

The logo for EMGO+ features the letters 'e', 'M', 'G', and 'O' in a dark blue color, followed by a plus sign '+' in a lighter blue color. The letters are bold and sans-serif.

Institute for Health and Care Research

PhD Candidate Manual

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The [EMGO⁺ Institute](#) is a multidisciplinary research institute that brings together ~700 researchers from departments of three different science communities, i.e., from the VU Medical Center, the VU Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences and the VU Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences. Annually, ~200-300 EMGO⁺ PhD candidates are working on their thesis within the institute, and on average 50-100 PhD theses are produced.

The aim of this manual is to provide an overview of relevant topics pertaining to the education and supervision of a PhD candidate at the EMGO Institute for Health and Care Research (EMGO⁺).

1 VU Doctorate regulations

The VU doctorate regulations apply to all EMGO⁺ PhD candidates. The Doctorate regulations contain information about the access to promotion, the procedure with regard to preparations for the promotion, the tasks and authorities of those involved in the promotion (promotor, promotion committee, etc.), and dispute regulations. Please click [here](#) for the full version of VU doctorate regulations.

From 1 January 2015 new Doctorate Regulations came into effect. Starting from 1 April 2015, [Form I](#) must be used to apply for admission to the PhD track. Form I has to be submitted at the start of the PhD track (no later than one month after the date of commencement of employment). Alongside Form I, PhD candidates must also submit a signed 'Training and Supervision Plan (TSP)' at the start of their PhD track (please see Paragraph 3).

2 EMGO⁺ PhD Committee

The [EMGO⁺ PhD Committee](#) consists of two senior investigators and four PhD candidates and the chair of the committee is responsible for reviewing the TSP (paragraph 3) that is designed and signed by the PhD candidate and supervisors at the beginning of each PhD project. This agreement lists the obligatory and individually selected courses that the candidate must complete alongside the PhD research project for the amount of at least 30 ECTS. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a standard for comparing the study attainment and performance of students of higher education across the European Union. In the Netherlands, 1 ECT is equal to 28 hours of workload. The overall aim of the agreement is to ensure a course program that is tailored to the needs of the individual PhD candidate and project requirements. Beyond its review and advice functions, the committee organizes the introduction of new PhD candidates into the institute and its committees and expertise (the so-called new employees meeting), offers assistance when PhD candidates find themselves in a dispute with their supervisors, and directs and supports a 'PhD candidate intervention system' that connects a group of new PhD candidates to one of the PhD representatives to provide a way to discuss common or personal issues among each other.

The members of the PhD Committee can be found on the [EMGO+ website](#). You can contact the committee by using the general email address: phdcommittee@vumc.nl

3 Training and Supervision Plan (TSP)

3.1 Introduction

In the first three months following the PhD candidate's appointment, a mutually drafted and accepted [Training and Supervision Plan \(TSP\)](#) must be signed. This agreement is compiled by the direct supervisor, together with the PhD candidate. In addition to a number of general aspects, such as information about the aim of the appointment and a general description of the PhD candidate's tasks, the TSP also defines a number of specific aspects. There is a description of where the PhD candidate will be working, under whose (co-)supervision, and for which period of time. Furthermore, a plan will be made by the supervisor and PhD candidate for the training courses in which the PhD candidate will participate. The TSP is signed by the (co-)supervisor(s), the PhD candidate and the Chair of the EMGO⁺ PhD Committee. The TSP will be discussed and adjusted, if necessary, during the annual progress-reporting.

3.2 Initial TSP assessment

Within 3 months after the appointment of the PhD candidate, the supervisor sends the TSP, signed by the (co-)supervisor(s) and the PhD candidate, to the (Vice) [Chair of the EMGO⁺ PhD Committee](#).

The chair of the PhD Committee:

- Signs the agreement and sends the signed document to the PhD candidate (after requesting further clarification, if necessary) and forwards the signed TSP to the EMGO+ secretary, or
- If there are serious objections, contacts the PhD candidate, who can, if necessary, discuss the issue with the (co-)supervisor(s).

