



VRIJE
UNIVERSITEIT
AMSTERDAM

GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

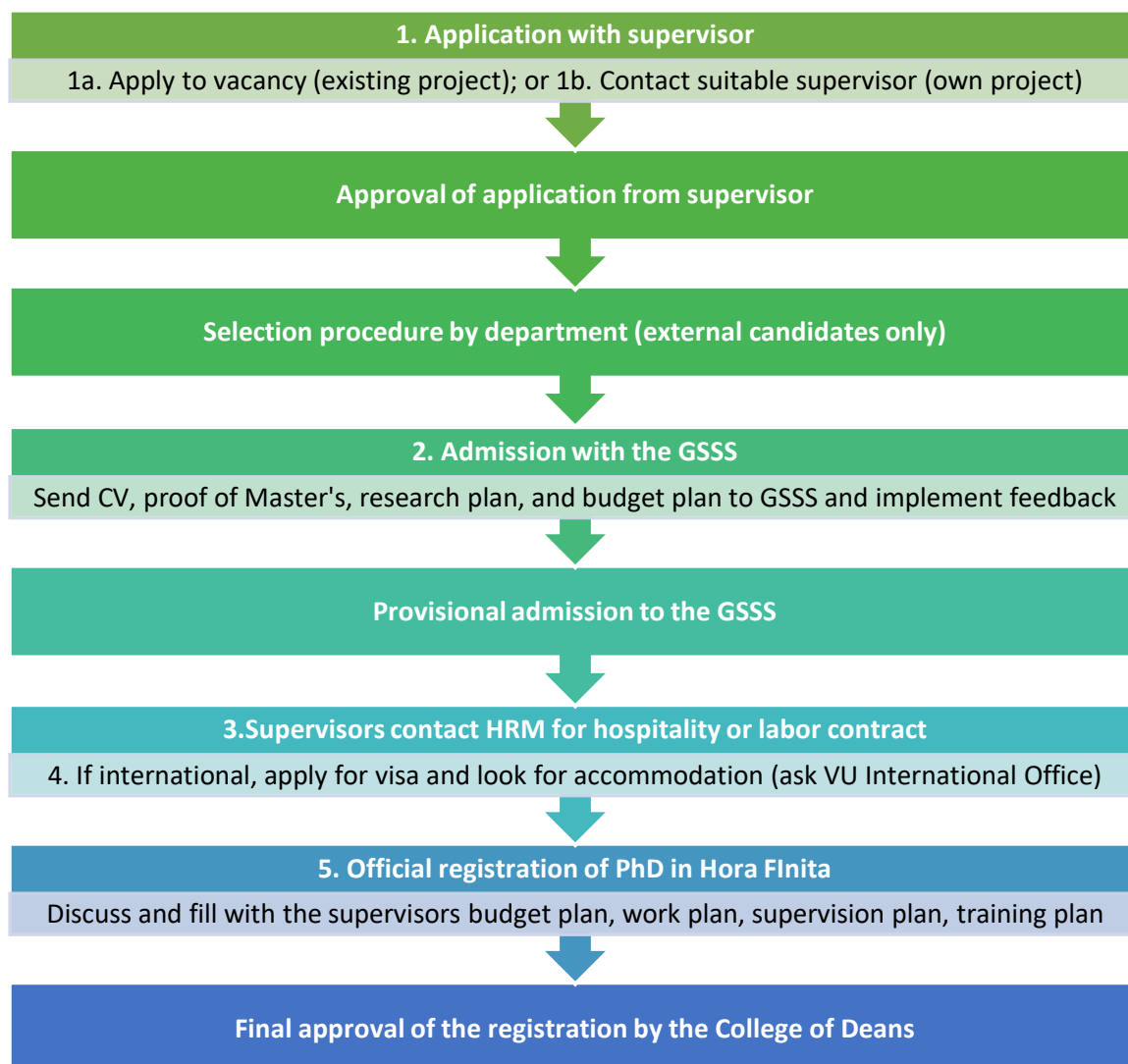
Application, admission, registration to the PhD program

This version is from September 2, 2025¹

General information is provided on the VU website. Please visit <https://vu.nl/en/research/more-about/application-and-admission>. The following information is designed for potential and recently admitted GSSS PhD candidates.

Five steps to becoming a PhD candidate

The GSSS admission procedure is illustrated in the figure below.



¹ Original version approved by the Faculty Board of the previous Faculty of Social Sciences (since 2025, School of Social Sciences within the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities) on July 16, 2018.

Step 1a: Application through recruitment as an employed PhD candidate

You are interested in conducting PhD research and have found a relevant vacancy.

