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**Obtaining a PhD**  
[www.studyinholland.nl](http://www.studyinholland.nl)

# Doing your PhD in Holland



## Why do your PhD in Holland?

- Holland ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> worldwide in number of publications per researcher.
- Holland ranks 4<sup>th</sup> worldwide in impact of research publications.
- Holland has excellent graduate schools.
- There is a large variety of research fields.
- There are fourteen research universities.
- A PhD is not regarded as a study but as serious research.
- PhD candidates and their supervisor work in close collaboration.
- There is a great amount of interdisciplinary collaboration.
- PhD researchers are often paid employees.

In Holland, research is carried out by research universities, research institutes and companies. Only the fourteen research universities can award PhD degrees. However, since other research institutes generally work in close collaboration with these universities, they can also provide positions to PhD candidates. You can find an overview of the Dutch research universities at [www.nuffic.nl/institutions](http://www.nuffic.nl/institutions).

In addition to the standard PhD degree, the three universities of technology also offer design and technological design programmes in a number of engineering fields. These consist of advanced study and a personal design assignment. Technological design programmes require two years of study to complete and graduates obtain the degree of 'Professional Doctorate in Engineering (PDEng)'.

## What is it like to do a PhD in Holland?

The aim of doing a PhD is to complete a dissertation based on original research. In Holland this requires a minimum of four years of research and writing. PhD research projects and dissertations must of course always be original work, as candidates are required to make an original contribution to the body of knowledge in their field.

The dissertation is made public and parts of it are often used as articles in international journals. In general Dutch dissertations are held in high esteem since they live up to the highest academic standards.

Once the research is complete the supervisor judges whether the dissertation is ready for oral defence and publication. Then a committee of professors is appointed to read and approve the dissertation and to question the candidate during a traditional, centuries-old oral defence ceremony.

## Research schools and graduate schools

Doing a PhD in Holland is research activity and involves little course work. PhD candidates start doing research from day one. This allows them to develop their own ideas and priorities in their research while maintaining close contact with their supervisor. All PhD candidates are part of a graduate school or research school. These schools provide them with an inspiring research environment. They offer tailor-made study programmes, master classes, seminars and conferences.

In research schools, multiple research universities and research institutes join their forces and knowledge. At the level of a subject area universities and institutions work closely together in offering in-depth knowledge. Within a research school, you will meet PhD candidates and advanced researchers in your field from your own and other Dutch universities.

Graduate schools, by contrast, are organizations within universities. Like research schools, they provide challenging study and network environments. They can take different forms. Some graduate schools are interdisciplinary, other graduate schools focus on a few or only one discipline.

Each PhD student is assigned a supervisor who will provide daily guidance through the entire research period. Most often this supervisor will be an associate professor or a full professor.

## Finding a PhD position

In general, PhD candidates in Holland are regarded as professional researchers rather than as students. The fact that the majority of the PhD candidates is employed, strengthens their status as professional researcher. In Holland there are three types of PhD positions:

### PhD researchers employed by the institution

Of the total number of PhD candidates in Holland, the majority sign an employment contract with the research institute at which

they do their PhD research. There are two ways in which you can find a PhD position: through vacancies or networks.

- In the first case a research group has created a research proposal for which they have created a PhD position. Such positions, open for international candidates, are often advertised internationally by means of job boards such as [www.academictransfer.com](http://www.academictransfer.com), notices in scientific journals, letters to academic institutions where potential candidates study and on the website of the institution. Candidates wishing to apply should contact the institution directly.
- Furthermore, research groups might have some spare budget for innovative research. If you know on which topic you want to do PhD research and you cannot find a vacancy which fits your interests, it is wise to pro-actively propose your research to the research groups of your choice. For an overview of the disciplines which are offered at the research universities and research institutes please refer to the factsheets of the Dutch research universities at [www.vsnu.nl/Universities/Research-Universities.htm](http://www.vsnu.nl/Universities/Research-Universities.htm).

