

# **Potential solutions for impact of COVID-19 for PhD candidates and postdocs**

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## **Preamble**

This document proposes a generic framework of potential solutions for the bottlenecks and problems confronting PhD candidates and postdocs due to the coronavirus crisis, inclusive of a procedure for the use of this framework.

This proposal was prompted by the difficult situation in which young scientists (with temporary contracts) find themselves due to the coronavirus crisis. Delays in their research can have serious consequences for the careers of this vulnerable group of scientists. In the first instance, half of the 0.45% pay bargaining range available in 2020, pursuant to the negotiated settlement for the Collective Labour Agreement Dutch Universities 2020, will be allocated to this proposal. This is in line with the agreement that this pay bargaining range will be allocated to funding the costs of bottlenecks caused by the coronavirus crisis in relation to the terms of employment of the staff.

UM is, self-evidently, also devoting internal attention to the bottlenecks and problems that confront all other staff. This issue is high on the agenda of the weekly consultations between the Executive Board and the faculties. The Executive Board and the faculties are continually discussing issues such as the importance of making sure that sufficient capacity continues to be available for the transition to online education and resolving as many of the bottlenecks and problems caused by the coronavirus crisis as far as possible. This also includes monitoring the workload. Within this context, an investment programme of at least 5 million euros has been established.

The proposal laid down in this document will be amended if and to the extent that national agreements so demand.

## Summary

The coronavirus crisis has had a great impact on UM research. Research with human subjects, for example, has been halted and virtually all researchers have been confronted with bottlenecks due to extra online teaching duties, care duties and limited facilities at home. PhD candidates and postdocs (researchers with temporary contracts), in particular, are faced with problems.

This document contains a proposal for a generic framework of potential solutions for the bottlenecks and problems confronting PhD candidates and postdocs due to the coronavirus crisis, inclusive of a procedure for the use of this framework.

The proposal has been prepared by a working group set up by the Executive Board. The Research Platform, PhD Platform, Maastricht Young Academy and Recognition & Rewards research committee were also involved in the development of this proposal. The terms of reference of organisations including the Association of Universities in the Netherlands, Dutch Federation of University Medical Centres (NFU), Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMw), PhD candidate Network of the Netherlands (PNN) and POSTDOCNL, as well as national and international developments, were taken into account in the development of the proposal.

The generic framework encompasses a range of potential solutions that can be customised to arrive at the appropriate solution. The objective of the framework is both to offer various potential solutions for experienced bottlenecks and problems and to provide for potential solutions of a maximum possible uniformity. The framework contains potential solutions focused on rounding off the research as far as possible in the available time and with the available resources by revising the content of research projects and/or adjusting expectations when necessary and possible (without lowering standards). This solution approach is in line with the new system of Recognition & Rewards and the DORA principles that place the emphasis on quality (rather than quantity), content, creativity and the contribution research makes to the state of knowledge.

A standardised decision-making procedure has been drawn up for this generic framework which consists of five successive steps, the first of which is to assess whether rounding off the research in the available time and with the available resources will be possible. When this is not possible, and the revision of the research and/or adjustment proves impossible, then employed PhD candidates and postdocs can submit an application for a contract extension to what is referred to as the 'delay committee' of the relevant faculty/school. This committee will then review whether a contract extension can be offered. A 'central delay disputes committee' will also be set up to offer PhD candidates and postdocs the opportunity to lodge an objection against the decision of the 'delay committee' of their faculty/school.

The faculties are requested to implement the generic framework of potential solutions and the standardised decision-making procedure on the basis of this proposal. The faculties are also requested to be generous to PhD candidates and postdocs and to contribute to avoiding delays.

## 1. Background

The coronavirus crisis confronts researchers with great challenges and has a huge impact on ongoing research. Research on patients, laboratory animals and human subjects and laboratory research with cells and materials has been virtually halted, significant bottlenecks have arisen in other areas of research, such as fieldwork and longitudinal research, and problems have arisen in remote research that relates, for example, to persons in essential professions. Moreover, virtually all researchers have been confronted with bottlenecks due to extra online teaching duties, care duties and limited facilities at home. PhD candidates and postdocs (researchers with temporary contracts), in particular, are faced with problems caused by these bottlenecks.

An inventory has revealed that many PhD candidates and postdocs in all faculties are confronted with bottlenecks and problems. Problems are expected for 321 employed PhD candidates, equivalent to about 29% of all employed PhD candidates. Non-employed PhD candidates experience similar bottlenecks and problems. Moreover, international PhD candidates and scholarship candidates are certainly in a vulnerable position as they are so far from home.

### ***Delay factors***

The impact of the coronavirus crisis varies between individuals. A distinction can be made between a number of causes that have an influence on the length of the delay.

#### Type of research

Research in which PhD candidates and postdocs need to make many observations will generally be delayed more than research in which these are not involved. Moreover, this longer delay will also vary with the nature of the research involving observations: research requiring observations of persons, research primarily carried out in laboratories, research carried out using laboratory and other equipment, research into chemical processes, research using living organisms, cell lines, plants or laboratory animals and longitudinal research will be delayed more than research that does not involve observations or for which the observations have already been completed. However, there may also be delays for research in the social sciences and humanities, in which fieldwork such as observations, interviews, focus groups and other anthropological and ethnographic methods play a role in which human contact is central. The impact on ongoing research is not restricted to the direct delay caused by halting the observations, but also extends to frictional delays resulting from the time required to redesign the study, register and seek approval from the ethics review committee for changes to the research design resulting from corona measures and communicating the changes to the participants, etc. Account also needs to be taken of waiting times when laboratories reopen, as well as of supplementary safety protocols.

