

Response to the ILLC PhD Programme Evaluation Report 2021

Formulated by the MT under directorship of Robert van Rooij

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The institute would like to thank the members of the 2021 Programme eValuation Committee (PVC) consisting of Aybüke Özgün (chair), Hein van den Berg, Johannes Marti, and Ekaterina Shutova 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.

Supervision

Recommendation 1: The main supervisor should make sure that it is clear to the PhD candidate and the members of the supervision team what they can expect from each other in all aspects of supervision. The PhD management team should help regulate this process via a written document (such as a form or a code of practice) and ensure that the division of tasks among the supervisors and the candidate is explicitly discussed in the beginning of the PhD programme and updated regularly as the project progresses.

Response The Training and Supervision Plan already contains an explicit question concerning the division of tasks in the supervisory team (*Role of different supervisors*) which is meant to be discussed and agreed upon every year during the progress meetings. Apparently this measure is not always working. We don't believe that a code of practice document is the solution but we will monitor the progress meeting reports more closely and intervene in case of problems.

Discussion on societal relevance of research

Recommendation 2: We advise the PhD candidates and the supervisors to have an open discussion about the societal relevance of their research, as far as the research topic allows.

Response We will add one question about this in the progress report forms so that every year we create an occasion for reflection on possibly unforeseen opportunities for academic and societal impact of the student research.

Nine-month report

Recommendation 3: The PhD management team should make sure to streamline this process and inform all supervisors (both promoters and co-promoters) as to what is expected from the nine-month report. Making a few sample pilot studies on different topics accessible to PhD candidates and supervisors could be helpful.

Response We will have a closer look at this issue but the instructions about the 9 months report on the PhD webpage are already rather clear. The nine-month report consists of a scientific contribution and a short plan for the research tasks that are to be conducted in the next years. This scientific contribution can be a paper (or one of the final drafts of a paper), a pilot study (for experimental research) or a literature review in the research field you are interested in - something that gives a clear picture of what you have done so far and also what you plan to do over the next years. (See (<https://phdprogramme.illc.uva.nl/current-candidates/Procedures/year1/#9-MonthReportandfeedback>)). The specific format of the scientific contribution should be decided by the student together with the supervisor. Note that in the webpage, as in this response, we made it clear that the pilot study is just one option, an option more suitable for experimental than for foundational research.

Academic skills courses

Recommendation 4: The PhD programme should allow for more flexibility as to which skills courses a PhD candidate has to take (instead of making all skills courses obligatory) and when they may take certain classes. These can be decided in consultation with the candidate's supervisors. We also

recommend scheduling the academic writing course in the first year of the PhD programme, if this is still not the case.

Response The academic writing course can already be taken in the first year or second year. Requests for exemptions from specific courses or more in general requests to deviate from the curriculum can be submitted in written form to the PhD management.

Teaching and organizational tasks

Recommendation 5: We advise the PhD management team to regularly check the number of hours PhD candidates spend on teaching and, if possible, increase the number of teaching assistants assigned to a course when the actual workload regularly exceeds what has been agreed. Moreover, The PhD management team should decide on clear rules to regulate how to compensate for teaching hours when the actual workload diverges significantly from what has been allocated. Both the PhD candidates and the lecturers should be informed about these regulations.

Response The PhD and ILLC management take the workload issue very seriously but we are also aware that not everything is in our hands (for example, the PhD/ILLC management cannot decide to increase the number of teaching assistants assigned to a course). With the aim to arrive at a fair system for all parties involved (teachers, teaching assistants and students) we introduced the TA agreement forms. We understand that the TA agreement system still has problems and so we are open to suggestions for improvement. Nevertheless it is a joint responsibility of the lecturers and the TAs to respect these agreements and so in principle extra teaching hours are not compensated.

Community building

Recommendation 6: The PhD council and the PhD management team should pay special attention to the PhD candidates whose main/part-time workspace is outside of the ILLC to help them feel part of the ILLC community.

Response The ILLC would like to thank the PhD council for great job they did in keeping the PhD community together during the last two difficult

years. We are considering introducing a “buddy” system for all PhD candidates so that people who feel left out or isolated can have regular contact with at least one person from another group within ILLC.

Covid-19 related issues

Recommendation 7: The PhD council should organize regular social events to enhance the feeling of community among the PhD candidates. They should pay special attention to the attendance of the PhD candidates who started the programme in the midst of the pandemic and to those with joint appointments for the reasons mentioned in section Community Building. Group meetings and seminars should continue as much as possible and the supervisors should regularly check up on their students. Finally, the PhD management team should make sure that the PhD candidates know whom to reach out if they feel overwhelmed.

Response The post-covid regulations of the Faculty of Science endorsed by ILLC prescribe that employees should come to work at least 3 days a week and we believe that this will improve the cohesion of the ILLC community, including the PhD candidates. The ILLC will further keep financing the social activities organised by the PhD council. And finally, the information about whom to reach out in case of problems is already on the ILLC PhD webpage (<https://phdprogramme.illc.uva.nl/current-candidates/support/gethelp/#AttheILLC>). The PhD management will look at ways to better promote this page so that it becomes common knowledge among the PhD community, and will keep organising regular information meetings for the new PhD candidates joining ILLC.