- Usually, an available PhD position has an elaborate research question and research plan. Positions are advertised in different ways, including on the VU website and as an internationally advertised call on Academic Transfer, on behalf of an already determined supervisory team.
- **Apply to the vacancy.** Instructions are provided in the announcement.
- The search committee (headed by the supervisor) assesses whether you have excellent scientific quality and the capacity to finish your PhD dissertation in time.

If you are selected for the vacancy, and before you can sign your contract, **you should request to be admitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences (GSSS)**. You cannot start your PhD trajectory unless you are formally admitted by the GSSS (Step 2).

Step 1b: Application through searching a potential supervisor

You have a research topic, or possibly your own research question and research plan, and want to develop your research in collaboration with a supervisor. You now need to **find a supervisor**. To do so, please visit <https://research.vu.nl/>. **Please note that only full professors and associate professors with *ius promovendi* can act as supervisors in the Dutch system. First supervisors cannot be retired at the time of the application.** Moreover, at the School of Social Sciences, supervisors cannot supervise more than 6 PhD candidates at the same time.

If your chosen supervisor is interested in your research idea and available to supervise you, **discuss and elaborate on your research, time plan, and budget plan with the proposed supervisor(s)**.

- In this step, take into consideration if you have sufficient time available (see "Start, end, and time planning of a PhD trajectory" at the end of this document) and if you have sufficient financial means to complete a PhD dissertation trajectory, either by your own means or means through another party, e.g., employer or scholarship. With some rare exceptions, costs should include the [tuition fees](#). Note that a partial fee waiver might be granted, upon discussion with the Head of Department.
- If you are an international PhD candidate, you should be extremely careful that your budget takes into consideration the cost of living in the Netherlands. You are advised to have a look at the [VU portal about accommodation](#). Do realize that finding suitable and affordable housing can be challenging.
- The supervisor consults the Head of Department (and the Research Manager) on the application. The Head of Department's consent is required to proceed.
- The supervisor assesses that you have excellent scientific quality and the capacity to finish your PhD dissertation in time, and that the research topic fits with their expertise.
- Once this step is completed, and before you request to be admitted to the GSSS, an internal selection committee is set up at the department at which you will be conducting your research to determine your eligibility for the PhD program.

Step 1c: Selection procedure by department (external candidates only)

As an external PhD candidate, you must undergo a **departmental selection procedure** by a committee consisting of the departmental Research Manager, an experienced supervisor (who is unrelated to the research project), and the prospective supervisory team, before you can be enrolled in the GSSS.

- The selection occurs upon request by the prospective supervisor.
- The committee invites you to an (online) interview to assess your quality and fit within the research program, and your verbal English language proficiency, based on selection criteria.
- If the committee deems you eligible for the PhD program, you should request to be admitted to the GSSS. You cannot start your PhD trajectory unless you are formally admitted by the GSSS.

Please proceed with step 2.

Step 2: Admission by the GSSS

In this step, you and your supervisor(s) should send the admission documents to the GSSS. By assessing these documents, the GSSS checks if all formal requirements for starting a PhD at the School of Social Sciences are met.

Please submit the following documents to graduate.school.ssw@vu.nl:

- Proof of Master's (or copy of Master's diploma);
- Proof of English level; minimum requirement is TOEFL 600 (internet based); TOEFL 100 (paper based); or IELTS 7.0. If an English master has been obtained a TOEFL/IELTS certificate is not necessary;
- A preliminary research proposal (including a paragraph on the time commitment of the candidate). Keep in mind that this planning should be feasible - a regular full-time project takes 4 years to complete. For an 8-year project (maximum allowed) the candidate should be available at least 2,5 days per week;
- Budget plan (see template on the VU-GSSS website); 'Data on supervisors at the start of a PhD project' (fill-in document on the website, to be completed by the supervisors and sent to the GSSS with all supervisors in cc).

The team of the GSSS will give you feedback on the application. Ultimately, the director of the GSSS decides to grant a provisional admission.

The GSSS informs you, the supervisors, and the Head of Department about the decision. In case of a labor contract, the HRM manager is informed that you have passed this step.

Provisional admission gives you the possibility to start the project. It also gives you access to the procedure to be hired as an employee, the application for housing of international candidates, the library (books and journals), software, use of office space, supervision, and participation in the GSSS doctoral training and other GSSS activities.

To get access to VU services, proceed with step 3.

Step 3: Access to VU services

In this step, you acquire an agreement or contract with VU, which gives you access to VU services.

- The Head of Department (or her or his replacement, i.e., the managerial staff member or in Dutch 'leidinggevende') invites you to register at the VU personnel administrative system.
- Please follow the instructions in the email you receive from the Head of Department (or her or his replacement) to start the procedure for a hospitality agreement (in Dutch 'gastvrijheid'; for a candidate without a VU employment contract) or a labor contract (for an internal candidate) with VU.

This step is performed by HRM. It is complete when you have a personal account (a VU net ID) and a VU access card.

