

Response to the ILLC PhD Programme Evaluation Report 2022

Formulated by the MT under directorship of Robert van Rooij

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The institute would like to thank the members of the 2022 Programme eValuation Committee (PVC) consisting of Benno van den Berg (chair), Karolina Krzyzanowska, Sandro Pezzelle and Makiko Sadakata for their detailed report. The report contains insightful reflections about the overall quality of the ILLC PhD programme, as well as several recommendations, which will be addressed below.

Social cohesion

Recommendations

- R1 It is crucial that the PhD council again starts organising some social activities. The PVC is happy to hear that its activities are increasing and a social committee is being set up. The PVC strongly encourages people to keep this initiative going.
- R2 There should be a clear preference for having seminars and supervision meetings in person and on location. Senior staff members should be encouraged to attend seminars in person and there should a preference for having speakers present in person as well.
- R3 There should be an ample supply of meeting rooms: they should be easy to book and both students and supervisors should be aware of how this is done.
- R4 We understand that people are setting up a buddy system where junior and senior PhD students are being matched. We think this is a very good idea and we fully support this initiative.

Response The PhD and ILLC management share the concerns expressed in the PVC report concerning the negative impact of recent developments (including post-pandemic adjustments and split of ILLC in different location) on social cohesion within the PhD community.

The PhD management will (i) encourage the PhD council to start again the organisation of social events (for which ILLC will continue offering financial support) [R1] and (ii) will continue organising the buddy system to help new PhD candidates to find their way in our institute but also favour connections among people from different research groups [R4]. To further favor cohesion we will also consider the organisation of a half “heidag” for the PhD community in the Fall 2023.

As for R2, the ILLC management will continue encourage people to organise seminars on location and encourage permanent staff to attend those. However this is not something that can be imposed top-down on the ILLC community. As for R3, the ILLC management is aware of the importance of having enough meeting rooms both at LAB42 and in the future ILLC location in SP904. For example, recently the ILLC arranged the conversion of the Quantum Lab in LAB42 into a meeting room open to all ILLC groups, and we ordered booths for zoom-meetings.

Mental health

Recommendations

- R1 Make supervisors aware of issues of mental health. Give them advise on how to help their students if they struggle with these issues and how to detect that they may be struggling. Make it clear that they are not asked to solve these, but make clear where help can be found.
- R2 Make rejection and dealing with (publication) pressure an explicit topic during one of the skills courses or at another point during the PhD.

Response Thank you for the suggestions. We will include these two topics for discussion in the supervision lunch [R1] and the PhD assembly [R2], both to be organised in May-June 2023. Topic 2 could also be discussed during the introduction event the PhD management organises twice a year for the new PhD candidates.

Supervision

Recommendations

- R1 We recommend that a lot of attention is being paid to a clear division of the tasks especially in the case of large supervision teams. In practice, it may work best if one supervisor carries the main responsibility for the student.
- R2 We are positive about the supervision lunch. Developing guidelines for starting supervisors would be very helpful.
- R3 Make sure that at least one person on the supervision team can confidently assess the progress of the student; and do not forget that one of the main jobs of the supervisor may be to tell the student that they are doing fine.

Response Thank you for the suggestions. We have already guidelines on the ILLC-PhD website

<https://phdprogramme.illc.uva.nl/Info-for-Supervisors/code/>

describing the different roles within a supervision team and highlighting the importance of the main supervisor. The PhD management will start to send a link to these guidelines to the supervisors of new PhD projects. We will further discuss these guidelines during the supervision lunch, which will take place in May-June 2023.

Diversity

- R1 Make sure the composition of the PhD council is an adequate reflection of the diversity of our PhD population.

Response The composition of the PhD council is in the hands of the PhD council itself which every year recruits its new members. Reflecting the diversity of the PhD community is one of the guiding principles in this process. However complying with it is not always possible in view of the often limited number of people interested in joining the council.

TA allocation

Recommendations

- R1 Ask PhD students on feedback on the TA agreement forms and how this has worked for them.
- R2 Pay special attention to the situation of PhD students in the Humanities. We recommend that the management of the PhD programme tries to get an overview of the situation there and guides PhD students and their supervisors in finding good teaching opportunities for them.
- R3 As a rule, new courses should be assigned to more experienced PhD students and old courses should be assigned to PhD students that have taught these previously.

Response R1 is a good idea and in fact the ILLC management already agreed to do this. As for R2, we have one and the same procedure for the TA allocation of PhD candidates from either faculty. We are not aware of any special issue arising for the Humanities students, but we will have a closer look. Also we will take the soft constraints in R3 into account in the future allocation process.

Skill courses

Recommendations

- R1 Inform supervisors and PhD students about the possibility of individual training for PhD students (such as presentation and language skills).

Response We will gather more information about additional individual training offered to PhD candidates and we will put it the PhD ILLC page. We should also add that we are aware that putting information on the website is often not enough to reach the whole PhD community. We will discuss this issue further with the PhD council and we are open to suggestions on how to communicate more efficiently.

Role of the PVC and questionnaire

Recommendations

- R1 Tell PhD students at an earlier stage about the PVC committee and what it does.

R2 Consider developing a special questionnaire for PhD students who have finished.

R3 Rephrase the question concerning relevance to society. We recommend rephrasing it along the following lines: Is the societal impact of your research important to you and do you feel that in your PhD trajectory sufficient attention is paid to the relevance of your research to society? If not, what would you like to see done differently?

Response About R1, information about the role of the PVC is given extensively during the introduction event we organise twice a year for the new PhD candidates. We are aware however that not everybody responds to our invitation to join this event. While in the past we had individual meetings with all new promovendi we now don't have enough resources to do so. R2 is a good idea and we will develop a simple evaluation form to be completed after the PhD defense. As for R3, the PhD management had a fresh look into the PVC questionnaire but could not find enough reason to change it at least for this year. For next year we will consider modifying the question concerning Societal relevance (which is now formulated as follows: "To what extent have you and your supervisor(s) discussed the societal relevance of your research results so far? To what extent have you and your supervisor(s) discussed how your research results could be extended to gain (more) societal relevance?")