



Memorandum

To : University Council

From : Secretary Central Election Office with input from Legal Affairs and Academic Affairs

Attachment : Attachment 1: The proposal of the University Council as received by the secretary of the Central Election Office (in Dutch)

Date : November 6th, 2025

Subject : CSB advies over voorstel Universiteitsraad PhD-zetel

Recommendation

The University Council had requested to include a specific PhD seat to the electoral regulations of the University Council. Below the input of Legal affairs, Academic Affairs, and the secretary of the central election office is added. The following can be concluded from this.

While there are no legal objections for such a PhD seat, there are organizational and governance reasons that also weigh in on such a decision.

The first question is what problem is solved by adding a PhD seat. In the current election system PhD students are already able to put themselves up as candidates, also on several levels PhD's can already give direct input. As stated by legal affairs it should be clear what justifies the separate electoral district for PhD students, without the risk of a PhD seat not being filled, which is in no one's interest.

The University council wants to implement this seat based on the assumption that the problem is based on hierarchy within the faculties and the length of term. However, the central election office has never received such signals, and the University Council has not presented input that supports this.

The PhD seat will decrease the amount of seats for employees and specifically decrease the amount of seats of the biggest faculty. Therefore this should also be discussed with the faculty council of the specific faculty.

At the moment Academic Affairs is working on a PhD council, which will furthermore strengthen the position of PhD students within EUR. Keeping close contact between the University Council and the PhD council could ensure that important topics can be picked up by the council as a whole. This way this will not be a task for just one person, one representative, within the council (also considering the workload of the PhD seat).

The University Council would have a stronger case if the request for a specific PhD seat would be requested from this newly established PhD council. This provides more certainty that the seat will be filled and will add to the representation of PhD interests.

Therefore it is strongly recommended to put the PhD seat on hold. To optimize the collaboration with and use the input from the PhD council, and if necessary let them advocate the need of a PhD seat in the future. Making sure this is an affective addition to the University Council.

Input Legal Affairs

Below is the reflection from Legal Affairs regarding the concept proposal of introducing a dedicated seat for PhD students in the University Council.

Legal Requirements

Based on the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act (*Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek*, Article 9.31 WHW et seq.), Legal Affairs sees, in principle, no objections to granting a dedicated seat for PhD students. Under the current Electoral Regulations of the University Council (*Kiesreglement Universiteitsraad, KRUR*), university staff at EUR are broadly represented through electoral districts that cover faculties and services. For larger electoral districts, it is possible to allocate an additional seat. However, the current electoral regulations do not provide the option to reserve a separate seat for PhD students.

In total, there are 24 seats, and according to Article 9.31(2) WHW, an equal distribution between staff and students is required. Article 5.2 KRUR stipulates that 9 seats are assigned to the staff section and 12 to the student section. The remaining three seats are also allocated to the staff section.

Introducing a seat for PhD students would therefore mean that one of these three additional seats must be removed. Furthermore, Article 5.2 KRUR would need to be amended to include a new electoral district for PhD students.

According to Article 9.34(4) WHW, individuals who are not employed by the university may still participate in the University Council; they are then regarded as staff members. The law specifies that this must promote effective participation in university governance. This article therefore also allows, for instance, scholarship PhD candidates (*beurspromovendi*) to become members of the University Council.

Defining the PhD Student Group

In the email correspondence, it is suggested that PhD students could stand for election either within their faculty or within the PhD community, and that they themselves could choose their electoral district:

"PhD studenten kunnen ervoor kiezen om hun kiesdistrict leeg te laten bij de kandidaatstelling, waarna zij tijdens de openbare zitting van de kandidaatstelling (of tot twee dagen voor het opengaan van de stemmingen) kunnen besluiten voor welk kiesdistrict zij kandidaat wensen te staan. (artikel 12)"

PhD students can choose to leave their electoral district blank when registering as a candidate, after which they may decide, during the public session for candidate

registration (or up to two days before voting begins), for which electoral district they wish to stand (Article 12)."

Legal Affairs believes it would be preferable to clearly define the boundaries between electoral districts in advance, so that PhD students do not need to make this choice themselves, and so that last-minute corrections or adjustments are avoided. Possible guidelines could determine whether a PhD student belongs to the faculty's electoral district or to the PhD student district. For other staff members, the main criterion is where the staff member primarily works.