The chair of the PhD Committee assesses the TSP against the following criteria:

- The education program consists of a minimum of 30 ECTs (see also: paragraph 3.2.1);, spread over the course of the PhD track.
- Duration of the supervision (see also: paragraph 3.2.2): a minimum of 8 hours a month from the co-supervisor and 2 hours per month from the supervisor

Please note that, when the TSP is approved and signed by the authority of the director of another graduate school (for example the Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences), a copy of the signed TSP must be send to the [EMGO⁺ secretary](#).

3.2.1 Education (training) program

The education (training) of a minimum of 30 ECTs can be categorized into three types of courses:

- 1) Compulsory courses selected by the VU (Total: 3-5.5 ECTs)
 - [Course on scientific integrity](#) (2 ECTs)
 - Conference attendance (1 ECT without, 2 ECTs with (oral or poster presentation))

- [BROK](#) (if necessary, mandatory for projects that are covered by the Human Research Act (WMO)) (1.5 ECTS)
- 2) Compulsory courses selected by the EMGO⁺ institute (Total: 8 ECTS)
 - Courses focused on advanced (methodological) research skills (6 ECTS)
 - Transferrable skills (1 ECT)
 - Research meetings, expert meetings, seminars (1 ECT)
 - 3) Elective courses (16.5-19 ECTS)
 - Courses focused on advanced (methodological) research skills
 - Transferrable skills
 - /Courses that are subject-specific and related to the PhD project

Please find more examples for courses under Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) 5.

3.2.2 Supervision

The supervision of the PhD candidate is regulated in the TSP, and is part of the employment agreement. The supervision is the responsibility of the principal supervisor (first promotor) together with one or more (co-)supervisors (i.e., project leaders). The PhD candidate has the right to a minimum of 8 hours of co-supervision per month from the daily co-supervisor, and 2 hours per month from the principal supervisor.

According to the VU/VUmc regulations, every PhD candidate has an annual progress meeting with his/her superior. The following aspects should be discussed during the annual meeting: is the workload not too high, is there good collaboration with other (co-)supervisors within the same project, is/are the PhD candidate(s) satisfied with the supervision etc. There are special forms that help guide the process and reporting of the annual meeting which can be found at the P&O service websites (VUmc intranet and VUUnet).

3.3 TSP annual monitor

- During this annual progress meeting, the supervisor(s) and the PhD candidate discuss the progress regarding TSP education requirements.
- Only in case of significantly large adjustments, a second assessment of the TSP by the chair of the EMGO⁺ PhD committee is obligatory. The supervisor and PhD candidate will follow the same procedure as during the first assessment.

