

Charter National Research Schools

With the introduction of the Utrecht University (UU) Graduate Schools (GS) the university board recently decided to stop active participation in National Research Schools (NRS). This was motivated by the observation that NRS do not cover all UU PhD programs. PrOUT questions the merits of this decision and wants to draw the attention to the following points:

Research related courses

NRS often organize courses and trainee programs for PhD candidates. Such courses can either be introductory courses, covering a wide range of topics e.g. aimed at transferrable skills, or can be highly-specialized. We expect GS to be well suited to take care of the first type of education. However, in most cases the latter type of courses is difficult to be organized by individual GS; simply because only on national level sufficient expertise can be gathered. PrOUT wants to point to the importance of the national education programs and hopes UU PhDs can continue to participate.

Inter-academic contacts

Besides courses, NRS play an important role in the academic debate by organizing symposia and workshops. These form a major platform for young researchers to exchange information and ideas. Those contacts can be extremely helpful to a PhD by offering reflection and exposure of the PhD's research. Furthermore, such symposia can be breeding grounds for scientific networks, which are important for the career opportunities of young researchers. PrOUT encourages PhDs to participate in national scientific debate.

Funding from NRS

The funding possibilities of NRS are diverse. Some NRS support PhDs by allocating funds for travel or thesis printing costs. For PhDs, such funds often form important resources e.g. when visiting conferences. Other NRS even fund entire PhD (or postdoc) positions. PrOUT welcomes these financial contributions of NRS.

Connection with non-university organizations

Some NRS have developed excellent joint-ventures with non-university organizations. This results in high level research, unique funding possibilities and good career perspectives for PhD candidates. PrOUT fears that in some cases ending the UU participation in NRS automatically ends the fruitful collaboration with the non-university organization.

Conclusions

PrOUT concludes that a PhD research benefits from active participation in NRS. They offer financial and scientific support to the local PhD program. Thus, NRS play an important role in facilitating the highly-specialized PhD research. As such NRS are not conflicting with the aims and means of local GS, but they can be seen as a welcome extra. In our opinion, the points presented above are of more importance than the fact that not every PhD program is covered by a NRS. As such, PrOUT supports active participation in NRS.

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