Legal Affairs also wonders whether non-PhD staff members could be eligible to stand as candidates in the PhD student district. This option could, for example, be used if there are no PhD candidates willing to run, but other EUR staff members who work closely with PhD candidates are available. Such a staff member could then take a seat on the University Council.

In general, we believe it would be advisable to provide a clear justification for the establishment of a separate electoral district for PhD students.

Representation

Another point of attention concerns the potential representation of the entire PhD community by the elected member of the University Council. Legal Affairs can imagine that a representative from a faculty or service, through the existing "lower" levels of consultation—such as the Programme Committee and the Faculty Council—has easier access to relevant input for the University Council.

At present, work is being done to establish a PhD Council, through which PhD students can engage in consultations with the university's central administration. It would be advisable to explore whether the PhD Council could play an active role in relation to the seat in the University Council. The regulations governing the PhD Council could then potentially be amended accordingly.

Input Academic Affairs

The reflection from Legal Affairs raises many valuable points and provides a clear overview of the considerations relevant to this topic. The following adds a policy-oriented reflection to these considerations.

The perspective of PhD candidates is of great importance to the university. They not only bring a unique and substantive viewpoint on research and education but also represent the next generation of scholars.

Within the university, the input of PhD candidates is already secured at various levels. All faculties have a faculty PhD council (the council at ESPhil is currently being established). At the central level, there is regular consultation with the chairs of these faculty PhD councils: six meetings take place each year, two of which are attended by the rector magnificus. Work is currently underway to formalize this consultation in the form of a central PhD council (referred to by Legal Affairs as the "PhD Council"). The aim is to formalize the existing interaction between the PhD council and the university administration so that both

parties can connect, exchange information, and coordinate effectively on issues that affect PhD candidates.

During the discussion of the proposal for the central PhD council with the vice-deans of Research, it was emphasized that alignment among the various bodies where input from PhD candidates is sought is essential. This helps prevent unnecessary workload for PhD candidates.

A significant challenge for PhD candidates is the time investment required of representatives in participatory governance. Research by the PhD Network Netherlands (PNN) shows that PhD candidates on average take more than five years to complete their PhD trajectory—one year longer than the standard four-year contract. Combining the demands of the PhD trajectory with a structural role in participatory governance, particularly in the university council, therefore represents a substantial burden.

Within the Dutch university landscape, roughly two models can be distinguished for the involvement of PhD candidates in participatory governance:

1. **Formal representation within the university council** – for example, at Leiden University and Wageningen University, where PhD candidates participate in central participatory governance either through the staff section or via parties specifically representing PhD candidates.
2. **Separate PhD councils or platforms with regular consultation with the administration** – such as at the University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Both models offer valuable points of reference. The key does not lie in the chosen structure, but in ensuring regular contact, visibility, and sufficient space for PhD-related topics within university decision-making.

Input from secretary Central Election Office

The secretary of the Central Election Office (CSB) has reviewed the proposal of the University Council to establish a dedicated PhD seat within the Council. After careful consideration, several points arise regarding the necessity, feasibility, and added value of such a measure.

Existing participation opportunities for PhD candidates

PhD candidates with an employment contract at EUR already fall under the staff section of the University Council and therefore have the right to stand for election and participate fully in university governance. Introducing a separate PhD seat would blur the current distinction within the staff constituency and create possible unnecessary differentiation between employee groups especially if with the dedicated PhD-seat would also entail a different length of term.

Lack of evidence for the alleged deterrent effect of the current system

The Central Election Office has received no signals indicating that the election process is experienced as discouraging by PhD candidates.

It is however conceivable that the standard two-year term for staff representatives may be perceived as burdensome given the typically short duration of a PhD trajectory. This argues

for more flexible forms of representation—an issue currently being addressed through the renewed PhD Council.

Reduction of electoral rights within the largest staff district

According to the proposal, the creation of a dedicated PhD seat would require withdrawing one of the existing seats from the largest staff district, usually a faculty. This would reduce the number of electable positions within that district, thereby limiting the passive voting rights of staff members.

Since passive voting rights are considered a fundamental democratic principle, such a decision must be coordinated with the affected district—meaning, in this case, the relevant faculty council should be consulted. To date, this consultation has not taken place. It is advised that such consultation takes place before the formal consultation of the PhD seat.