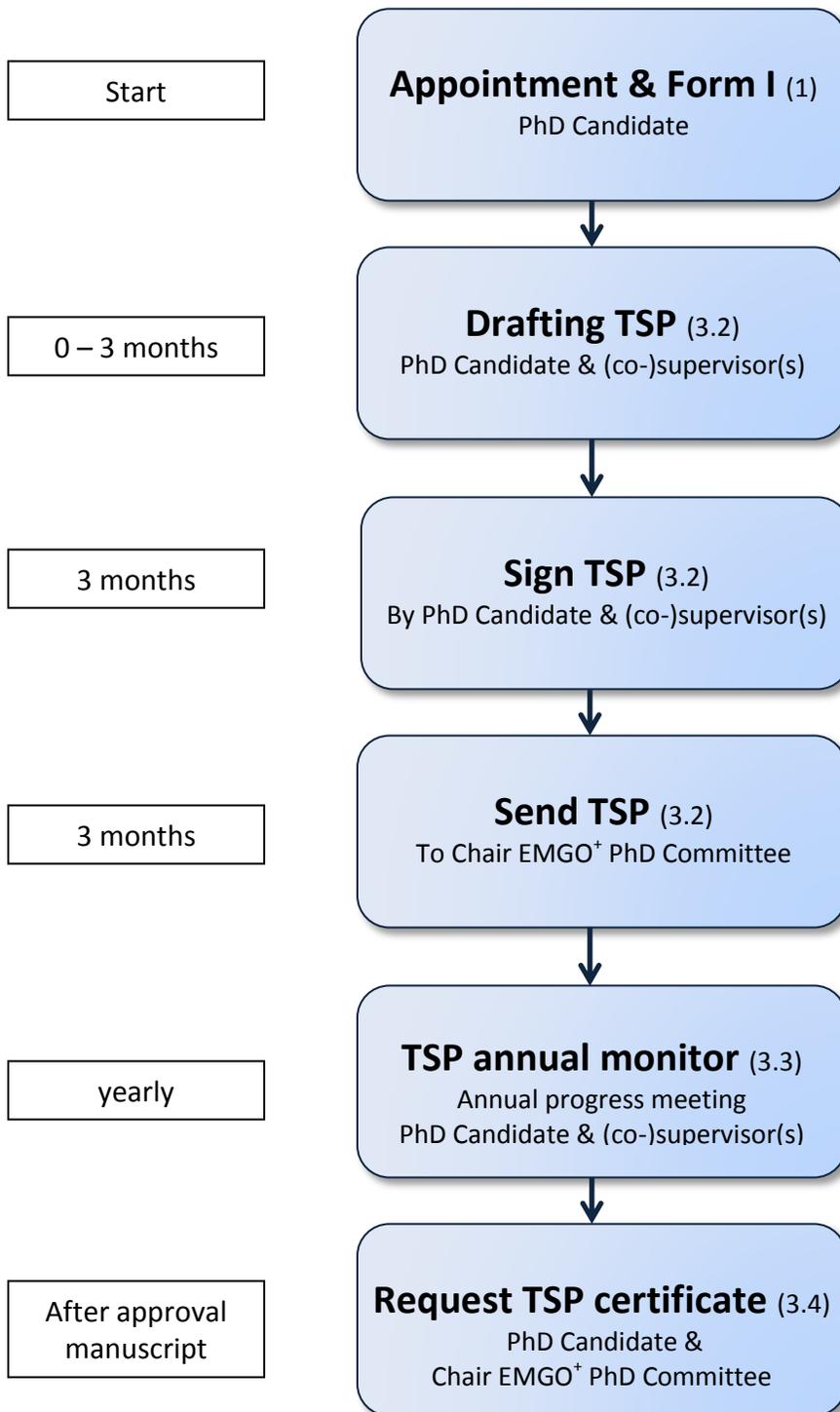
3.4 TSP certificate

In order to obtain the degree of Doctor from the VU, the PhD candidate will have to submit a request to the chair of the EMGO⁺ PhD committee to determine whether all education (training) requirements have been met as agreed in the Training and Supervision Plan (TSP).

- The PhD candidate hands in his/her TSP portfolio, once the supervisor has approved the dissertation.
- The TSP portfolio consists of a summary of all relevant courses including corresponding certificates of attendance or otherwise, proof that education has been followed.

- The EMGO⁺ PhD committee is responsible for drawing up the training certificate and awarding it to the PhD candidate.

3.5 TSP time line



4 The PhD candidate and the (co-)supervisor(s): a few tips

4.1 *Responsibilities of a PhD candidate*

The success of all projects depends to a great extent on the PhD candidates themselves. A few tips are given here:

- The PhD candidate must state clearly what (s)he needs from the supervisor. When supervisors give contradictory advice, it is recommended to plan a discussion with the supervisors in question in order to achieve consensus.
- Explicit agreements must be made. It is wise to take minutes or to make a report, and to keep a log book throughout the entire project.
- Persistent problems, or problems that have a negative influence on the project, must be discussed. If you expect that nobody will take any action to solve your problems, then it is recommended that you discuss the problems with someone from the EMGO⁺ PhD Committee, or with someone who is higher in the hierarchy than your supervisor. If you mainly need someone to listen to you, then anybody you trust is suitable.
- Ensure the continuity of the project, for instance by making accurate and realistic plans, and refer to your supervisors for comments.
- Make everything debatable – for instance, make an early decision about the (co-)authorship of articles.
- During the assessment discussions (after 10 months and 3 years) and the annual discussions, ‘supervision and functioning of the leaders’ is always a specific topic. Use this official opportunity to discuss (again) any possible problems with supervision.