For more information on the wages or other employment rights go to: [www.vsnu.nl/Workstudy/Work-in-the-Netherlands.htm](http://www.vsnu.nl/Workstudy/Work-in-the-Netherlands.htm)

## Fellowship or grant

About one sixth of the PhD candidates in the Netherlands are not employed by the institution but finance their PhD research through a fellowship or grant. Often these candidates come from abroad. If you want to use this option there are two things you need to arrange:

1. find yourself a fellowship or grant. To find available fellowships and grants please visit: [www.euraxess.nl/fellowships-grants](http://www.euraxess.nl/fellowships-grants) and [www.grantfinder.nl](http://www.grantfinder.nl).
2. find yourself a supervisor at an institution. A supervisor will support your proposal and serve as the official supervisor for your research. Try to find someone with a leading reputation in your field. You can direct your inquiry to the central information office, which can provide information about the opportunities available at the university or institute in question. The best way to find a supervisor is through international networks in your field. Your own professors and their networks can be a good source of information. Furthermore, you can also find information at alumni networks, Nuffic Netherlands Education Support Offices ([www.nuffic.nl/neso](http://www.nuffic.nl/neso)) or blogs.

## A PhD next to your job

Sometimes it is possible to obtain a PhD degree next to a (full-time) job. If you (and your employer) are interested in this option, contact the institution of your choice for more information.

### Dutch scientists have a great reputation when compared to the rest of the world.

- Publications per researcher: 2<sup>nd</sup> place.
- Citation impact scores: 4<sup>th</sup> place.
- Eleven Dutch research universities are ranked in the top 200 of the Times Higher Education Supplement 2009.
- Twelve Dutch research universities are ranked in the top 500 of the Academic Ranking of World Universities 2009.

When I decided to study in the Netherlands, I realized that I actually knew very little about the Dutch culture. So the first thing I did was to Google “studying in Holland” and I found loads of useful information. I foresaw immediately that being a foreigner was not going to be a problem. Soon after arriving I knew where to buy a bicycle, the closest supermarket and where to get detailed online information about public transportation.

University-wise, I could have never imagined a better working environment. English is the standard language and I was welcomed as a new member into the scientific community of the Centre for Molecular and Biomolecular Informatics. They gave me a folder with detailed information about appointments I would need to make to arrange state and

university-related formalities, making it easy not to miss out anything important.

Given that this is a very densely populated country, it can be hard to get a place to live. When I arrived, the student housing association arranged a temporary stay in a guest house apartment until I could find a place myself. Planning in advance was crucial for this, and now I am very happy with my housing situation.

Last but not least, I made friends by joining local social events and to really experience what it is like to live as a Dutch person.

More recently I have started to explore the neighbouring countries, since it is possible to do so in a very affordable way, given the excellent geographical position of the Netherlands.

## Isabel Duarte, Portugal

Radboud University, Nijmegen  
PhD in Comparative Genomics



“University-wise, I could  
← have never imagined a better  
working environment.”

## The practical side of doing your PhD

### Admission requirements

PhD positions in Holland are of high quality, therefore candidates have to meet high standards. It is important that candidates begin their research with a solid background in the theory and methods of their field. You will need to have a recognized master's degree. Satisfactory knowledge of English is another requirement. In Holland, dissertations are usually written in English. This requires full mastery of English idiom and grammar. These language skills must be demonstrable before work on the dissertation begins.

With these considerations in mind, the individual university will determine whether to admit the candidate.

### Tuition fees

Some Dutch institutions charge tuition fees for enrolment and supervision. Each research university has its own way of charging for the cost of supervision and access to laboratories and other facilities. Fees also vary from one discipline to the next, depending on aspects such as whether or not expensive equipment is required.

### Euraxess

At [www.euraxess.nl](http://www.euraxess.nl) you can find all sorts of practical information useful for researchers (including PhD candidates) coming to Holland. You can read about immigration procedures, social security, taxation, healthcare insurance, etc. If you need an entry visa, you are advised to contact your institution to find out what to do in your particular situation.