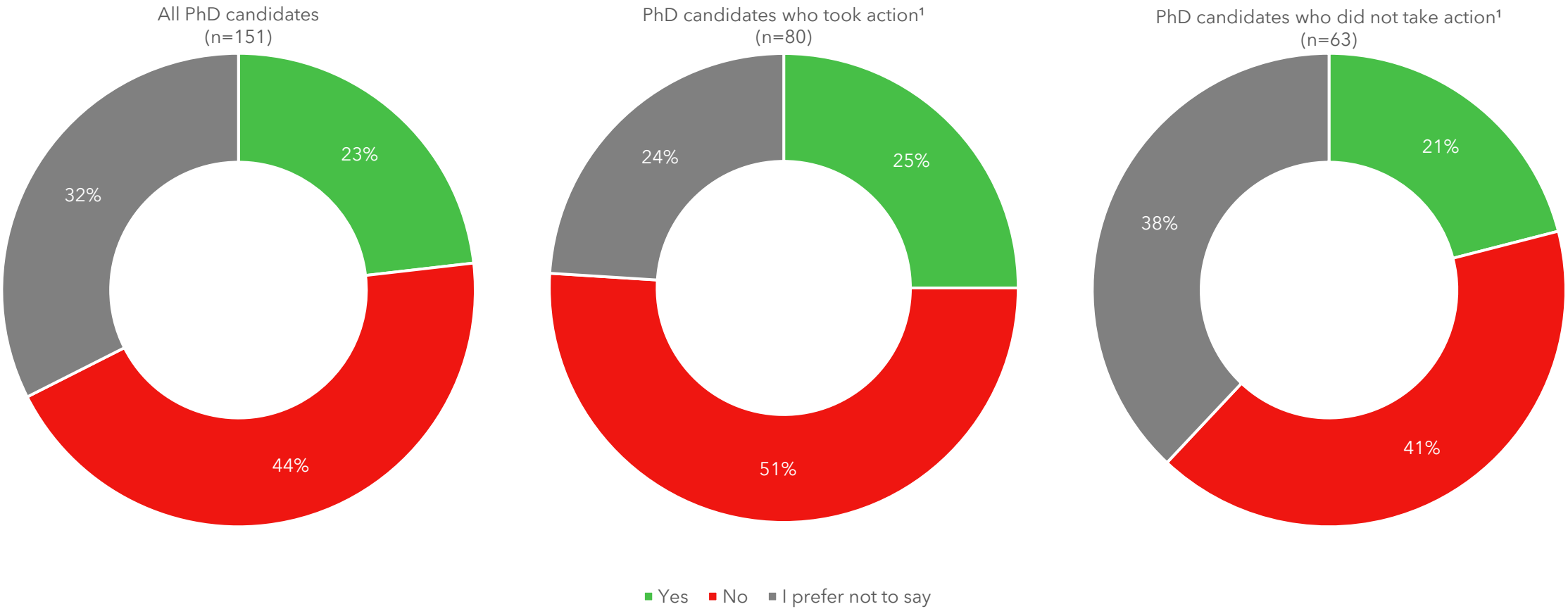
Base: all who have experienced undesirable behaviour (n=151)



A third does not want to disclose whether they feel protected or supported by VU after experiencing the undesirable behaviour. 44% did not feel supported and/or protected

Did you feel protected and/or supported by the university after you experienced undesirable behaviour?