#### Phase of the research:

It is expected that many PhD candidates and postdocs will be confronted with a delay. The current phase of the research can influence the length of the delay. An overall distinction can be made between three research phases:

- Literature study and specification of the method (planning)
- Actual research (implementation)
- Processing of the data and preparation of papers (evaluation)

These phases can also run in parallel within a research project, as a number of studies are often carried out simultaneously. Most problems are expected with the research of postdocs and PhD candidates that is currently in the implementation phase.

### Education

A large number of PhD candidates and postdocs are expected to teach and to follow courses. Many currently need to spend extra time on the conversion of face-to-face education into an online variant. This is to the detriment of the customary amount of time that they can spend on their research, which can then suffer delay.

### Personal circumstances

Personal circumstances also have an influence on the length of the delay in research.

- Mental stress caused by the coronavirus crisis: very few of us have experienced a crisis of this magnitude before. The uncertainty about the coronavirus crisis can make it difficult for PhD candidates and postdocs to concentrate on their research
- Informal care: some PhD candidates and postdocs need to take care of ill relatives during the coronavirus crisis
- Illness: PhD candidates and postdocs may have been infected with coronavirus and become ill
- Care of children or relatives: some PhD candidates and postdocs need to spend more time on care during this coronavirus crisis, for example because they have children who need to be taught at home or small children who cannot attend childcare centres
- Reduced supervision: PhD candidates and postdocs may receive less supervision when supervisors and principal investigators are themselves confronted with the aforementioned problems. This can impede progress in their research and result in delays.

Specific attention also needs to be given to PhD candidates and postdocs active in the medical field who are or have been engaged in temporary care duties and, consequently, have had to devote less or even no time to their research.

### ***Everyone has their individual problems***

The above makes clear that the coronavirus crisis has a great impact on the research of PhD candidates and postdocs, irrespective of the type of their research, research phase and personal circumstances. Consequently, the bottlenecks, problems and the ultimately delay will vary between individuals.

This diversity in the problems precludes a one-size-fits-all solution for the bottlenecks and problems confronting PhD candidates and postdocs due to the coronavirus crisis. A range of potential solutions are needed to do justice to the diversity of the problems. This requires a generic framework of potential solutions that can be customised to offer the appropriate solution. This document contains a proposal for a generic framework of potential solutions for UM PhD candidates and postdocs, inclusive of a procedure for the use of this framework.

## 2. Members of the working group and working method

### *Members*

The Executive Board set up a working group to develop the proposal. This working group consisted of six members, with expertise in areas such as ethics and integrity, recognition and rewards, HR, PhD policy and external funding.

### *Procedure*

The Research Platform (associate deans research), PhD Platform, Maastricht Young Academy and the Recognition & Rewards research committee were involved in the development of the plan. The terms of reference of organisations including the Association of Universities in the Netherlands, Dutch Federation of University Medical Centres (NFU), Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMw), PhD candidate Network of the Netherlands (PNN) and POSTDOCNL were taken into account, as well as national and international developments including the new system of Recognition & Rewards. On 10 June 2020, after discussions in the Executive Board and Management Team, the Local Consultative Body approved the proposal.

## 3. Working group's assignment

The working group's assignment consisted of the following sub-assignments:

- A) Development of a **generic framework of solution approaches** to research delays confronting PhD candidates and postdocs due to the coronavirus crisis, with due observance of a number of terms of reference (see below). This framework is intended for PhD candidates and postdocs who are confronted with bottlenecks and problems due to the coronavirus crisis that make it impossible to complete their research in its original design and within the expected time schedule.
  
- B) Development of a **standardised decision-making procedure** to be followed when deciding on the potential solutions (in the generic framework) to be implemented for PhD candidates and postdocs.

## 4. Scope/Target Group

The working group focused exclusively on PhD candidates and postdocs:

- Employed PhD candidates
  - o Employee PhD candidate
  - o PhD candidate employee
- Non-employed PhD candidate
  - o PhD scholarship candidate (external scholarship)
  - o Externally funded PhD candidate
  - o External PhD candidate
- Postdoc (researcher 3 and 4)

### **PhD candidates**

The following table lists the definitions of the types of PhD candidates on the basis of the classification drawn up by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (translated from the original Dutch)<sup>1</sup>.

<b>Employed PhD candidates</b>	
Employee PhD candidate	Employee who has an employment contract and an agreement focused on a PhD track with UM. An important indicator is then the employee's receipt of a salary from UM. NB: The origin of the funds required for employment from either direct government funding or from third parties such as the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) is not of relevance.
PhD candidate employee	Employee who has an employment contract and an agreement focused on a PhD track with UM. An important indicator is then the employee's receipt of a salary from UM. This type of PhD candidate receives funding and/or time from UM to take his/her PhD. An employee who self funds taking his/her PhD and does not receive time from the university is classified in the non-employed PhD candidate - PhD scholarship candidate category.
<b>Non-employed PhD candidate</b>	
PhD scholarship candidate	Person who does not have an employment contract with UM (where the PhD is to be taken) but whose main objective is to take his/her PhD and receives the necessary funding from a scholarship provider. An important indicator is then that the person does not receive a salary from UM (or no more than a supplement to the scholarship). This can relate to scholarships granted by an organisation other than UM, for example from NUFFIC, the European Union, a university outside the Netherlands, organisations and foundations such as Fulbright and banks and other governments, such as CSC PhD scholarships.
Externally funded PhD candidate	An externally funded PhD candidate distinguishes him/herself from an external PhD candidate by his/her use of other funds to take his/her PhD or the allocation of working time by his/her employer to take his/her PhD (irrespective of the amount of time that is made available). An important indicator is then that the person does not receive a salary from UM.
External PhD candidate (self funded)	Person who does not receive time or funds from an external party to take his/her PhD but is of the intention to take his/her PhD. The external PhD candidate has his/her own funds or is funded by his/her family. Examples include a pensioner working on taking a PhD, a company employee who is working on taking a PhD in his/her free time alongside his/her job, a university employee who does not have the University Job Classification profile of PhD candidate and does not receive funds/time from the university to take his/her PhD (formerly a PhD candidate employee), or a medical specialist who Maastricht academic hospital (the azM) has not released from his/her regular duties. An important indicator is then that the person does not receive a salary from UM.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.vsnu.nl/files/documenten/Feiten\\_en\\_Cijfers/Typering\\_promovendi\\_2019.pdf](https://www.vsnu.nl/files/documenten/Feiten_en_Cijfers/Typering_promovendi_2019.pdf)



