Feedback loop of the experiences of FHML PhD candidates with the supervision process

Since the beginning of 2019, supervisors of FHML PhD candidates have been given insight into the feedback on the supervision process as experienced by their PhD candidates. The anonymity of individual PhD candidates is safeguarded, as *only average, anonymous ratings* will be shown when *four or more different PhD candidates* have provided feedback in PhD TRACK.

The Board, Schools, Institutes and Faculty PhD Committee (FPC) of FHML consider it important that feedback is gathered on a structural basis from PhD candidates on how they experience their PhD trajectory in broad sense. For this purpose, PhD candidates are requested to fill out a questionnaire in PhD TRACK each year, one month prior to the end of each PhD-year, to sensitize them regarding aspects to discuss in their annual appraisal interview. The parts of the TRACK questionnaire in which PhD candidates provide feedback on how they experience their supervisors' performance are *confidential*; only the PhD coordinator of the FHML School or Institute that the PhD candidate is part of has access. If the progress of the PhD trajectory, or an individual supervisor, is scored suboptimal by a particular PhD candidate (= lower than seven out of ten), the PhD coordinator receives a signal by email. He or she can then gain more insight into the situation via the questionnaire and contact the PhD candidate to ask whether (s)he needs support. It has been agreed upon before the implementation of PhD TRACK at FHML, that PhD coordinators will never reveal the scores of individual PhD candidates to supervisors, or within their School, or to the Board.

The FHML Board finds it important to gather information on the satisfaction with supervision and complete the feedback loop to the persons concerned, regardless whether this would need improvement or if it leaves nothing to desire. This is in line with the wish expressed by both PhD candidates and supervisors in a Faculty-wide FPC-survey after the implementation of PhD TRACK, similar to the feedback on educational activities of lecturers by students. At other UM Faculties, there is no such feedback loop regarding the performance of PhD supervisors as yet.

> *"Given the amount of time they spend together and the nature of their contact, also taking into account their interdependence, the relationship between a PhD candidate and his or her supervisor is pivotal for their achievements. (…) Trying to improve the quality of supervision by improving the relationship between PhD candidate and his or her supervisor requires learning about their needs, wants and expectations." H. van der Boom, G. Klabbers, K. Putnik, M. Woolderink (2013). It takes two to tango, p. 5-6, https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/support/phds.*

The feedback loop of the supervision process at FHML is now as follows:

- PhD candidates fill out nine sections of questions in the annual questionnaire in PhD TRACK. Section six (table 1) concerns the performance of individual supervisors and section seven (table 2) the supervision team as a whole. These sections are only visible to the particular PhD candidate and the PhD coordinator and hidden for all other users;
- The PhD coordinator receives information on the satisfaction of PhD candidates within the School/Institute by way of the questionnaire results and can provide support to a particular PhD candidate if needed and agreed upon together;
- TRACK will draw up a picture of the average and anonymous 'performance ratings' in a supervisor's account, only when four or more different PhD candidates have provided feedback on this person in questions 6.3.1. to 6.3.11. The PhD coordinator has access to this picture and the average ratings of all supervisors in the School/Institute;

- Supervisors are requested to discuss the average and anonymous 'performance ratings' in PhD TRACK annually, preferably over a period of several years, in the annual appraisal meeting with their senior. Heads of Departments and School/Institute Boards are informed.

Table 1: Questions in section six of the annual PhD TRACK questionnaire

6.1. Open question	Role of this supervisor in your project
6.2. Open question	Is this supervisor responsible for your daily supervision?
6.3. Keywords as visualized in the ratings picture and the related questions in the questionnaire:	
6.3.1. **Accessibility**	This supervisor is there for me when I need him/her
6.3.2. **Advice**	I am satisfied with the way this supervisor helps me with my writing (papers, reports, articles etc.)
6.3.3. **Agreements**	This supervisor sticks to the agreements we make
6.3.4. **Competence**	This supervisor has expertise relevant to my research topic
6.3.5. **Encouragement**	I am satisfied with the way this supervisor encourages me to increase my knowledge & skills
6.3.6. **Enthusiasm**	This supervisor makes me feel enthusiastic about my research project
6.3.7. **Feedback**	I receive useful feedback from this supervisor
6.3.8. **Interest**	This supervisor is genuinely interested in my work
6.3.9. **Management**	This supervisor carefully keeps track of the time schedule of my research project and intervenes if necessary
6.3.10. **Networking**	I am satisfied with the way this supervisor stimulates the expansion of my network of professional contacts
6.3.11. **Responsiveness**	This supervisor provides feedback quickly
6.4. Score 0-10	On a scale from 0 (very poor) to 10 (excellent), how would you rate the overall performance of this supervisor?
6.5. Open question	What overall effect does this supervisor's performance have on your PhD project?
6.6. Open question	Have you taken measures to improve the situation vis-à-vis this supervisor

Table 2: Questions in section seven of the annual PhD TRACK questionnaire

7.1	Approximately how many hours per month do you receive direct supervision (i.e., planned discussions with a clear focus on aspects of the PhD trajectory)?
7.2	On average, how often do you meet with one or more of your supervisors to discuss your work?
7.3	How satisfied are you with the frequency of the coaching you have received from your supervisor(s) during the last year?
7.4	How satisfied are you with the content of the coaching you have received from your supervisor(s) during the last year?
7.5	On a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely), how satisfied are you with the overall supervision/coaching you are receiving during your PhD project?
7.6	Have you experienced problems with any of your supervisors in the last year? Sub question 7.6.1: Have these problems been resolved?

The FHML envisages that the features in PhD TRACK trigger both PhD candidates and PhD supervisors to pick up the responsibility regarding the supervision process together, in this way contributing to an open and respectful atmosphere of mutual trust between PhD candidates and their supervisors, and between supervisors and their seniors on PhD supervision matters. PhD coordinators, confidential advisors and HR advisors can provide support if needed.

In case of questions, you can approach the PhD coordinator of your School or Institute, to be found on the FHML PhD web pages, or the Policy advisor PhD affairs and PhD TRACK coordinator of FHML, Hannerieke van der Boom.