

Annual progress review by supervisors and candidate

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During the project, the supervisors and the candidate regularly talk about the project as a whole, i.e., beyond a discussion of a piece of the research. In the School of Social Sciences, an Annual¹ Progress Review (APR) is held with all PhD candidates. For employee candidates, this may coincide with at least annual review conversations, of which the results are stored in VUweb.² For candidates within a part-time project that is stretched over a longer period of time, the review is held regularly, such that a minimum of five reviews take place.

[This form](#) can be used to prepare for and record the APR.

Content of the APR: 15 topics to discuss

The APR is a meeting of the candidate with the supervisor to discuss and assess:

A. The extent to which the candidate has achieved the learning outcomes and the progress made by the PhD candidate.

The PhD candidate provides a brief written progress report, including reflection, to be discussed with the supervisors. The candidate sends the progress report to the supervisor(s) at least one week before the meeting. The report contains an evaluation of all aspects of the work of the past period, insight into the progress of the project, and a re-evaluation by the PhD candidate and supervisor(s) concerning the expectations of the PhD project. The progress report requires the PhD candidate to:

1. Look back, factually: The report includes a list of publications, research presentations, research activities, and training activities (in accordance with those administered in Hora Finita and supplemented by other activities of learning on the job, such as participation in colloquia). This information is supportive of the PhD portfolio.³
2. Look back, evaluative: Did you meet the goals set for the past period? What went well, what went less well, and what does this mean for the agreements you want to make for the coming period? How does the progress relate to the overall goal of the project? For example, is the project on schedule, have parts of the thesis been completed, did you publish enough, did you attend enough courses?
3. Look ahead, within the project: which goals do you want to reach in the period to come, and how do you plan to do so? Is it desirable to adjust the earlier schedule in order to complete the dissertation within the duration of the project?
4. Look ahead to the future (career development): what are your plans for life and profession after the PhD; what preparations in research and training should be made for this?

¹ Annual is a helpful designation but is not necessarily to be taken literally. Good times to have this conversation at least are: (1) in the beginning of the project, at about 4/48 of the planned duration in preparation for the go / no go assessment; (2) shortly after the outcome of the go / no go assessment; (3) halfway through the project – a time when it is clearly visible how the project has developed and what the prospects are; (4) at about 36/48 of the planned duration in preparation for completion; from then on, all attention should be focused on timely and sufficient completion; (5) annually thereafter as long as the project is not completed.

² <https://vu.nl/en/employee/annual-consultation/the-annual-consultation-for-employees> or <https://vu.nl/nl/medewerker/jaargesprek/het-jaargesprek-voor-medewerkers>

³ <https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/more-about/from-dissertation-to-defense>

5. Reflect on what has been achieved and what this means to you. Did anything stand out or was anything especially important to you and why? Was there anything that made a big impression? What are you proud of? By taking the time to reflect on these questions you can start making plans for the future, for example regarding how you could put your talents to better use or how you might boost your job satisfaction. What would you like to do more often, less often, or differently? What do you need from your supervisor or your colleagues to achieve this? A good reflection will help you and your supervisor to be well prepared for the annual consultation and will allow you to make useful agreements together for the coming year.
- B. The quantity and quality of the supervision.
It is very important to get and give feedback on both sides about the supervision and the working relationship. In this way, possible problems and disappointments do not remain until the end of the project where nothing can be done about them, and intermediate goals can be set to initiate improvements. The role of supervisors in achieving the goals should be explicitly discussed.
 - C. Supervisors and the candidate are expected to conduct themselves professionally. If there is any reason, discuss what can be improved.
 - D. In some projects, a PhD candidate can give direction to the project in terms of content and in terms of outputs other than the dissertation. In other projects, there are more or even stronger constraints. Discuss where and how much choice is available and confirm previous agreements.
- Consider also the following topics:
- E. Workload: Can it be done, or is it too much or too little? Should work be organized in a different way?
 - F. Social well-being and a safe social setting: Is the candidate doing well? Is the candidate satisfied and happy with working on the PhD project? Are there any special circumstances at work or work-influencing private circumstances that require attention? Does the candidate feel free to express her or his opinion and is she or he not afraid of humiliation or harassment by colleagues or supervisors?
 - G. Ancillary activities (work-related): Are there any work-related activities besides working on the PhD project? Is there sufficient time and opportunity to do these? Do these contribute to achieving the goals of the PhD project (in a broad sense; not just the completion of the dissertation), or are they a hindrance?
 - H. Working conditions: For example, is an ergonomic workstation available? Are there adequate facilities, such as computer hardware and software? Are there sufficient opportunities for continuing education and training? Is there sufficient attention to psychosocial workload, and is help accessible?
 - I. Cooperation with supervisors and other colleagues: For example, is there good, professional cooperation? Are there transparent agreements to be made and made about all kinds of components of the PhD project (such as design of the project, publishing, authorship)? Are there irritations, and have they been discussed?
 - J. Other, miscellaneous
 - K. Conclusions (e.g., on how to work, the direction of the project, the cooperation between supervisors and candidate, the employment contract)

Organization of the APR

Being the driver of their own development, the PhD candidate is expected to take a proactive role in the meeting and its preparation. The supervisor is responsible for the planning and conduct of the meeting. Both the supervisor and the PhD may each bring someone else along, if desired, in consultation with each other. An example is that the second supervisor and the PhD departmental buddy are present. It is agreed whether the supervisor or the candidate writes the final report. The agreements made during the meeting are then addressed during the preparations for the next ARP. The report is input for the Go / No Go procedure and for the supervisor's annual interview with their supervisor. Unsatisfactory outcomes may have consequences.