### ***Postdocs***

The position of postdoc is not included as such in university personnel records. Postdocs are researchers classified in University Job Classification profile of researcher level 3 and 4. Postdocs in some faculties can also have a University Job Classification profile of assistant professor with an adjusted allocation of research/teaching time.

### ***Tenure trackers***

Tenure trackers are not included in the working group's assignment. Although tenure trackers also have a temporary appointment and are confronted with many of the same problems as postdocs, the essential difference between the two categories is that tenure trackers work towards learning outcomes required for an internal decision on an offer of permanent employment. The Research Platform has stated that the coronavirus crisis will have a limited impact on this group of researchers, as any delay they may suffer can be taken into account in the assessment.

The greatest problem confronting tenure trackers is their inability to fulfil the agreements laid down in their contract. This is a problem as researchers awarded a tenure track (usually in the position of lecturer) are granted a certain period (for example, five years) to achieve performance targets, such as targets for research, education, management/administration and, on occasion, knowledge valorisation. They are awarded a permanent employment contract when they achieve their performance targets. The coronavirus crisis can complicate the achievement or timely achievement of the agreed targets. The delay this causes may make it impossible for a tenure tracker to achieve the performance targets within the agreed time and, as a result, fail to automatically qualify for a permanent contract and promotion. The faculties/schools/principal investigators/sections are requested to adjust the assessment criteria for this group of researchers to take account of the coronavirus crisis and, where relevant, to adjust the performance targets.

## **5. Principles**

The working group took account of the following terms of reference in its work on the assignment. These were specified by the Research Platform and are in line with the joint 'Research project delays' statement published by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands, Dutch Federation of University Medical Centres (hereinafter referred to as the 'NFU'), Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (hereinafter referred to as the 'NWO'), Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (hereinafter referred to as 'ZonMw'), PhD candidate Network of the Netherlands (hereinafter referred to as 'PNN') and POSTDOCNL.

- a. **Complete research as far as possible; allow PhD candidates to take their PhD; complete projects.** When problems or delays occur due to the coronavirus crisis, the guiding principle is that we wish to complete existing research projects as far as possible, irrespective of whether they have temporarily been halted.
- b. **Generic framework for all faculties.** A generic framework of solution approaches that can be offered in all faculties is needed. We wish to ensure that appropriate solutions for the completion of research and PhD tracks are offered.
- c. **Range of solutions.** Potential solutions could lie in searching for a different research design or different definition of the problem or sub-problem or, when possible, adjustment of expectations (without lowering standards). This is in line with the idea that taking a PhD is an aptitude test to verify the ability to contribute to the independent pursuit of science. The

modifications that are necessary and possible will depend on a large number of factors including the field of research, type of research, phase of the research and the agreements that are or can be made with grant providers. For postdocs, the possibility of adjusting the learning outcomes can be examined. The need for PhD candidates and postdocs to receive extra time to complete their research can also be examined.

- d. **Take 'Recognition & Rewards' into account.** Creative solutions are needed to resolve bottlenecks and problems. The 'Recognition & Rewards' project, which offers an opportunity to view PhD tracks and PhD theses from a different perspective, can serve as a good point of departure for the development of these creative solutions. The focus should be shifted away from solely quantitative output towards an assessment, in a broader sense, of the qualities and performance of PhD candidates and postdocs. A specific number of publications does not as such constitute an aptitude test. Substantive qualitative criteria must be decisive.
- e. **Financial compensation.** Contract extensions may be necessary in exceptional cases. Financial compensation should be offered in those cases in which it is clear that alternative solutions are not possible and an extension of the contract is the only and necessary solution. No financial compensation will be provided for replacement or supplementary research resources. Non-employed PhD candidates (i.e. PhD scholarship candidates, externally funded PhD candidates and external PhD candidates) will not come into consideration for a contract extension as they are not in employment with UM.
- f. **The implementation of the framework will require customisation based on a standardised decision-making procedure.** As the type of problems and their consequences will vary from person to person, customisation will be required in the implementation of the generic framework of potential solutions. However, this implementation will need to be based on a standardised decision-making procedure. This customisation must be sought in consultation with deans, graduate schools, section heads and/or supervisors/principal investigators, as determined on the basis of the person in the best position to provide this customisation.

## 6. Context

National developments, including in the context of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands, and international developments were taken into account in the development of the generic framework. The working group adopted the principle that developing potential solutions for these groups that are not too much out of line with solutions developed by other Dutch universities will be in the interests of the further academic careers of UM PhD candidates and postdocs.

