

Response to the ILLC PhD Programme Evaluation Report 2025

Formulated by the MT under directorship of Robert van Rooij

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The institute would like to thank the members of the 2025 Programme eValuation Committee (PVC) consisting of Gregor Behnke (chair), Marloes Geboers, Martha Lewis, and Yde Venema for their detailed report. The report¹ contains insightful reflections about the overall quality of the ILLC PhD programme, as well as several recommendations addressed to the ILLC management but also to the supervisors. In this document we will respond in written form to the major recommendations addressed to the PhD programme director and the ILLC management. The general findings and recommendations to the supervisors have already been presented to the ILLC community by the PVC chair during a CAM meeting in June 2025, and if needed will be discussed again during the Heidag in January 2026.

Flex Desks

Recommendation Practical issues (lockers, missing equipment, non-registration of desks) should be resolved. The ILLC’s management should consider measures to increase the occupancy of the PhD rooms – also as a measure to increase social cohesion and sense of belonging (see Section 3.8). Desks should not be occupied by private items. The management team could also consider providing PhD candidates with alternative options to individualise their office environments (e.g. individual cupboards, although we also acknowledge potential issues here).

Response Lockers for overnight storage are now available. We have the impression that the flex system is now not fully used. If a situation developed where all PhD candidates have the working facilities they need without

¹The full PVC report is downloadable from:
<https://phdprogramme.illc.uva.nl/current-candidates/support/pvc/>

having the need of a desk booking system then we can turn it off again. If there does seem to be a need for this flex booking system then we propose that the PhD-council, together with the PhD-coordinator formulate clear rules on how to use the flex desks which we shall then communicate.

Skill courses

Recommendation The complaints about the “Mastering your PhD” should be made to the Faculty and the Dean as they are responsible for this course. Overall the course organisation must become more flexible. For example, missing one meeting should not automatically mean that a candidate needs to re-do the course at a later point in time. Creating flexibility here will also prevent instances where PhD candidates finish the Mastering your PhD-course very late in their trajectory. The Faculty’s PhD council could also be contacted to take up the issue. For the other courses, we recommend that the units review their current content. If appropriate, a subset of the units could and should make a joint proposal for a replacement of some of the skills courses, especially the writing course, with content more appropriate for their PhD candidates. Potential provision of optional specific courses could also be organised by units.

Response We are aware that in previous years the organisation of “Mastering your PhD” has been highly problematic. Since 2024/25 things have been largely improved, but there are still issues of lack of flexibility. The PhD director contacted the FNWI organisers concerning the flexibility issue. They clarified that missing one session does not automatically mean that candidates have to redo the whole course one year later because candidates can make up missed sessions in other rounds of the same semester, but confirmed that to retake a missed session the following year comes with additional costs. They also informed us that next year they will design a new PhD programme, starting in 2027 and asked us to provide input for this redesign. As for the other skill courses organised by ILLC (including Academic Writing), we have reorganised them into a PhD trajectory which started in September 2025. The trajectory includes, besides a scientific programme (LoLaCo + ILLC PhD day), the old presentation skill course (which consistently received good evaluations); a new Active Bystander Training and an Academic Writing training which will replace the Coursera course, which is no longer freely available. The Academic Writing training will be offered by senior ILLC researchers representative of different areas of ILLC (in 2026, K. Apt, M. Stokhof and K. Sima’an) and will include plenary presentations

by the instructors and individual feedback on writing samples submitted by the participants. The plan for this new PhD trajectory was discussed with the ILLC staff and PhD candidates on various occasions last year (Heidag, PhD assemblies, MT-PhD council meetings), and in particular the feedback from the PhD candidates led to important improvements (notably, ILLC PhD day). During the last MTG (14/11/2025) we further discussed the trajectory with the unit leaders who have been invited to organise additional training relevant for their community, if needed.

Financial Information

Recommendation PhD supervisors should foster an open atmosphere also surrounding financial matters. Candidates should be encouraged to (1) consult the information available on the ILLC's websites (PhD, ILLC and Wiki) and (2) contact the ILLC's office in case of doubt. Generally supervisors should ensure that PhD candidates will seek help and advice if any issue or unclarity arises. Supervisors themselves should also ask for clarifications if in doubt. Supervisors should take the effort and educate themselves about the financial and budgetary rules of the ILLC especially surrounding internships and research visits. As an additional measure, such information may be given at the supervisors' lunch. An introduction to financial information should be included into the ILLC office's on-boarding procedure for new PhD candidates. As a general rule, it is from the ILLC's perspective – within reasonable limits – acceptable if a PhD candidates visits a conference without having a paper to present. However, final decisions always rest with budget holders.