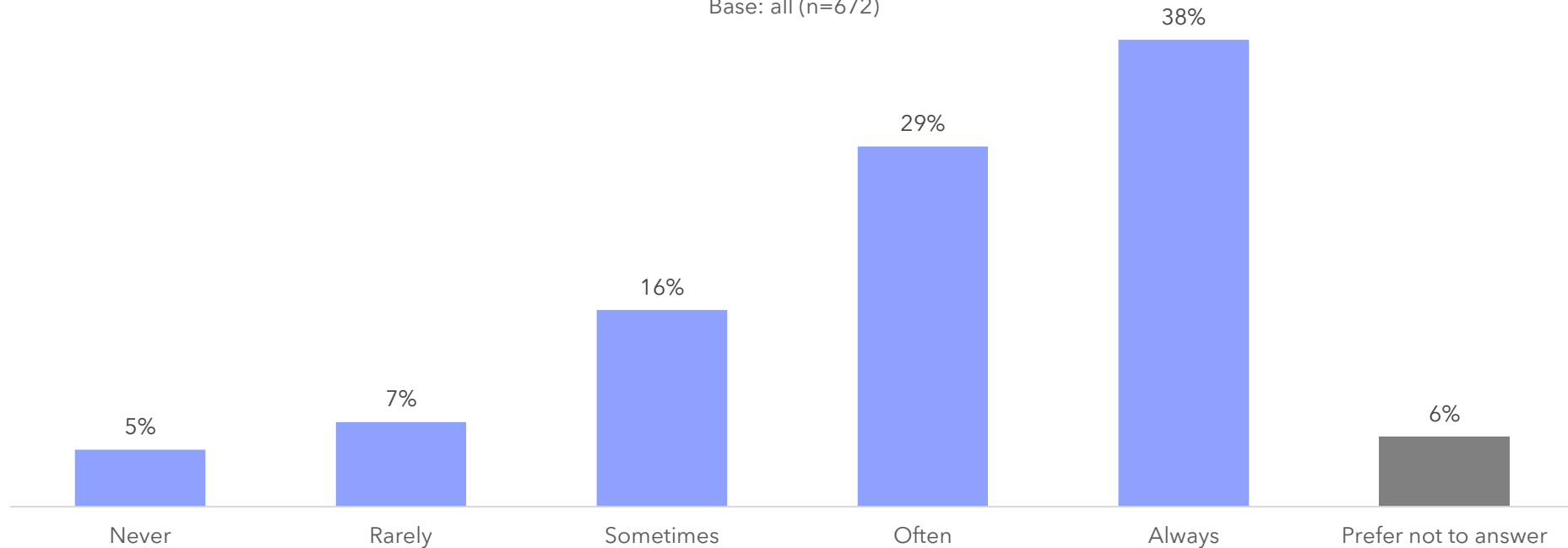
Base: all who have experienced undesirable behaviour



27% of PhD candidates do not (always) feel their contributions are valued regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, etc.

Do you feel that your contributions are valued at your department, regardless of your race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, political views or appearance?

Base: all (n=672)



- > Employed PhD candidates are more likely to experience that their contributions are often valued than external PhD candidates (33% vs. 25%).
- > External PhD candidates are more likely to indicate that they prefer not to answer this question compared to employed PhD candidates (11% vs. 2%).

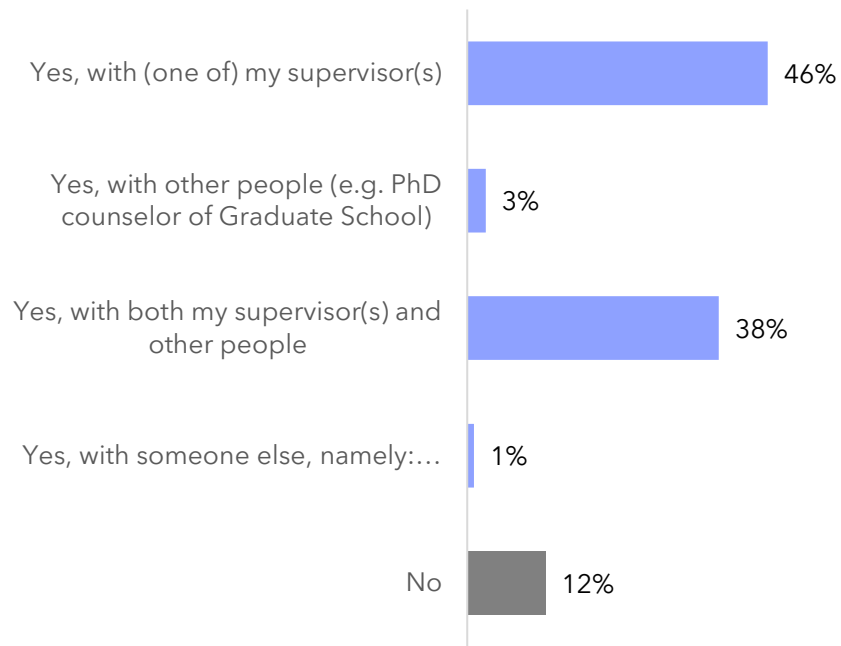
Finish & Later Career



Most have discussed the scientific requirements of their PhD thesis. For 62% the requirements are (rather) clear; for over a third they are relatively unclear