### Association of Universities in the Netherlands, NFU, NWO, ZonMw, PNN and PostdocNL

A joint statement from the Association of Universities in the Netherlands, the NFU, NWO, ZonMw, PNN and POSTDOCNL contained proposals including a creative search for solutions, such as, when possible, the modification of the research design, learning outcomes of a PhD degree and adjustment of the expectations from funded research projects.

The Association of Universities in the Netherlands and The Young Academy (DJA), POSTDOCNL, PNN and Dutch Trade Union Confederation (hereinafter referred to as the 'FNV') drew up three documents (which were co-read by the NFU, Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (hereinafter referred to as the 'KNAW') and NWO) on the basis of this statement. These documents mapped the three most important groups confronted with delays (PhD candidates, postdocs and tenure

trackers), outlined their problems and reviewed possible and desirable solutions. These documents will be worked out in more detail into the form of a 'menu' that outlines the approach to each of the groups confronted with delays. These are intended to serve as a guide for customisation. The potential solutions and decision-making procedure proposed by the working group in this document are in line with this approach.

### NWO

The Association of Universities in the Netherlands and NWO are holding discussions on the feasibility of funding contract extensions for research projects for which a decision on extension is urgently required, inclusive of the cover and the implementation. Specific attention is being given to Knowledge and Innovation Covenant (KIC) and Dutch Research Agenda (NWA) funding as compensation.

Other grant providers for Dutch research have not as yet made funds available for contract extensions and have gone no further than stating that they will adopt a flexible approach to budget-neutral extensions.

### Secondments with Maastricht academic hospital (azM)

A number of Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML) PhD candidates and postdocs are currently working or working longer in Maastricht academic hospital (hereinafter referred to as the 'azM') in response to the coronavirus crisis. These PhD candidates and postgraduates are usually formally seconded to the azM, which is remunerated. These funds can be deployed for so far as contract extensions are an issue for the relevant PhD candidates and postgraduates.

NB: some PhD candidates and postgraduates will probably not be formally seconded and will not then receive remuneration.

### Recognition & Rewards

The Association of Universities in the Netherlands, NFU, KNAW, NWO and ZonMw published the 'Room for everyone's talent; towards a new balance in the recognition and rewards of academics'<sup>2</sup> position paper in November 2019, which explains the ambitions to expand the recognition of and rewards for the work of academic staff. Less emphasis will be placed on the number of publications and more emphasis will be placed on the other domains, such as education, leadership and impact. The objective is to achieve more scope for diversity in academic career paths and end the fixation on research and output and, in so doing, implement the new principle that quality has priority over quantity.

## **7. Proposal**

This section contains the actual proposal. This proposal is subdivided into three sub-proposals as specified in the assignment, namely:

- A. Generic framework of solution approaches
- B. Standardised decision-making procedure (for the implementation of the framework)

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vsnu.nl/files/documenten/Domeinen/Onderzoek/Position%20paper%20Ruimte%20voor%20ieders%20talent.pdf>

## **A. Generic framework of solution approaches**

This subsection explains solution approaches that can be adopted to resolve bottlenecks and problems confronting PhD candidates and postdocs due to the coronavirus crisis. The working group has drawn up a generic framework that does justice to the impact of the coronavirus crisis.

Customisation is of crucial importance to the determination of the most suitable solution or solutions. The impact of the coronavirus crisis varies between individuals and will vary between the types of research, phase of the research and the personal circumstances of those involved (see Section 1, Delay factors). Consequently, the bottlenecks, problems and the ultimate delay will vary between individuals. This has given cause to the inclusion of a range of potential solutions that is in line with the diversity in the problems. The procedure followed to arrive at a suitable solution or solutions is explained in subsection B.

The objective of the generic framework is both to offer various potential solutions for experienced bottlenecks and problems and to provide for solution approaches of the maximum possible uniformity. Customisation needs to be sought in the implementation of the generic framework. It should be noted that the framework is not cast in stone: other solutions that are not included in the framework are also allowed, provided that they are 'in the spirit of the framework'.

The express intention is that the generic framework and, in particular, the Recognition & Rewards features of the framework are also used in the future development of a new standard for Recognition & Rewards PhD candidates and PhD theses. This will contribute to the future adoption of a uniform standard for the assessment of PhD candidates independent of the current coronavirus crisis.

### ***Generic framework of solution approaches***

#### **Revision of content of research projects and adjustment of expectations in line with the transition to the new system of Recognition & Rewards**

The framework contains potential solutions focused on rounding off the research as far as possible in the available time and with the available resources by revising the content of research projects and, when possible, adjusting expectations (without lowering standards). The adjustments that are possible and necessary will depend on a large number of factors such as the field of research, type of research and phase of the research. This solution approach must also be viewed in the light of the new system of Recognition & Rewards and the DORA principles that place the emphasis on quality (rather than quantity), content, creativity and the contribution that the research makes to the state of knowledge. The commitment and cooperation of the supervisors and principal investigators is of crucial importance to the identification of suitable solutions. It will also be necessary to review agreements on modifications and adjustments that can be reached with external funders of research.

Solutions will need to be compatible with the 'aptitude test to verify the ability to contribute to the independent pursuit of science' criterion that is guiding for taking a PhD. The principle for arriving at suitable solutions is that it must be possible to verify this aptitude, irrespective of the method or way in which it is verified. Consequently, the number of articles/chapters and publications is not of relevance, but rather the quality of the research and the PhD thesis – subject

to the express condition that the minimum standard for PhD theses may not be compromised. This is necessary to guarantee the quality of UM PhD degrees and to avoid a disadvantaged position on the academic labour market.

Postdoc projects are often of a shorter term and strictly specified: sometimes explicit learning outcomes are lacking. In these cases, it will be necessary to examine the learning outcomes closely with the principal investigator (and, where relevant, with the external funder).