4.2 *Guidelines of supervision*

The nature of good supervision depends on the type of research, the content of the project, and the personal wishes of both the supervisor and the PhD candidate. However, what is certain is that the aim of the supervision must be two-sided: on the one side, it must result in a good project and good quality scientific products, and on the other side it must result in a junior researcher who has learnt how to carry out research independently and has been able to develop in the field of science.

5 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

5.1 *How should I define advanced methodological courses and transferable skills?*

Examples of courses focused on advanced (methodological) research skills:

- [EpidM master](#) and [research school CaRe](#)

Examples of transferable skills:

- EMGO⁺ PhD intervision year group (0.5 ECTS)
- [Personal development](#) (2-3 ECTS)
- [Taalcentrum-VU](#) (including Dutch for foreign PhD candidates, 2 ECTS)
- Workshops focussing on entrepreneurship and/or valorization (2 ECTS)
- [Writing for publication](#) (2 ECTS)
- [Presenting in English](#) (2 ECTS)
- Project management (2 ECTS)
- [Grant writing](#) (2 ECTS)
- Teaching activities/tasks (e.g., contributing to bachelor or master courses, tutor, supervising internships and teaching [courses](#) (BKO) (max. 5 ECTS)
- Auditor [EMGO+ Quality committee](#), including training (2 ECTS)
- Active member of journal club, clinimetrics group etc. (max. 2 ECTS)

5.2 *'Workshops, symposia, colloquia, international research visits, supervising students...' Which items may I include in the TSP?*

You may include workshops, conferences, symposia (1 ECT without, 2 ECTS with (oral or poster presentation), colloquia, international research visits as well as supervising students (max. 5 ECTS) in the TSP.

5.3 *What should be provided in the TSP portfolio?*

Please include all certificates of the attended meetings and courses. In the occasion that no certificate is provided, for example for research meetings at the VU, please ask your supervisor to sign a document that you have attended a departments' research meeting once in a fortnight.

5.4 *Can I receive exemption from (compulsory) courses of TSP?*

Exemption can be granted if the PhD candidate can prove that (s)he has completed these courses (or comparable courses) during preliminary education. When a dissertation is in preparation and the individual has an appointment as for instance a (junior) researcher or physician (not appointed as a PhD candidate), all courses completed within a year before the date of application for admission to the PhD track can be included in the TSP. In case of an external PhD candidate ('buitenpromotie'), full exemption (from all compulsory courses) can be requested.

To apply for exemption, the following procedure should be followed:

- The PhD candidate and her/his supervisor make a written request for exemption from the course in question
- The reason for the application for exemption should be explained in the letter
- The letter should be addressed to the [Chair of the EMGO+ PhD Committee](#)
- The exemptions should be listed on the TSP as well in the required field.

Please contact the EMGO⁺ PhD Committee if you have questions regarding the exemptions or if you would like to lodge an appeal against the decision of the EMGO⁺ PhD Committee.

5.5 Is there a good example of a completed Training and Supervision Plan?

Please click [here](#) for two examples of a course list of a TSP. And if any questions remain, don't hesitate to [contact](#) the EMGO⁺ PhD committee. To speed up the process, it is strongly advised that the PhD candidate gets information from PhD candidates from their own department who already have a signed TSP, or, from PhD representatives from the PhD committee before sending it to the chair of the PhD committee for formal assessment.

5.6 Who is financially responsible for the education that I receive during my PhD?

Finance for the education (training) of the PhD candidate is the responsibility of the principal supervisor (i.e., first promotor). The EMGO⁺ Institute cannot financially support individual training programs of PhD candidates.

To avoid misunderstandings, we strongly recommend to discuss finance before each application for a course with your (principal) supervisor. Specific regulations may differ per faculty, and detailed information can be obtained from the Administration Department of the faculty.

Furthermore, not all courses and conferences require a fee, and it might be worthwhile to explore the opportunities of free courses and conferences in your field of study.