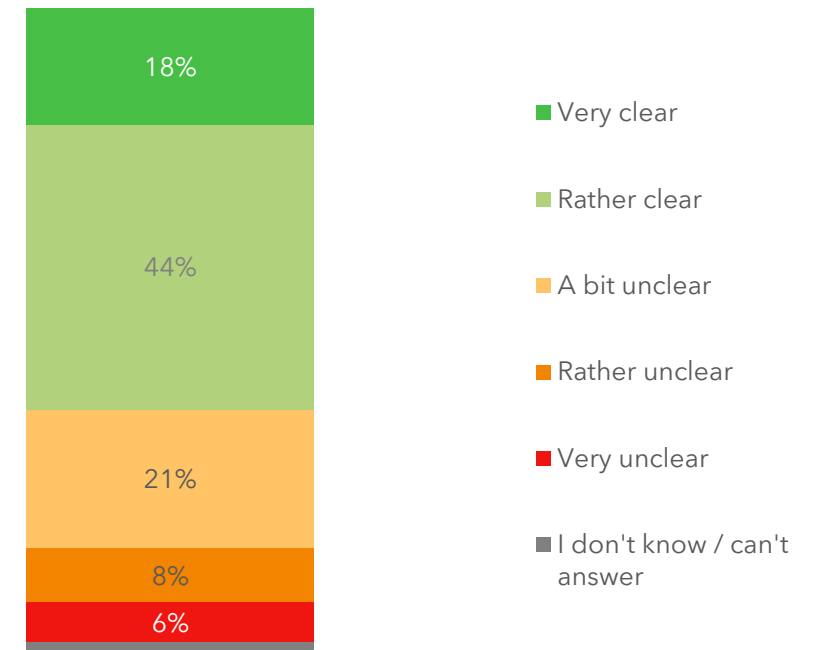
Have you discussed the scientific requirements of your PhD thesis?

Base: all (n=672)



Are the scientific requirements of your PhD thesis clear to you?

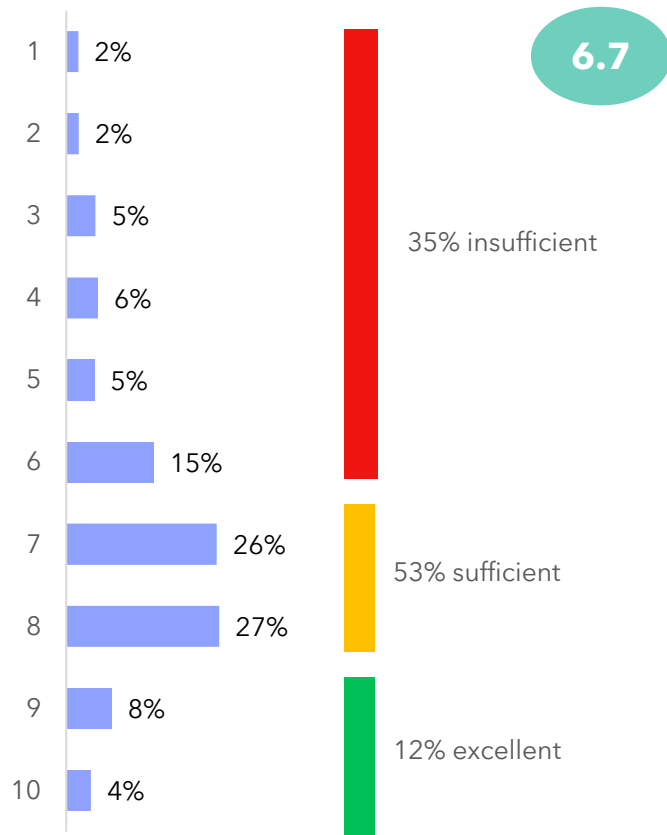
Base: all (n=672)



- > For external PhD candidates the scientific requirements are more often clear to them than for employed PhD candidates (69% vs. 57% (very) clear).
- > For medior PhD candidates the scientific requirements are more often unclear compared to the junior PhD candidates (18% vs. 6% (very) unclear).