Potential solutions are:

- Adjustment of the study design
- Adjustment of all or part of the research question (for example, in the event of physical examinations of persons in coronavirus risk groups)
- Adjustment of the quantitative standard for the number of articles
- Adjustment of the expectations (for example, with respect to the number of studies, chapters and publications)
- A replacement study that can be carried out with the prevailing restrictions and available resources (for example, online rather than physical, with a different target group) in the same or a shorter period of time
- A more flexible focus of the PhD thesis (for example, the inclusion of a COVID-19 study/publication in the PhD thesis in the place of a planned article)
- One less study/experiment to absorb the delay/overrun (moving on to the concluding phase at earlier than originally intended)
- Research using data that has already been collected
- Literature review/meta-analysis (instead of an actual study)
- Study with a smaller number of human subjects
- Repeating a study or discontinued study in a different form
- Reduction of amount of field research or longitudinal research
- Moving to another research phase

#### **Extra time and funding solutions**

Implementing one or more of the aforementioned options will be insufficient to resolve the delay in some research projects and absorbing the delay by extending the contract will then be necessary. The length of the delay is dependent on the course of the coronavirus crisis and the factors discussed above (the type of research, phase of the research and personal circumstances). For this reason, a standard term for contract extensions is not appropriate: the term will need to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

The additional funding that will always be required for an extension can be a problem, particularly with external funding. A contract extension, where relevant a one-off extension, is intended for cases in which the ongoing research suffers a delay due to the corona virus and a revision of the research plan and adjustment of the expectations are impossible, as a result of which the only solution will be to extend the contract so that the research can be completed by extending the contract. In an ideal situation, an extension is financed from extra funds that may be made available from the regular external flow of funding for the PhD candidate/postdoc. When the

external funder offers no financial scope for an extension then this cost is borne by UM. This will also be the case with direct government funding of PhD candidates and postdocs.

Only employed PhD candidates (i.e. employee PhD candidates and PhD candidate employee) come into consideration for a contract extension funded by UM. Non-employed PhD candidates are not in employment with UM and, consequently, cannot be offered a contract extension. The completion of the research of these PhD candidates is facilitated by offering them an extension of the hosting agreement so that they retain their access to UM facilities (such as the library) and qualify for an application for an extension of their residence permit.

An assessment of an application for a contract extension needs to extend to a review of the feasibility from a legal and Collective Labour Agreement perspective:

#### Employed PhD candidates

- The contract of employee PhD candidates covered by the CAO NU can in principle be extended without legal concerns. There are no restrictions with respect to the term and number of successive periods of employment. This means that an employment contract with a PhD candidate can be extended by indefinite terms and numbers of periods of employment.
- The chain provision is applicable to PhD candidate employees of UM with a fixed-term contract (not University Job Classification profile of P). The contract cannot in all cases be extended without problems.

#### Non-employed PhD candidates

- The chain provision is not applicable to PhD candidates with a scholarship from an external funder as they are not in employment with UM. These are often international PhD candidates. The legal feasibility of extending the scholarship depends on the agreements with the external funder and the funder's financial scope for an extension.
- The feasibility of compensation for externally funded PhD candidates, who do not have an employment contract with UM, depends on their external funder, often the organisation that grants them the time and/or funding required for the PhD track. The chain provision is applicable to PhD candidates who have a fixed-term contract with their employer. Any exception to the chain provision for the Higher Education sector, where relevant, is not applicable to employers outside the Higher Education sector. The PhD candidate will need to consult on the available options with his/her employer.
- Most external PhD candidates have a large degree of freedom in structuring their PhD track as they do not have an employment contract and work on their PhD thesis in their own time. The completion date is not usually fixed. However, agreements on the completion date for the PhD thesis have been reached with some PhD candidates. There are no legal or financial restrictions on adjusting this completion date.

#### Postdocs

Most postdocs have a temporary employment for a period of, for example, two years, in accordance with Article 2.3 of the CAO NU. This Collective Labour Agreement provides for the extension of these contracts to a maximum of four years. This means that the extension of a

contract of less than four years is possible, but that a contract that has already been extended to a total of four years can in no circumstances be extended for a further temporary period. When an extension is needed that results in the maximum period prescribed by the Collective Labour Agreement Dutch Universities (CAO NU) being exceeded then the fixed-term employment contract is converted into an open-ended employment contract by operation of law. This is also the case when the fixed term employment contract is extended for a further period after the permitted maximum of two extensions: a third extension (= fourth period of employment) also automatically converts the fixed-term employment contract into an open-ended employment contract.

#### International PhD candidates and postdocs

International PhD candidates and postdocs have often been issued a residence permit (visa) for the term of their project. Their residence permit will also need to be extended when their project can be extended (when it is the intention that the relevant PhD candidate/postdoc will remain in the Netherlands).

Now the Public Servants (Standardization of Legal Status) Act has entered into force, all non-employed PhD candidates only have recourse to what are referred to as 'hosting agreements'. The residence permits of non-employed PhD candidates are linked to the term of their hosting agreement. Their residence permit can be extended once their hosting agreement has been extended. The KICS (Knowledge Center for International Staff) can assist in this procedure. NB: The residence permits of family members are linked to those of employees and non-employed PhD candidates. These can also be extended.

#### PhD track fee

Some non-employed PhD candidates (or, where relevant, their external employer) pay an annual fee for their PhD track. These fees are used to fund various costs, for example, the cost of access to facilities such as the intranet and library, participation in the Graduate School and courses, visits to congresses and the costs of research such as laboratories, data storage and fieldwork. The 2020 fees of non-employed PhD candidates can, when applicable and possible, be waived/refunded, either in whole or in part, for example when courses, visits to congresses and specific research have had to be cancelled.

