

GPP – Good PhD Practice

Guidelines and inspiration for PhD students and supervisors

The continued development and maintenance of a high quality PhD education is a major priority for the PhD Study Board (PSN) at The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University (KVL). KVL has currently 350-400 PhD students enrolled. The quality of the education is essential for the PhD student, the supervisors, the departments, and ultimately the university.

PSN has initiated a campaign of Good PhD Practice (GPP). The present folder is a part of the campaign focusing on the collaboration between the PhD student and the supervisor(s).

We hope this folder can be used as a guideline and inspiration for the collaboration between the PhD student and the supervisor(s).

On behalf of the PhD Study Board

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Introduction

The successful completion of a PhD programme demands an enthusiastic and flexible candidate. Even before starting the PhD study, the candidate is confronted with multiple expectations, demands and ambitions from supervisors, departments, collaborating institutions, scientific expectations and society, as well as the family and friends (Figure 1). The many expectations may be contradictory and therefore need to be carefully balanced when planning and executing a PhD programme. In doing so, a full and wholehearted collaboration between the PhD student and supervisors is essential.

The focus of this folder is the collaboration between the PhD student and the supervisor(s), as an essential part of Good PhD Practice (GPP). *The aim is to improve the quality of the PhD education at KVL by providing guidelines for good collaboration between PhD student and supervisor(s) throughout the PhD programme.*

A PhD student at KVL will usually have two supervisors: a head supervisor and a project supervisor. The head supervisor has the main responsibility that the PhD programme runs according to the plan. The head supervisor is also responsible for the administration of the PhD programme. The project supervisor is responsible for the scientific supervision. The roles can be carried out by the same person. Finally, one or more co-supervisors can be associated with the PhD programme.

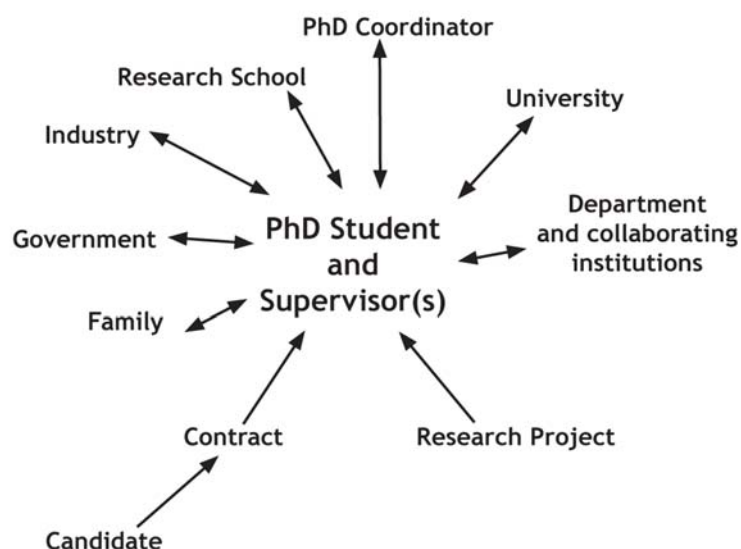


Figure 1. The PhD students network

GPP - a flexible approach

Throughout a PhD programme, the challenges and expectations for the collaboration between the PhD student and the supervisor(s) change. This affects the frequency and style of supervision needed, and demands flexibility from both the PhD student and supervisor(s).

In general, PhD programmes include an initial phase, where finalisation of the objectives and methods, and planning of the process are necessary. Data collection and analysis are the main areas of the middle phase, and in the final phase the writing of the thesis dominates. These three phases of a PhD programme have different requirements to the collaboration between the supervisor(s) and the PhD student. The length of the phases can vary considerably; often they overlap, and sometimes there will be a need to step back and re-adjust the plan.

Initial phase

The planning of a PhD programme starts prior to the official enrolment, and continues after the enrolment with further refining the project plan. This does not only include objectives and methods, but also consensus on level of ambition, distribution of responsibilities and definition of work style. Adjustment of the mutual expectations is critical for the detailed planning of the project, and for the collaboration throughout the programme. Make sure that a shared understanding of the framework is achieved - consider drawing up a contract specifying expectations and commitments. This allows the PhD student to assume responsibility for the programme, and clarifies the contribution of the supervisor(s). In the following, additional issues important for GPP in the initial phase will be addressed:

Be ambitious, but realistic - When planning the programme. Consider the integration of scientific achievements with social commitments (family, friends, hobbies etc.).

Share the responsibility - A successful PhD programme requires the PhD student to take responsibility and the supervisor(s) to participate fully. Share the responsibility for setting up realistic targets and limitations. Adjusting the level of ambitions in the project group might be needed.

Invest the time needed – Though the initial phase is usually rather short (3 - 6 months), the major input in supervision may very well be needed here. Planning a PhD programme in detail is time consuming and regular meetings are essential. Clear agreements on where, how often and why you will meet are necessary - both the PhD student and supervisor(s) have to commit themselves and make sure that sufficient time is set aside. Be well-prepared for the meetings and keep notes of what you decide. Always be open to extra meetings if needed.

