

Fees for PhD candidates without a VU employment contract (effective from 1 February 2026)

1. Introduction

As part of an organisation-wide reassessment of the VU Amsterdam's financial position, the Executive Board has introduced a series of measures to reduce spending and increase revenues. One of these measures is to set and charge an annual fee for PhD candidates not employed by the VU. This policy memorandum describes the current situation in the Faculty of Law, as well as presenting a benchmark of fees charged (or not charged) at other Dutch university law faculties and a proposal for charging fees to PhD candidates not employed by the faculty.

2. Current situation:

The VU does not currently charge fees to PhD candidates not employed by the faculty. Costs that the Graduate School incurs for PhD candidates (administration, organisational arrangements, communications and training costs) are covered by the faculty. The supervisor applies to the department head for courtesy privileges, the costs of which are borne by the department.

PhD candidates not employed by the VU are classified as UNL [Universities of the Netherlands] types 2b, 3 or 4. The number of PhD candidates in these categories between 2020 and 2024 averaged 14 per year:

Type	Numbers (2020-2024)
2b. Scholarship-funded PhD candidates ▪ Nuffic ▪ CSC (China Scholarship Council) or another personal government scholarship	8
3. Externally funded PhD candidates ▪ Full-time PhD candidates not employed by the VU (may be employed, for example, by NSCR [Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement] or the Applied University of Amsterdam [HvA]) ▪ PhD candidates granted resources (time and/or funding) by their employer.	40
4. Self-funded PhD candidates (receiving no external resources) ▪ Retired ▪ Doing a PhD in their own time and funded from their own resources, alongside a job ▪ Full-time, self-funded	23
Average per year	14

Table 1. Overview of new PhD candidates in UNL types 2b, 3 or 4 in 2020-2024.

How PhD candidates in the different categories are registered and monitored varies, including when they are registered in Hora Finita. In the case of UNL type 3 and 4 candidates, we often wait until the prospective supervisor and the candidate are confident that the PhD trajectory will be completed successfully. Account is taken of the quality of the PhD candidate and whether they have sufficient time and/or resources to complete the thesis. This 'engagement period' plays an important role in preventing candidates from dropping out. Good, clear agreements

between the candidate and the prospective supervisor are vital, specifically regarding the conditions that the candidate will have to meet, and by when, in order to register for a PhD programme.

3. Costs

The Graduate School currently organises (and funds) 5 courses, including the compulsory course on Academic Integrity and two courses on methodology. In addition, an Academic Writing for Law course is organised annually in liaison with the Taalcentrum-VU [VU Language Centre], along with the course on 'How to conduct a Scientific Interview'. These courses are available to all PhD candidates, and those not employed by the VU regularly also elect to do the non-compulsory courses. Another requirement is for candidates to attend and present a paper at an academic conference. These costs are for the candidates themselves. Many external PhD candidates (categories 3 and 4) can be exempt from the vast majority of the educational requirements (max. 23 EC). Candidates have to apply to the Graduate School for an exemption in this regard. This requires them to submit their CV and demonstrate that they have acquired the transferable skills appropriate for an academic during their career to date. Account is taken of their experience of teaching, publishing, project management, communications (giving presentations) etc. In principle, exemptions from compulsory elements of a programme are not granted.

Most PhD candidates not employed by the VU are granted courtesy privileges. The supervisor applies to the department head for these privileges. The department head makes the necessary arrangements with HR (annual costs: around €1050).

Supervision costs are not included in the fees charged to PhD candidates not employed by the VU.

4. Other Dutch universities

When setting our fees, it is important to take account of whether and, if so, how much law faculties at other Dutch universities charge. We have obtained information on this from other faculties and from websites. Since 2023, the University of Amsterdam (UvA) has charged an annual fee of €2000 to all PhD candidates not employed by the university.

UvA	2000
Utrecht University (UU)	No fee
Erasmus (EUR)	No fee
Leiden	Some departments charge a fee of €10,000, or €5000 without a workspace, or €2,500 at the candidate's request.
Groningen (RUG)	10,000 (only for scholarship-funded candidates, in category 2b)
Maastricht University	No fee
Radboud (RU)	No fee

Table 2. Overview of other Dutch universities (law faculties)

5. Conclusion and proposed fees for PhD candidates not employed by the VU

From 1 January 2026, all PhD candidates at the VU who are not employed by the university will pay an annual fee. The faculty itself is responsible for structuring the fees and determining the applicable exemption criteria.

Based on an assessment of the current policy, an analysis of the costs and a benchmark of the fees charged by other Dutch university law faculties, we have established that:

- The costs incurred by the faculty (Graduate School and department) for PhD candidates not employed by the university are not currently covered.
- Only one other law faculty, since 2023, has structurally charged these PhD candidates a fee.