Re-establishment of the PhD Council

At present, Academic Affairs is working on re-establishing the PhD Council at EUR. Although the Council has existed for many years, its activity declined over time due to decreasing interest among PhD candidates. Recently, however, PhD candidates have expressed a renewed commitment to revitalizing the Council, a development warmly welcomed by the Rector Magnificus.

A draft regulation has already been prepared, providing the Council with a stronger legal and organizational foundation within the university. This Council is explicitly designed to represent the diversity of the PhD community across faculties, disciplines, and appointment types—something a single PhD seat in the University Council could not achieve.

Ambiguity regarding roles and responsibilities

The proposal does not yet clarify whether the envisaged PhD seat would have overlapping or complementary powers relative to the PhD Council. Such ambiguity could lead to fragmented representation, confusion about mandates, and even conflicting advice or decisions. It is therefore advised to postpone the formal establishment of a dedicated PhD seat until the regulations of the PhD Council have been officially approved, in order to prevent overlapping or conflicting rights, duties, and responsibilities.

Limited representation through a single seat

Whereas the PhD Council can include representatives from multiple faculties, a single PhD seat in the University Council would offer only very limited representation. The Council's broader and more inclusive structure ensures that diverse perspectives among PhD candidates are adequately reflected.

Role clarity and effectiveness in advocacy

The PhD Council is explicitly designed to represent and advocate for PhD interests both within EUR and at the national level, through collaboration with PhD Councils of other universities. It therefore serves as a more effective and specialized platform for raising PhD-related issues to the Executive Board than a single University Council seat, which must also address a wide range of broader institutional topics.

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Het voorstel van de universiteitsraad is als volgt:

- De afgelopen 10 jaar is er slechts eenmaal een PhD student in de EUR universiteitsraad, dit terwijl bijna alle andere universiteitsraden elk jaar meerdere PhD studenten hebben in de raad. Dit komt waarschijnlijk door het unieke kiesstelsel van de Erasmus Universiteit, die schrikt PhD studenten af om zich te kandideren en het op te nemen tegen een 'hogere' academicus. Een lijstenstelsel voor de personeelsgeleding zou dit probleem waarschijnlijk ook oplossen, maar daar is geen draagkracht voor. Daarom is het voorstel om een eigen PhD zetel te creëren voor deze groep promovendi. De verwachting is dat hierdoor vaker een PhD student in de universiteitsraad plaats zal nemen, waardoor deze kwetsbare groep personeelsleden beter worden vertegenwoordigd, in het huidige stelsel worden de PhD gerelateerde voorstellen namelijk met name naar voren gebracht door PhD studenten.
- Met het creëren van een PhD zetel, vervalt er een van de drie extra zetels voor de grootste kiesdistricten.

Verhouding PhD council

- PhD council bestaat nog niet, maar wordt opgericht als overlegorgaan. Het is daarmee geen formele medezeggenschap, waardoor de PhD council en de PhD zetel in de Universiteitsraad onderling niet zorgen voor problemen. Beide organen kunnen naast elkaar bestaan, en kunnen elkaar vooral versterken en voeden met informatie, net als een opleidingscommissie en een studentenpanel.
- Gesprekspartner PhD council is CvP, Uraad is CvB.

Wat moet er gebeuren in kiesreglement:

- Beurspromovendi krijgen actief en passief kiesrecht
- Er komt een extra kiesdistrict, kiesdistrict 11, deze is bestemd voor alle promovendi studenten. (artikel 5.2.k)
- (artikel 6.2.b) → Kiesgerechtigden die promoveren kunnen zich kandidaat stellen in het Kiesdistrict waar zij in overwegende mate werkzaam zijn of het promovendi-kiesdistrict.
- Promovendi kunnen 1 stem uitbrengen, zij kiezen zelf in welk van de voor hen bestemde kiesdistricten dit is.
- PhD studenten kunnen ervoor kiezen om hun kiesdistrict leeg te laten bij de kandidaatstelling, waarna zij tijdens de openbare zitting van de kandidaatstelling (of tot twee dagen voor het opengaan van de stemmingen) kunnen besluiten voor welk kiesdistrict zij kandidaat wensen te staan. (artikel 12)
- Je kan als PhD ook maar 1 jaar zitten. → Dat explicieter benoemen dat ze daar voor kunnen kiezen, en dat er dan tussentijdse verkiezingen zijn.