NB: the fees that are levied vary between and within faculties, for example, at faculty, school, institute or department level.

## **B. Standardised decision-making procedure**

The working group proposes that the generic framework of potential solutions be implemented using a standardised decision-making procedure. The advantage of a standardised decision-making procedure is that it avoids the need for faculties to develop their own policy. Moreover, it ensures that all faculties treat PhD candidates and postdocs equally. All faculties will implement the generic framework in the same transparent manner. This will result in uniformity, whilst at the same time providing scope for customisation (i.e. discretionary room is available for finding the solution or solutions that is/are most suitable for the personal situation of the PhD candidate/postdoc). A

decision-making procedure is proposed which can be implemented at either faculty or school level, as determined by the level most suited to the implementation procedure.

The decision-making procedure and the potential solutions put forward in the procedure also take account of the current phase of the research being performed by the relevant PhD candidate/postdoc. It is expected that the coronavirus crisis will probably have a lower impact on the research of PhD candidates/postdocs that is currently in either the planning or completion phase. The planning phase often offers more scope for the revision of the research design. Although it is often no longer possible to revise the research design in the completion phase, this is not usually a problem since the actual research has already been performed in the implementation phase. It will then be necessary to assess whether the research that has been performed to date (by PhD candidates) is sufficient to verify the candidate's aptitude. The coronavirus crisis will probably have the greatest impact on the research of PhD candidates/postdocs that is currently in the implementation phase. However, the need for and feasibility of an extension becomes an issue only at the end of their employment.

The decision-making procedure, which consists of a sequence of five steps, is based on the following line of reasoning: the primary solution approach is to complete research projects as far as possible in the available time and with the available resources by revising the content of research projects and/or adjusting expectations when necessary and possible. This solution approach must also be viewed in the light of the new system of Recognition & Rewards and the DORA principles that place the emphasis on quality (rather than quantity), content, creativity and the contribution that the research makes to the state of knowledge. The criterion for research for a PhD is the 'aptitude test to verify the ability to contribute to the independent pursuit of science'. The principle adopted for arriving at solutions is that it must ultimately be possible to verify the candidate's aptitude, irrespective of the method or way in which it is verified. The criterion for postdocs is usually 'the successful completion of a short research project', often with learning outcomes that are not clear. In these cases, it will be necessary to specify the learning outcomes explicitly and to assess whether the 'successful completion' criterion has been met for the project, irrespective of the method or way in which it has been completed. When completion in the available time and with the available resources is not possible, and revision of the research and/or adjustment proves impossible, then employed PhD candidates and postdocs can independently submit an application for a contract extension to what is referred to as the 'delay committee' of the faculty/school. This committee will review whether it is necessary to offer a contract extension.

It is proposed that employed PhD candidates/postdocs will only be able to submit an application for a contract extension in the last year, as a better assessment of the need to extend the contract, and if so, the term of the extension can be made near the end of employment. However, employed PhD candidates/postdocs who are not in their last contract year are requested to compile information about the delay and the argumentation for the necessary contract extension on the basis of the six questions that must be addressed in the application to the 'delay committee' (see below). This information will be documented in PhD candidate monitoring systems (such as TRACK) and/or HR systems and will be discussed in the annual assessment interviews. In his/her last contract year, the employed PhD candidate/postdoc will then be able to determine whether he/she has caught up with



the delay or a contract extension will still be necessary (and, consequently, an application must be submitted to the 'delay committee').

In summary, the standardised decision-making procedure consists of the following sequence of five steps (a flowchart of the procedure is enclosed in supplement 1):

1. Has the coronavirus crisis caused problems for the PhD candidate/postdoc that have resulted in a delay in the research?
  - Yes: go to next step
  - No: no solution required
2. Have options been identified, in consultation, for the redesign of the research, so that the programme can be completed in the original time and with the original resources (for PhD candidates: the candidate's aptitude can be verified; for postdocs: the project has been completed successfully)?
  - Yes: the research is redesigned in consultations between the PhD candidate/postdoc and the supervisor/principal investigator (and, where applicable, the external funder) and documented.
  - No: go to next step (with an explanation of why a redesign of the research is not possible)
3. Is the PhD candidate/postdoc in employment with UM?
  - Yes (employed PhD candidates and postdocs): go to next step
  - No (non-employed PhD candidates): where relevant, offer extension of hosting agreement, allowance for residence permit fee (also for family members) and waiver/refund of PhD track fee.
4. Is contract extension possible?
  - Yes: go to next step
  - No: where relevant, offer hosting agreement and allowance for residence permit fee (also for family members).
5. Submit compensation scheme application to the 'delay committee' of the faculty/school.
  - Contract extension on the basis of external funding (when possible, for example, from the grant provider), UM funding, or combination of external and UM funding. In addition, where relevant, allowance for residence permit fee (also for family members).
  - No contract extension. Option of lodging a formal objection with the 'central delay disputes committee'.

**1. Has the coronavirus crisis caused problems for the PhD candidate/postdoc that have resulted in a delay in the research?**

The impact of the coronavirus crisis varies between individuals and will vary between the types of research and the phase of the research. Personal circumstances will also influence the length of the delay. Factors considered to be relevant causes for delays include:

- Research that has been halted
- Laboratories or archives that are closed
- Research that can be performed less well

- Frictional delays (for example, the time required to redesign the study, register and seek approval from the ethics review committee for changes to the research design and communicating the changes to the participants)
- Reduced supervision (by supervisors/principal investigators)
- Extra teaching duties/online teaching duties
- Limited home facilities
- Informal care
- Care of children or relatives
- Personal illness
- Mental stress caused by the coronavirus crisis

The sole issue addressed by this question is whether the research has suffered a delay, irrespective of the reason (i.e. delay = delay).