If you are already in the Netherlands, you can start with your research and proceed with step 5.
If you are abroad and need a visa and housing, please proceed with both steps 4 and 5.

Step 4: Applying for a visa and housing (international candidates only)

If you are an international PhD candidate, you probably need a visa and housing. Please visit [Information for new international staff - Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam](#).

- If you need a visa and you have not already been contacted by the International Office, do get in touch with the Immigration team at VU by emailing immigration@vu.nl. If you need housing, visit the [International Office's pages on accommodation](#) for PhDs. VU provides limited university housing for new international PhDs. Inquiries can be directed to accommodation@vu.nl, and general housing information is available on the [VU accommodation page](#). Note that VU accommodation is provided for individual PhD candidates only, not for families.

Please note that the visa procedure alone can take up to three months, and finding appropriate housing is a challenge. This step is completed when you have a visa (if necessary) and housing.

Step 5: Official registration as a VU-GSSS PhD candidate

After you have been provisionally admitted, the GSSS will contact you to start your registration process. **You should complete the registration within 1 month after the beginning of your PhD trajectory.**

- You will be invited to register in Hora Finita (<https://horafinita.vu.nl/>)
- Please add your personal data, upload your CV, and a copy of a valid passport.
- To ensure a proper start of the project, the PhD candidate and the supervisor come to an agreement on the project details. The involved parties in a PhD project document what is expected from the project in terms of research to be conducted by the PhD candidate, and the support, training and supervision offered. Adjustments can be made at any time; approval follows the same procedure. After discussing them with your supervisors, please upload:
 - o The supervision plan, which should state the frequency of meetings with the supervisors, and any division of tasks within the supervisory team
 - o The plan for doctoral training, developed in collaboration with the supervisory team and with the GSSS Program Director; the approval of the GSSS Program Director is necessary before uploading it.
 - o The latest budget plan (according to the budget plan template available on the GSSS website)
 - o Work plan (according to the work plan template available on the GSSS website)
 - o Agreement on teaching or other tasks (if relevant)
- Your registration is reviewed by the GSSS. You will update the information according to the feedback and once it is ready you hit submit.
- The registration is reviewed by the supervisor, the Head of Department, the Director of the GSSS, and finally assessed by the Dean.

Your registration is finalized once it has been approved by the College of Deans. You are now officially a PhD candidate of the School of Social Sciences!

Start, end, and time planning of a PhD trajectory

Start date of the PhD

The preferential starting date is September 1, in order to facilitate participation in the first-year doctoral training. The PhD Induction starts at the beginning of the academic year (i.e., the last week of September or the first week of October). **To start on September 1, the admission procedure with the GSSS should be initiated by May 1.** If you send your admission later than that, the GSSS cannot guarantee that you will be admitted by September 1.

A starting date other than September 1 is possible but may have implications for the planning of doctoral training. This is discussed when the training plan is composed.

End of project and premature ending of PhD

The graduation of the candidate marks the regular ending of the project and membership in the GSSS.

The project and membership may also end prematurely by termination initiated by the candidate or the supervisor, an assessment resulting in a No-Go decision, not paying the required fee for membership of the GSSS, or not fulfilling the requirements as laid down in the training and work plan, or other compelling reasons. The supervisor and Head of Department are consulted. The final decision is taken by the Director of the GSSS and reviewed by the Dean.

Time plan of dissertation trajectory

- The activities of a PhD candidate consist of conducting research (calculated as 5544 working hours; about 1680 hours is the yearly working load), resulting in a dissertation. (If the candidate works elsewhere on top of doing a PhD, the assumed total of workable hours is 40-50 hours a week. We believe that well-being and leisure time are extremely important, which is why a max. of 6 days per week count as working days.) The number of working hours needed to complete the dissertation is a rough indication. Currently, many PhD candidates need this time or even more to finish their dissertations. Therefore, the GSSS deviates from the 5544 hour minimum only when work has already been completed that is directly useful for the thesis. A project plan needs to take into account the number of 5544 working hours. The possibilities for reduction are described on the GSSS website ('Admission for a PhD candidate with a regular, short or a long trajectory').
- The project should be completed within 48, 60 or 72 calendar months, depending on the labor contract and the appointment between the candidate and the supervisor made at the start. A longer project requires approval by the GSSS.
- All PhD candidates participate in doctoral training to further educate themselves. This consists of 30 European Credits (= 840 hours). PhD candidates with a research master's of 60 ECs or 120 ECs can apply for a training exemption of up to 10 or 20 ECs, respectively. This exemption is reviewed by the Program Director of the GSSS and may be rejected.
- A PhD candidate with a labor contract as 'promovendus' has an option to teach at the Bachelor's or Master's level (5 % of the total PhD hours = approx. 277 hours throughout the trajectory). Generally, this is not mandatory, but do check the specific requirements of your contract.