

Findings and Recommendations PVC 2008

ILLC's PhD Progress Committee
Promotievoortgangscommissie (PVC)

Introduction and Procedure

In the week of June 9–13, 2008, the ILLC promotievoortgangscommissie (PVC) held its yearly interviews with almost all of the PhD students (43 out of 50) working at the ILLC of the University of Amsterdam. (Some of the students resided abroad at the time of the interviews.) These interviews, which were held for the eleventh time, serve to monitor and where possible improve the quality of the institutional environment provided by the ILLC for the PhD projects carried out at the institute. We try to gain the perspective of the individual students, focusing on the progress made in the individual projects and their embedding in the ILLC. We try to spot bottlenecks and provide solutions for them, and come to a general evaluation of the ILLC as a research and education environment for these projects.

Over the years the PVC has consisted of at least three of the following people: Peter Blok, Reinhard Blutner, Paul Dekker, Ulle Endriss, Theo Janssen, Dick de Jongh, Jaap Kamps, Tanja Kassenaar, Michiel van Lambalgen, Ingrid van Loon, Peter van Ormondt, Khalil Sima'an, Leen Torenvliet, Marjan Veldhuisen, and Yde Venema. Like last year, the meetings were held by at least three members of the committee consisting of Paul, Ulle, Theo, Jaap, Tanja, Ingrid (chair), and Peter. This document reports some general findings and recommendations ensuing from this year's interviews.

Findings

1 General The PhD projects are of high quality, and the PVC was again happily surprised about the enthusiasm, spirit, and creativity of the students. The majority of the research projects are expected to be completed in time, and no project seemed to require us to take drastic measures. Of course there were a limited number of projects which caused some concerns, but appropriate actions have been taken.

We may have to mention that one project was put to an end this year, even though no complications were spotted at the PVC evaluation last year. We realize that in the procedure we advocate, which takes the perspective of the students as a starting point, we may fail to see problems if they are not raised by the students themselves.

2 Supervision There are clear differences in the style of supervision in the various sections of the ILLC; in some sections supervision takes place on a very

structured and organized basis, in others it is of a more occasional nature. The PVC does not promote one style of supervision, but advises all supervisors to reflect on the amount of guidance appropriate for each student. Of course, the appropriate type of supervision also depends on the style and wishes of the student. Supervision facts and student's wishes are not always perfectly aligned, but no grave disagreements were found this year.

More guidance from the supervisor could be in place, especially with regard to planning and executing teaching duties, but also with regard to the preparation and evaluation of presentations. Some students would like to improve didactic their skills.

The PVC is content to see that almost all students have an approved of Opleidings en Begeleidingsplan (OBP, education- and supervisionplan). The standardized format of these plans could be improved though, and the PVC is happy to see that a new format is nearly ready.

3 Education There is still a big difference between the teaching duties of the FGW and FNWI faculties, and assignment of teaching duties still seems to be rather ad hoc. Some students have done more teaching than might be desirable, and supervisors are advised to monitor and evaluate these activities more than is currently done. On top of this we face the three-year PhD projects, which, it seems, hardly leave room for additional activities like teaching. A letter from the Dean of the Humanities Faculty (dated 6 October 2008) to all professors of the faculty appears hopeful. This letter seems to suggest that at least partially the problem is solved as a 4-year part-time track (0.8 fte) has become the standard. The letter states that PhD-students get the opportunity to extend this with 0.2 fte for one year to gain teaching experience. However, if there is no extra funding the problem seems to remain.

Most students follow courses at the ILLC, mainly in the first years. Even if students do not follow these for credits, a few make the assignments and participate in the exams.

Quite a few students have followed courses from the Loopbaan Advies Centrum (LAC, Centre for Career Advise) or a similar organisation (learning to teach, to give presentations, to write articles, etc.) The findings are satisfactory, and the PVC is glad to note that the course which was evaluated so badly last year, "Starting up and getting there", has improved after complaints of the PVC had been communicated to the organizers.

4 Embedding The upcoming transfer to the Science Park raises divergent opinions. Almost all students welcome the concentration of the various ILLC research units, but the separation from the philosophy department raises complaints. Students also don't seem to be happy about the location, housing, and rooms in the science park.

Intellectually, most students seem to lead an interactive life in the ILLC, even though, clearly, not everybody works together with everybody. The level of activity is high, with the various colloquia, and is quite well appreciated. There is a continuous need and effort to maintain the logic tea, and the PVC

persistently supports the initiative, but cannot take an organisational role, since the tea is organized for and by the students.

Some students are in favour of more cooperation between the philosophy and other sections of the ILLC, to be initiated by supervisors and project leaders. The latter should check out each other's whereabouts, and look for opportunities to collaborate on projects. The grassroots initiative of the AiO-lunch in the philosophy department has come to an end, but only temporarily we hope.

5 Information Supply Students are happy about the information supply by means of the ILLC channels, even though there are complaints of there being too much. Most probably there is too much to report on, rather than too much report.

6 ICT Support The lack of ICT support is a recurring complaint, and has spread to those working in the science faculty. It is sad to witness students lose all their faith in any such support.

7 Legal Position and Further Complaints This year again there appeared to be no problems or complications with appointments and other legal and administrative matters. A further complaint is very practical: the temperature in the JK building. Especially, in winters it is too cold in the rooms. This is a dragging issue having to do with the ventilation system of this particular building.

Recommendations

The PVC's impressions of this year's interviews are by and large positive, so there are only few recommendations.

1. Develop a more general standard OBP (Opleidings- en begeleidingsplan).
2. Chart the contribution of the PhD students in the course programs, to get an overview of their individual input, and the distribution of this input over the various programs. With what kind of appointment do students get what kind of teaching duties?
3. A related worry concerns the three-year PhD tracks. From the perspective of their careers it is important for these students to have teaching experience and like last year we advise them to work towards an extension of these research projects.
4. Even though there are well-functioning national research schools like SIKS and LOT, and even though ESSLLI figures to some extent as a national research school on logic, it is regretted that the OZSL still is in coma, since this should provide the embedding of the logic education on a national level.
5. Failing a regular OZSL meeting, we repeat the wish from last year of having a one day seminar for all PhD students in the style of {Accolade.

Amsterdam, October 2008
Paul Dekker and Peter van Ormondt
On behalf of the PVC 2008