Yes: go to next step	The PhD candidate/postdoc and supervisor/principal investigator discuss the options for the redesign of the research (in part in the light of the new system of Recognition & Rewards and the DORA principles). The guiding question for PhD candidates is whether the aptitude to contribute to the independent pursuit of science has been verified or, where relevant, this aptitude can be verified in some other manner.
No: no solution required	The PhD candidate and postdoc continue the research without further intervention.

***2. Have options been identified, in consultation, for the redesign of the research, so that the programme can be completed in the original time and with the original resources (for PhD candidates: the candidate's aptitude can be verified; for postdocs: the project has been completed successfully)?***

The generic framework offers suggestions for potential solutions relating to the revision of the research plan and/or adjustment of expectations, in part in the light of the new system of Recognition & Rewards and the DORA principles. These potential solutions serve as examples of solutions for this issue.

The potential solutions also need, when applicable, to be presented to the relevant external funder.

Yes: the research is redesigned and documented	The agreed solutions are drawn up in more detail by the PhD candidate/postdoc and the supervisor/principal investigator and, when necessary, presented to the external funder. The solutions are also recorded in PhD candidate monitoring systems, such as TRACK, and HR systems.
No: go to next step	The PhD candidate/postdoc examines the feasibility of a contract extension (with an explanation of why a redesign of the research is not possible)

***3. Is the PhD candidate/postdoc in employment with UM?***

Only employed PhD candidates (i.e. employee PhD candidates and PhD candidate employees) are in employment with UM and, consequently, come into consideration for a contract extension

funded by UM (the next steps). An important indicator is then the PhD candidate's /Postdoc's receipt of a salary from UM.

Non-employed PhD candidates (i.e. PhD scholarship candidates, externally funded PhD candidates and external PhD candidates) are not in employment with UM. Consequently, these PhD candidates cannot be offered a contract extension.

Yes: go to next step	The employed PhD candidate/postdoc examines the feasibility of contract extension.
No	<p>UM cannot offer the non-employed PhD candidate/postdoc a contract extension. The following options are then offered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The faculty will offer the PhD candidate/postdoc an extension of the hosting agreement so that he/she retains access to UM facilities such as the library.</li> <li>- International PhD candidates/postdocs: the faculty will reimburse the residence permit extension fee (also for family members) when a longer stay in the Netherlands is necessary. The residence permit extension fee is €174.</li> <li>- PhD candidates who pay an annual PhD track fee: when possible, the 2020 fee will be waived/refunded, either in whole or in part.</li> </ul> <p>It is also recommended that the PhD candidate/postdoc discusses the feasibility of extending the contract with the external funder or external employer, where relevant.</p>

**4. Is contract extension possible?**

The option for the extension of the contract of employed PhD candidates and postdocs is specified in the generic framework.

Employed PhD candidates

- The PhD track contract of employee PhD candidates covered by the CAO NU can in principle be extended without legal concerns. There are no restrictions with respect to the term and number of successive periods of employment. This means that an employment contract with a PhD candidate can be extended by indefinite terms and numbers of periods of employment.
- The chain provision is applicable to PhD candidate employees of UM with a fixed-term contract (not University Job Classification profile of P). The contract cannot in all cases be extended without problems.

Postdocs

Only postdocs (researchers 3 or 4 or lecturers) with a temporary contract that has not been extended to the maximum term of four years or has not already been extended twice (without gaps of at least six months) come into consideration for a contract extension.

Yes: go to next step	The PhD candidate/postdoc can submit an application for a contract extension to the 'delay committee'.
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No: alternative solution, where relevant	<p>A redesign of the research is not possible and an extension of the contract is not possible. The following options are then offered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The faculty will offer the PhD candidate/postdoc a hosting agreement so that he/she retains access to UM facilities such as the library.</li> <li>- International PhD candidates/postdocs: the faculty will reimburse the residence permit fee (also for family members) when a longer stay in the Netherlands is necessary.</li> </ul>
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**5. Submit compensation scheme application to the 'delay committee' of the faculty/school.**

*Delay committee*

A 'delay committee' to be set up at faculty/school level will assess whether PhD candidates/postdocs will be offered a contract extension. The term of reference for this assessment is that the previous steps have not yielded a solution and that the delay is attributable to the coronavirus crisis. Consequently, the committee will assess the need for a contract extension and the necessary term of the extension of the contract. The term of the necessary extension of the contract is dependent on the course of the coronavirus crisis and the factors discussed above (the type of research, phase of the research and personal circumstances). This means that the necessary extension of the contract will vary from case to case.

The financial situation of the faculties/schools/sectors/supervisors/principal investigators and the availability of external funding, where relevant, is not a factor that is taken into account in the assessment of applications. This is important to guarantee that the need for a contract extension for PhD candidates and postdocs due to the coronavirus crisis is assessed in a uniform manner, irrespective of financial status.

A crucial element of the assessment is the question whether the delay is actually attributable to the coronavirus crisis, as contract extensions are intended solely to address delays resulting from the coronavirus crisis. If necessary, the delay committee can make use of other processes and systems (for example, PhD candidate monitoring systems, such as TRACK) to assess the extent to which a 'regular delay' is an issue.