On average, PhD candidates rate their satisfaction with their PhD trajectory with a 6,7. PhD candidates indicate they need a better work environment and resources, more support and more focus on their well-being in order to thrive

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your PhD trajectory?
Base: all (n=672)



What do you need to thrive in your PhD, and how can VU contribute to this?
Base: all (n=672)

PhD candidates indicate various ways in which the VU can better support them in thriving in their PhD project. There are three major issues that can help PhD candidates thrive. Firstly, VU should support PhD candidates in their project by creating a good **work environment with decent resources**. Secondly, VU should spend more time on the **onboarding process and support** from supervisors, especially for PhD candidates from outside the VU. And thirdly, VU should spend more time focusing on the **mental health and well-being** of the PhD candidates.

Work environment and resources:

- > I want to get more support for working skills, such as how to decide whether we should work outside academics or not, how to get training and support of it
- > Get info from courses [...] more in advance. It comes often last minute and then there is frequently a lot of homework and preparation time, which is unplanned for and therefore difficult to combine with regular tasks
- > I am an "out" PhD, so I do not have access to VU facilities

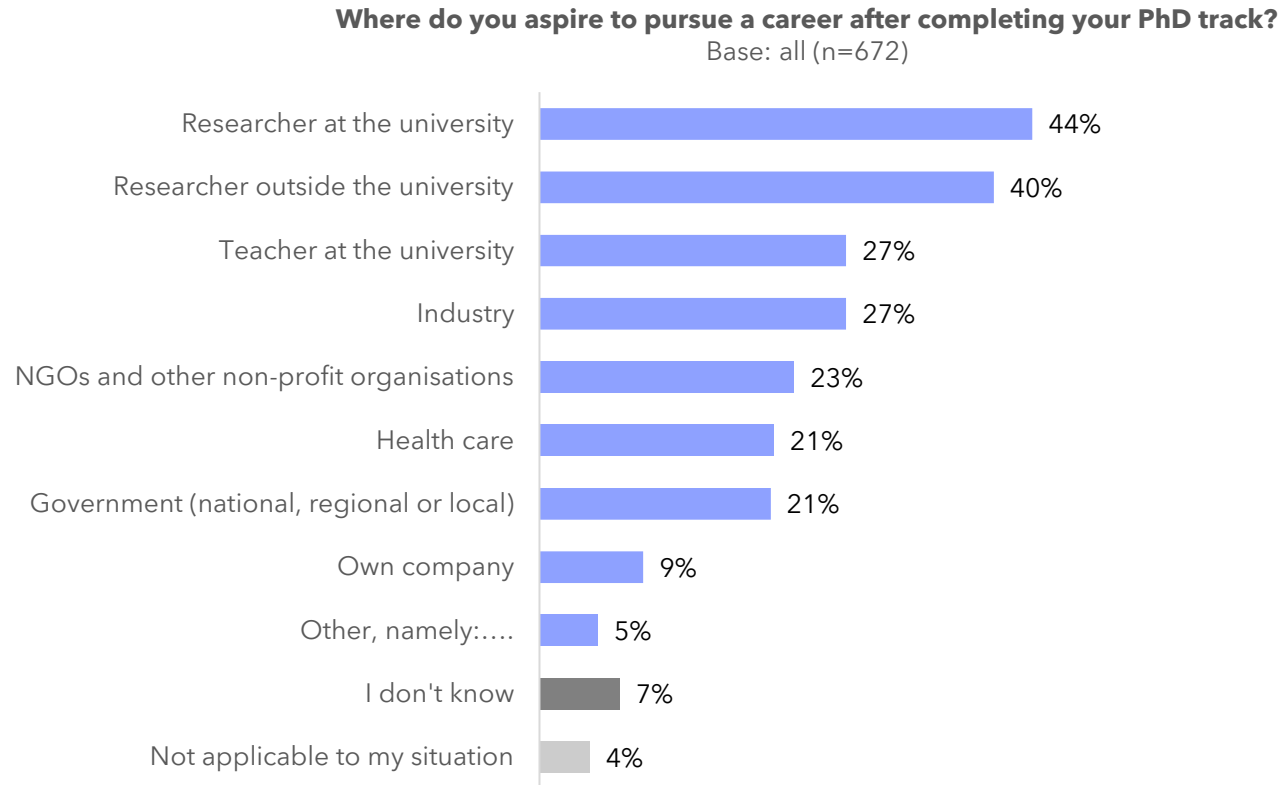
Onboarding and support:

- > Onboarding for people who are not really part of the system but need some more knowledge on infrastructure etc.
- > Supervisors with good time management skills, and a more supportive attitude with clear expectations. More guidance from my supervisors for the current and future career prospects. Opportunities to be able to work part-time as a lecturer or researcher in other research projects
- > Supervision. VU can push for better supervision. Ask supervisors to not take on too many other responsibilities while supervising a PhD student

Mental health and well-being:

- > I'm in the last year of my PhD and there is a lot of pressure to graduate on time and avoid working extra time without having a salary. It'd be nice if there was a transient period where I could finish my PhD without feeling the economic pressure
- > A more human approach by the supervisors. Then acknowledge that I'm not a robot and have feelings
- > I need from VU to create a concretely safe, ethical, responsible environment that recognize the value and the fragile position of PhD candidates

Being a researcher is the most sought-after career of PhD candidates



- > Employed PhD candidates more often aspire to pursue a career as a researcher at the university (51% vs. 35%), or as a researcher outside the university (46% vs. 33%), work in industry (34% vs. 18%) or work in health care (24% vs. 17%) than external PhD candidates.
- > External PhD candidates more often aspire to pursue a career as a teacher at the university compared to employed PhD candidates (32% vs. 23%).
- > Seniors are less likely to pursue a career in government compared to junior and medior PhD candidates (16% vs. 26% and 27% respectively).

Appendix



Research justification

Method



> Online quantitative research



> 55 questions



> Time needed to fill in the questionnaire:
18 minutes

Target group & Sample



> Target group: PhD candidates VU
Amsterdam



> Representative for faculty. The
distribution in the population and the
sample is shown on the next slide.
> Weighing the data was not necessary.



> Sample frame: PhD candidates
database of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
(Hora Finita)

Fieldwork



> Questionnaires completed: 672
participants (maximum margin is 3.8%
with 95% reliability)



> Data collecting: April 24 until June 11,
2023



> Respons: 22%

Research justification

Distribution



- > The table summarizes the distribution of PhD candidates within VU faculty in both population and sample data.
- > As the distribution in the sample is similar to the distribution in the population, we concluded (in consultation with VU) not to weigh the data afterward.

Faculty	Population		Sample data	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences	289	9%	57	9%
Faculty of Dentistry (ACTA)	57	2%	12	2%
Faculty of Science	770	25%	201	30%
School of Business and Economics	251	8%	55	8%
Faculty of Humanities	141	5%	26	4%
Faculty of Law	152	5%	34	5%
Faculty of Religion and Theology	199	7%	55	8%
Faculty of Social Sciences	166	5%	34	5%
VUmc School of Medical Sciences	1045	34%	198	30%

Research justification

Response



- > In total 672 PhD candidates from VU Amsterdam completed the questionnaire.
- > 3,064 Invitations have been sent. PhD candidates that did not respond to the first invitation, received a reminder invitation.
- > The response rate is 22%.

Description	Number
Number of invitations (gross sample)	3,064
Bouncers (not reached)	-
Started the questionnaire	751
Screened out (no target group)	-
Screened out (quota full)	-
Incompletes	69
Screened out (did not provide consent)	10
Qualified participants (net sample)	672



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