Response The institute manager started conducting the introduction meetings with the PhD candidates. The different rules surrounding finances, e.g., reimbursement claims, is one of the topics that is now covered. We hope in this way that we can take away any uncertainty about these issues.

Supervision

Recommendation PhD candidates should have regular meetings with their supervisors; depending on the nature of the project this can be anything between various meetings weekly and one meeting monthly. Every candidate must have two supervisors, both of which should typically be staff members of the ILLC or at least the UvA. The involvement of the second supervisor can vary, but they should be able and available to meet

the student on a regular basis and take over the main supervisor's task if the need arises. Under regular circumstances, the second supervisor should be appointed once the PhD candidate submits her or his 9 month report. The second supervisors must in any case be appointed before the one year evaluation meeting of the PhD candidate. The director of the ILLC's PhD programme should enforce these requirements strictly. The PhD candidate's main supervisor must be present at the candidate's first day of work. The supervisors should generally respond to written material in a timely manner and if not possible inform their PhD candidates. Supervisors should provide PhD candidates with feedback on their overall progression towards completing their PhD. We noticed that for some PhD candidates it is not enough to provide feedback on this item only during the yearly evaluation meetings. Supervisors should clearly communicate their expectations for a completed PhD and how they think their candidates are progressing towards it. PhD candidates may feel uneasy to start a discussion about this topic. Supervisors should – as appropriate, but somewhat regularly – allocate time in supervision meetings to discuss these higher level issues and take the lead in discussing them. Generally supervisors should ensure that supervision meetings discuss more than the day-to-day business.

Response Concerning the second supervisor: (i) We discussed the PVC recommendation with unit leaders during the last MTG and decided the following: every PhD candidate must have at least two supervisors. Typically both supervisors are from ILLC or UvA but the second supervisor can be from another university, e.g., in the case of joint-degrees or if justified by the project topic. In the case of an external second supervisor it is the responsibility of the main supervisor to organise a proper (local) replacement for when they are unavailable for a longer period (more than one month). (ii) The second supervisor and the promotor should in fact be appointed already within the first 3-6 months when the Teaching and Supervision Plan (TSP) is prepared; when no second supervisor is mentioned in the TSP, the main supervisor is urged by the management to appoint one; (iii) the code of practice for ILLC supervisors (<https://phdprogramme.illc.uva.nl/Info-for-Supervisors/code/>) has been discussed and critically evaluated during the last supervisor lunch in May 2025 and a link to it is included in all welcoming emails sent to supervisors of new PhD candidates.

PhD Defense

Recommendation The ILLC might lobby for, e.g., introducing a third location for defenses at Science Park or for a more efficient use of the available facilities (e.g. allow for a third defense on some days and for defenses to take place during the summer)

Response The ILLC director raised the issue with the FNWI faculty, and they replied that it was recently decided to pilot a 3rd location for PhD defences in the city centre (at Spui).

Social Cohesion

Recommendation: The ILLC leadership should work to resolve the split housing situation. To help intermingling in the meantime, residents of LAB42 might be encouraged to have more meetings in SP107. Supervisors should encourage their PhD candidates to participate in ILLC-wide social events like the ILLC colloquium and current affairs meetings. The ILLC's units should have their own regular social events, e.g., together with a seminar or the like to foster communication within the units. These events should be specifically designed as social events and PhD candidates should be encouraged to participate. Some units already do this, but we would recommend this to become practice in all units.

Response One of the goals of the newly introduced PhD trajectory is to increase social cohesion among the PhD candidates of the same cohort. And since 2025/26 we have also introduced two new social events for the PhD community on top of the initiative of the PhD social committee: a welcoming event for the new PhDs with drinks and pizza at the start of the academic year (in the last Monday of September), and the ILLC PhD Day (in the last Monday of January). As for increasing cohesion within ILLC, the ILLC management introduced the ILLC lunches which were successful and we could consider of having more of these regular events.

The PVC as a Contact Point

Recommendation: PhD candidates should be made aware of this opportunity. For example, they could be told about this at their onboarding and during events of the PhD council or the ILLC's CAM.

Response The PVC is listed as one of the contact points on the PhD-ILLC website (<https://phdprogramme.illc.uva.nl/current-candidates/support/gethelp/>), and this is also highlighted during the introduction meeting of the Trajectory for new PhD candidates. It is very important that new members of the PVC are properly informed by the ILLC management and by the PVC chair about what is expected from them in this role.