The following options are available for funding contract extensions:

- Contract extension on the basis of external funding from, for example, the NWO, European Commission, collection box funds, private parties or the government. The alternative use of the budget for the funded research project can also be reviewed in consultation with the external funder, for example:
  - o the reallocation of the part of the budget for travel/congress expenses (that may possibly not be expended in full due to the coronavirus crisis) to contract extension;
  - o a critical review of options for savings on research costs to be incurred for planned studies/experiments (efficiency savings) or on other costs to fund a contract extension.
- Contract extension based on funding by UM.
- Contract extension based on a combination of external funding and funding by UM, for example when the external funding will be insufficient for the full term of the extension of the contract.

When a contract extension results in the need for a longer stay in the Netherlands then the faculty will reimburse the residence permit extension fee (and also for family members).

The 'delay committee' will decide on the need for a contract extension and the term of the extension on the basis of an application with information that addresses at least the following:

1. Has the coronavirus crisis caused problems that have resulted in a delay in the research?
2. How has the coronavirus crisis caused the delay?
3. What is the nature of the delay?
4. Which potential solutions have been discussed and implemented to redesign the research and why is this insufficient?
5. Why are other solutions impossible?
6. Why is a contract extension necessary?

The 'delay committee' will also hear disputes between PhD candidates/postdocs and their supervisor/principal investigator on the possible redesign of the research addressed in question 2. PhD candidates and postdocs can also contact the regular confidential advisors.

#### *Applications*

PhD candidates/postdocs independently submit applications for a contract extension to the 'delay committee'. To avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest, explicit consent from the supervisor/principal investigator for these applications is not required. The PhD candidate/postdoc must at least provide the information answering the six aforementioned questions. When the research is externally funded, the PhD candidate/postdoc must state whether the external funder has funds for a contract extension. The application submitted by the PhD candidate/postdoc must include an explanation from the supervisor/principal investigator which states why the research can/cannot be redesigned and why a contract extension is/is not necessary.

PhD candidates/postdocs must be in their last contract year before they can submit applications to the 'delay committee' for a contract extension. However, employed PhD candidates/postdocs who are not in their last contract year are requested to prepare their application in advance and to have this documented in PhD candidate monitoring systems (such as TRACK) and HR systems. This application/documentation will be discussed in the annual assessment interviews. In his/her last contract year, the PhD candidate/postdoc will then be able to determine whether he/she has caught up with the delay or an application will need to be submitted for a contract extension.

NB: PhD candidates/postdocs registered in two or more faculties (in a financial sense) are requested to submit applications for a contract extension to the 'delay committee' of each faculty. The application must also state the faculties to which the application has been submitted. The delay committees of the faculties will then consult on their approach.

Contract extension on the basis of external funding	A contract extension is offered on the basis of the funds made available by the external funder of the research.
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Contract extension with UM financing	A contract extension is offered on the basis of UM funding.
Contract extension on the basis of external and UM funding	A contract extension is offered on the basis of the funds made available by the external funder of the research in combination with UM funding.
No contract extension, option of lodging a formal objection with the central delay disputes committee	When the 'delay committee' decides not to offer a contract extension to the PhD candidate/postdoc then the PhD candidate/postdoc has the option (in cooperation with the supervisor/principal investigator) of seeking an alternative solution (customisation). The 'delay committee' of the faculty/school can, as the situation arises, decide to make a recommendation on an alternative solution of this nature. The PhD candidate/postdoc can also lodge an objection against the decision not to offer a contract extension with a <u>central delay disputes committee</u> set up for this purpose.

### **Delay committee (faculty/school)**

Each faculty sets up a 'delay committee' that assesses whether the PhD candidate/postdoc will be offered a contract extension (step 5 of the decision-making procedure). This committee will also hear disputes between the PhD candidate/postdoc and supervisor/principal investigator relating to the possible redesign of the research addressed in question 2.

This committee can be set up at either faculty or school level. In the latter case a faculty may have a number of committees.

It is also important that the delay committees treat applications in the same manner. The six questions to be answered in the application will promote this uniform treatment. The diversity of the problems and impact of the coronavirus crisis – and the resultant need for customisation – is such that it has been decided not to formulate the assessment criteria more precisely. Instead, what are referred to as 'calibration sessions' will be held in which the delay committees or representatives from the committees discuss specific cases with the intention of furthering uniform assessments by the various delay committees. Regular calibration sessions will be held during the initial phase. The frequency will be reduced once the necessary common understanding has developed. The outcomes of these calibration sessions will be reported to the Research Platform.

### **Central delay disputes committee**

One 'central delay disputes committee' will be set up. This committee will hear disputes arising from step 5, namely disputes between the delay committee of the faculty/school and PhD candidates/postdocs on contract extensions and the terms of contract extensions.

As the central delay disputes committee will then need to review the content of research projects, it is recommended that a number of officers with the necessary expertise be appointed members of the committee. This will also avoid the need for one person to study a large number of files. It is also important that the members of the committee are independent and impartial and include experts in

the fields of ethics and integrity and Recognition & Rewards. The committee can call in expertise if so required.

## **8. Implementation**

The faculties are asked to implement the generic framework of solution approaches and the standardised decision-making procedure in their faculty on the basis of this proposal. It is crucial that the faculties actually work according to these frameworks. Deviations from these frameworks are only permitted with the exceptional consent of the Executive Board (i.e. hardship clause). Faculties are also asked to be generous towards PhD candidates and postdocs, and to contribute to the prevention of delays, for example by sparing PhD candidates and postdocs when allocating (extra) teaching tasks. Faculties will consider to what extent it is feasible to spare PhD candidates and postdocs when allocating (extra) teaching tasks, so that this does not lead to a higher workload for other researchers.

## Supplement 1: Flowchart of the standardised decision-making procedure