When structuring fees, it is important to decide on the costs to be covered by the candidates, on the exemptions criteria to be applied by the faculty and on how the fee structure is to be accounted for over the years. In comparison with the other law faculties, the VU is a pioneer with regard to fees for external PhD candidates. This has to be taken into account when determining the fees to be charged.

Cost breakdown

	Explanation	Annual costs
Graduate School (GS)	Hora Finita administration, organising the kick-off and seminars, and organising courses, communications and plagiarism check	€500 fee - Hora Finita registration/GS onboarding* - Go/No Go assessment* - Plagiarism check - Organisation of kick-off - Organisation of seminars/Go! Presentations - Communications: event/workshops/courses - Questions (GS/PhD candidate's adviser)
VU organisation	Courtesy privileges (VunetID and library (UB) access)	€1050
Training (30 EC)	Compulsory participation in courses organised by the Graduate School (5 ECTS) • Methodology (3 EC) • Academic Integrity (2 EC)	€1800 for 4 years (i.e. €450 per year) ¹

* Only applicable in year 1.

Table 3. Costs of the Graduate School

Fee structure

6-month engagement period	Courtesy privileges	Department costs (€)
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¹ These costs align with the costs of participating in the [contract teaching offered at a Master's level](#). Fees are charged only for the costs of the compulsory elements (total: 5 EC). The costs of participating in the other activities are divided between the faculty (optional subjects and seminars) and the PhD candidates (attending conference).

Years 1-4 ²	Y	2000 - 1050 VunetID - 500 Graduate School - 450 Training
Years 5-8	Z (courtesy privileges only)	1050 - 1050 VunetID
Total	Maximum for full programme	12,200

Table 4. Fee structure

Other (optional) costs: the fee does not cover field work, data storage, literature purchases, attending a conference and printing costs. These costs are for PhD candidates themselves. Details of the allowance for printing costs, provided by the faculty and the VU, can be found in the memo '[Persoonlijk Budget Promovendi](#)' [Personal Budget for PhD candidates].

The maximum for the full programme is €12,200. This assumes a trajectory of eight years. After eight years, the department will pay any courtesy privileges required. The programme stops after ten years, based on the principle of 'comply or explain'.

6. Exemptions: criteria and procedures

The basic principle is that the fees that all PhD candidates not employed by the VU pay should cover the costs. As PhD candidates in categories 2b, 3 and 4 do not comprise a homogenous group, it is important to set clear criteria for fee exemptions.

Exceptions are possible only:

1. If requested by the department head;
2. After checking for compliance with the exemption criteria (see below).

The procedure applying to prospective external PhD candidates applying for an exemption is as follows:

- An exemption can be applied for if registration in Hora Finita has started. A decision on whether to grant the exemption must be taken before registration has been completed.
- The department head must submit a request for exemption to the faculty board, stating the reasons for the request.
- Only the faculty board can grant an exemption. The faculty board will check the request against the criteria and the department's financial parameters.
- If an exemption is granted, the relevant department will set the annual fee.

Criteria for granting an individual exemption:

- I. The prospective PhD candidate must be within the target group for the Dutch Research Council's Mosaic scholarship programme, as most recently set in 2024,³ and so reflect the VU's ambitions for greater diversity;

² From date of registration in Hora Finita.

³ As from 2024, this means: The applicant or one of their parents must be a migrant and born in one of the following countries of origin: Level 2: Outside Europe (specifically: Turkey, Morocco, Suriname or Indonesia); Level 3: Other countries outside Europe (specifically, countries of origin in Other Africa and Other Asia). Countries of origin in Other America and Oceania are excluded, except for Central and South

- II. Prospective PhD candidates need to access specific data that are important for their research at the faculty; or
- III. The candidate has insufficient financial resources; i.e. the candidate's income is below the applicable minimum wage.⁴

The faculty and institutes/organisations may make general agreements on fees for PhD candidates not employed by the VU.⁵

7. Closing comments

This policy will come into force on 1 February 2026 and apply to PhD candidates for whom the registration procedure at the Graduate School started after 1 February 2026.

This policy will be assessed in January 2027.

America, the Caribbean region and indigenous populations of Other America and Oceania. See: <https://www.nwo.nl/calls/mozaiek-20-2024>.

⁴ Minimum wage as at 1 January 2025: €2,191.80 (excl. holiday allowance). Incoming international PhD candidates with a scholarship must in any event meet the IND (Immigration and Naturalisation Service) standard (as at 1 January 2025: €1,657.00). If the scholarship is insufficient, the faculty will arrange for a top-up. See VU framework for International PhD Candidates with a Scholarship, as adopted by the Executive Board on 11 June 2024.

⁵ Collective agreements for PhD candidates employed by the NSCR will be set out in the new collaboration agreement between the VU and the Dutch Research Council that is expected to apply as from September 2026.