What, when, where, why – A well-planned curriculum and time schedule are important management tools. Practical issues to consider are:

Physical location (KVL, other institutions)

PhD-courses

Studies abroad

Budget

Scientific meetings

Research school

Teaching and other duties for the department

This may seem obvious, but make sure to discuss location of the student during the programme including studies abroad, conferences and connection to research schools; budget because many projects are expensive and may require additional funding; which PhD courses to take and when; what kind, when and how much work to do for the department. Planning of the above at the beginning of the programme provides an over-view of activities and work load.

Be open and generous - Be willing to invest time and help others even if the connection with and direct benefit to the project is not obvious - the effort will be rewarded.

Networking - Scientific and social networks offer synergy effects and new perspectives. Networking is anything from a proper introduction to the work place, the department, colleagues, the PhD coordinator and other PhD students (e.g., the PhD network), to lunch discussions, meetings, conferences, seminars, social events, and to formal research groups.

Start-up seminar - The final project plan is submitted after 3 - 6 months. Prior to submission, it is recommended that the plan is presented at a seminar with a critical audience to give comments to the scientific content and practical set-up of the programme. The outcome of the seminar should be the optimal project plan for the full period. However, necessary adjustments can and should be made when applicable throughout the programme. Make sure all involved parties agree to the final plan and their individual contributions, and that the project group includes the necessary members to handle the project. The composition of the group can be adjusted during the programme.

Middle phase

The heart of a PhD programme is the amount and quality of the data collected and/or methods developed. The collection and analysis of data are time consuming and require hard work and discipline from the PhD student. Additionally, there are a number of other requirements such as PhD courses, teaching, studies abroad etc. that will take up time and energy. Despite the work load and multitude of activities in the middle phase, it is important to take time to discuss and evaluate the progress at regular intervals.

Half-year evaluation - Use this opportunity to make status and update time schedule and project plan accordingly to reflect changes in the PhD programme.

Meet regularly – Even if everything is running smoothly.

Feedback – Is essential for the development of the project. Lunch-meeting, teaching, workshops and conferences can be valuable supplements to the project group meetings.

Start writing – As soon as possible. Plan the structure and format of the thesis (article-based v. monograph), even if all the data collection and analysis are not completed. Evaluate the data regularly, and constantly consider the possibility of submitting manuscripts for publication.

Plan ahead – What happens after the PhD programme? Discuss career goals and opportunities well before completion of the PhD (options at the department or work place, grant applications etc.).

Status seminar – Approximately one year prior to completion of the PhD programme, the project should be presented to a critical audience (PhD coordinator, other PhD students, and other relevant people). Consider arranging multiple seminars in one session. Discuss and evaluate the presentation and response thoroughly. The status seminar can provide the PhD student with valuable suggestions for finalizing the project, manuscripts and the thesis.

Final phase

Prepare for the final phase; clarify the mutual expectations regarding the collaboration, and agree on a plan for finalising the programme. Be familiar with the rules and regulations for completion of the PhD programme. Make sure the thesis contains the elements required by the regulations.

Writing – Is time consuming and can be all absorbing and frustrating. A detailed plan specifying deadlines, draft submissions and feedback may ease this process. Consider arranging writing groups with other PhD students.

Statements of authorship – Obtain the relevant signatures well in advance

Assessment committee – Consider possible members of the committee well in advance, acquire relevant information, and make sure that the application reaches the PhD Study Board at least two months before planned submission of the thesis.

Submission of thesis – Be aware that the assessment committee has two months to evaluate the thesis after submission. The official date of the PhD defence cannot be announced till the thesis has achieved a provisional acceptance.

Administrative guidelines

It is very important that the PhD regulations are known by both the PhD student and the supervisor. They take half an hour to read, and many problems can be avoided. Below is a short summary in table form of some of the main points. The table highlights who takes the initiative (I), gives advice (A), approves by signing the forms (S), and who makes the final decision (D).

Action	PhD student Supervisor(s)	PhD coordinator	Department	PSN
Enrolment and approval of study plan	I, S	A, S	S	D
Half year reports and status seminar	I, S	S	D, S	A - only when negative
Major changes in study plan	I	A	S	D
Problem-solving	I D ³⁾	A	I, D ³⁾	D ³⁾
Changes of PhD courses	I, D ¹⁾ , S			D ¹⁾
Changing supervisor and/or adding extra supervisors	I	A	S ⁴⁾	D
Leave and change of working time	I, D ⁵⁾ , S		D ⁵⁾ , S	D ⁵⁾
Extension of the study period	I, D ²⁾ , S	A, S	D ²⁾ , S	D ²⁾
Appointment of assessment committee	I ⁶⁾ , S		S	D

¹⁾ PSN must be informed and must approve courses that are not already approved

²⁾ Extensions: 3 months by supervisor(s); additional 6 months by the department; More than 9 months by PSN

³⁾ Problems should first be discussed between PhD student and supervisor(s). If satisfactory solutions cannot be found, then informal advice should be asked from the PhD coordinator and maybe from members of PSN. If that does not solve the problem, formal decisions have to be taken by the department or by the PSN depending on the matter. If the department is the first to see the problem, then the PhD student and the supervisor(s) should be informed.

⁴⁾ A PhD student can, if the department neglects the supervision, ask PSN directly for a new supervisor. In that case, the department should not sign, but send its opinion to PSN.

⁵⁾ Depending on the type of the change.

⁶⁾ The initiative lies with the head supervisor, but it is customary to discuss this with the PhD student.

For further details, see the PhD regulations at:

<http://www.kvl.dk>

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