5.7 If a disagreement with my supervisor cannot be solved, what should I do?

If there is a dispute between a PhD candidate and a (co-)supervisor(s) with regard to the supervision, the training and/or the research, that cannot be solved, the principal supervisor (i.e., first promotor) should be involved in an early stage. If this is not possible, or if one of the parties so wishes, the chair or another PhD representative from the EMGO⁺ PhD Committee can be consulted.

5.8 Can I obtain a doctorate degree as a junior researcher?

In some occasions you may be appointed as a junior researcher or equivalent positions such as a medical doctor with a research appointment. Yet, during your first year(s) as a researcher it becomes clear that there might be the opportunity to fulfill a PhD program along the same project. Hence it

becomes vital to submit [Form I](#) and complete an [Training and Supervision Plan](#). Be aware that completing a doctorate degree as a junior researcher involves the same rights and obligations as being appointed a PhD candidate. Therefore, you must meet the 30 ECTS requirement, as otherwise you are not allowed to obtain your doctorate degree

5.9 Can I obtain a doctorate degree as an external PhD?

External PhD candidates are PhD candidates who are not employed by the VU or the VU Medical Center. In principle, external PhD candidates have the same rights and obligations as 'internal' PhD candidates (i.e., PhD candidates that are employed by VU/VUmc). They likewise have to submit an Training and Supervision Plan and an approved research plan setting out their PhD research and curriculum in advance. Similarly, external PhD candidates must meet the 30 ECTS requirement, as otherwise they will not be allowed to obtain their doctorate degree.

5.10 Which regulations Scientific integrity apply during my PhD appointment?

The VU doctorate regulations specify that the PhD candidate, supervisor and co-supervisor must at all times observe the norms for scientific integrity as formulated in the [Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice](#) by the [VSNU](#). During the closed part of the PhD ceremony, this declaration also has to be pronounced. Furthermore, the VU requires all PhD candidates to sign [a statement](#) regarding scientific integrity.

VU and VU Medical Center operate a joint policy for the handling of academic integrity complaints. This [complaints procedure](#) outlines the various steps to be taken in the event of a complaint, the officers who play a role in this procedure and what you can expect once a complaint has been submitted.

5.11 While I am appointed as a EMGO+ PhD candidate, should I contribute to teaching chores at my faculty?

The nature and extent of this PhD candidate's task differs per faculty, and we recommend that this should be discussed together with you as a PhD candidate. Within EMGO⁺ an indication of the extent of teaching chores is 5-10% of the working time. You may include your teaching courses (partly) in your TSP (see also paragraph 5.2).

It is important to realize that providing education is a task that should not be under-estimated. The time-investment that is needed to provide education is usually greatly underestimated. Moreover, not all PhD candidates have the necessary didactical qualities or the ambition to teach. The [VU Training Centre](#) organizes various educational courses, such as a basic course for tutors, a course on lecturing, and a course focusing on education in small groups.

On the other hand, if you are interested in teaching and you are keen to further develop your teaching skills, within EMGO⁺ it is possible to provide education as a working group supervisor/tutor for [EpidM courses](#), and in the supervision of trainees.

5.12 Can I become registered as an Epidemiologist after obtaining my doctorate degree?

Because the education (training) that many EMGO⁺ PhD candidates receive has a strong epidemiological character, you may apply for registration as an Epidemiologist with the [Epidemiological Society \(VvE\)](#) after obtaining your doctorate degree. However, registration and requirements are not the responsibility of the EMGO⁺ or PhD Committee. Therefore, questions regarding registration should be pointed to the VvE.

The aim of registration as an Epidemiologist is to register people with a scientific and practical epidemiological training who are able to function in epidemiological research, in providing advice or in the preparation of policies with regard to (public) health problems for which epidemiological expertise is required.

There are two different registers for epidemiologists:

- 1) Epidemiologist A (MSc level), the basic level. Registration via the VvE.
- 2) Scientific Research Epidemiologist, also referred to as Epidemiologist B (PhD level). This is registration has other requirements, in addition to the basic level, such as an academic promotion and international publications.

Since 2015, new registration requirements apply for both options. Please find further information on the [VvE website](#).