

To: The Executive Board

Date
17-12-2024

By email

Subject
KRUR 2025 – Right of Consent

Our reference
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Your reference

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Enclosure
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Dear members of the Executive Board,

With this letter, the University Council refers to its right of consent in respect to the KRUR 2025 and consents to the KRUR 2025.

The information provided by you to the entire council for this topic was the following:

- Appendix 1 288.115 Proposed revision of the Election Rules of the UC
- Appendix 2 University Council electoral regulations 2023
- Appendix 3 CONCEPT KRUR 2024 20241016
- Appendix 4 Overview of proposed amendments KRUR 2024 20241016 (NL+ENG)
- Appendix 5 CSB - Overview of Election Schedule (incl. possibility of new ballot)

The UC discussed these documents in its Plenary meetings of 19 November, 3 December and 17 December.

Additionally, the council strongly advises on the creation of a PhD-seat for the University Council. It is the explicit wish of the Council to put this seat in place in the 2025 elections. Either way, the council requests the EB to update the KRUR and have the council vote on this renewed KRUR this academic year.

During the meeting of 3 December, policy workers of the CSB joined the council to answer questions. Additionally, the council asked technical questions and had contact with the CSB about a PhD-student seat. The CSB indicated to have a neutral position about such a change and later indicated to be willing to advise on the technical implementation of a supported proposal in the KRUR.

Active participation of PhD candidates in the University Council is essential for representative and effective participation. PhD candidates form a significant group within the university community, with specific interests and experiences that often differ from those of students, or other staff members. These include;

Funding issues

There is a great variation between the funding of different PhD candidates. Some candidates only get partial funding, or unclarity about their funding.

Mental Health problems

Around half of the PhD candidates have an increased risk of mental health problems.¹ Further, recent studies have shown that roughly one third of all PhD candidates already suffer from mental health related problems such as burnout.²

Harassment

Survey data³ reveals that 18.6% of PhD candidates have experienced some form of workplace harassment, including discrimination (8.6%), breaches of the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (4.9%), sexual harassment (3%), and other forms like bullying and intimidation (4.5%). These issues disproportionately affect certain groups, with women experiencing harassment more frequently than men, and international and scholarship PhD candidates facing higher rates of discrimination.

Dependency on supervisors

PhD candidates are exceptionally dependent on their supervisors for guidance, mentorship, access to resources, and ultimately, the successful completion of their doctoral project. This dependency creates a power imbalance that can make PhD candidates particularly vulnerable. Issues such as inadequate supervision, conflicting expectations, or even instances of mistreatment or abuse of power can have a devastating impact on a PhD candidate's progress, well-being, and career prospects.

Additional problems for international students

International PhD candidates experience additional vulnerabilities, including visa dependencies, language barriers, cultural adjustment challenges, and heightened reliance on the university and their supervisors.

Allocating a dedicated seat in the University Council for a PhD candidate ensures that this distinct voice is structurally heard in decision-making processes, a voice that has been absent during most of the previous ten years of this council, even though roughly one in three EUR staff members is a PhD

candidate. PhD candidates are also currently not in the Erasmus Labour Council.

This not only contributes to better representation of all university constituencies but also offers PhD candidates a valuable opportunity to develop crucial skills outlined in the PhD Competence Model. Participation in the council directly enhances competencies in areas such as 'Communication' (effectively conveying ideas to diverse audiences), 'Personal Effectiveness' (adapting to achieve results in a complex environment), and 'Leadership and Management' (contributing to strategic decision-making).

Furthermore, this involvement directly aligns with the principles of the university's Rewards and Recognition policy, which emphasizes valuing diverse contributions to the academic community. By actively engaging in university governance, PhD candidates gain practical experience in policy formation, network within the university community, and exert direct influence on the factors that shape their academic experience. This direct involvement in policy development is crucial for effectively addressing the specific challenges faced by PhD candidates and fostering a stimulating and supportive environment for their research.

There are several ways in which a reserved seat for PhD candidates on the University Council Staff section could be implemented. The general idea is to reserve an extra seat specifically for PhD candidates, parallel to the regular elections per constituency. This could mean that when a PhD candidate runs in a constituency, this candidate, under certain conditions, becomes eligible for this special PhD candidate seat. There should also be a safety net in case no PhD candidate applies, for example by assigning the seat to a constituency with a high number of eligible voters (similar to how other additional seats are allocated), this prevents the seat to remain empty if no candidate steps forward. PhD candidates and their supervisors could make tailored arrangement such as the candidate to only serve one year to ensure sufficient progress for the research.

The existing active and passive voting rights of PhD candidates in the KRUR, combined with their clear identification in university systems (they are a separate category in the job classification system, UFO), ensure the technical feasibility of this change.

Research of the council shows that several universities already have had PhD students on their University Councils continuously in current times and the past. For example, at Leiden University, 2 to 3 of the 8 seats have been held by PhD

students for many years. Utrecht University has a similar situation with 2 to 3 PhD students on a council of 12 seats. In Groningen, there is usually at least one PhD representative on the council of 12, with periods in the past of even 2 seats. TU Delft recently, after a period without representation, managed to secure no fewer than 6 seats on the works council with a combination of PhD candidates and postdocs. At Radboud University, there has been continuous representation of at least one PhD student on the council since 2010. These examples demonstrate that PhD students are willing to put themselves forward for Council work and suggest that perhaps our unique system of faculty-bound seats is seen as a barrier for PhD-students.

Having weighed all arguments, the Council widely supports the idea of the creation of a dedicated PhD-student seat with the hopes that this will stimulate PhD-students to put themselves forward as candidates for the UC because they are an important group of university staff that has not been widely represented at the UC in previous years. Because of this, the council believes that this change should be in place for the 2025 election season.

Members of the UC have also spoken to multiple PhD-students at different faculties at EUR, they have indicated support for such a change. Additionally, the Dutch organization for PhD candidates (PNN) officially supports the idea of ensuring PhD candidates in seats of participatory bodies.⁴

The University Council consents with the required two-thirds majority to the proposed KRUR and supports with a two-third majority the change to accommodate a PhD-student seat, as outlined above.

The council asks the EB to respond to this letter of consent with a letter explaining how the PhD-seat will be created for the upcoming election. The CSB already has some suggested article-drafts. The council would be happy to think along with the EB, if this is desired. Due to the upcoming deadlines, the council kindly asks the EB for a swift reply.

Furthermore, the council would like to stress that it regrets that this KRUR is only discussed with the council at the last cycle before a new election cycle starts, severely hindering the input the council could deliver. The council is aware that the presidium of the council was consulted nearly a year ago for input, but the current council has not been consulted. The council regrets that because of this, a thorough discussion with the council was not possible. An example of such a discussion would be the discussion about the tools for the

CSB to effectively fulfill their task. The council additionally therefore advises the EB to look into expanding the tools of the CSB to enact the KRUR and hopes this will be taken into consideration for future changes to the KRUR.

Lastly, it has come to the attention of the council that members of the Council that must leave their seat because of for instance their pension, cannot be replaced according to the CSB if the vacancy comes too early before the next election. The council is worried that this hinders the representation of the council and advises the EB to look into changing this.

With kind regards,

On behalf of the University Council,



I. Cune-Noten
Chair University Council