PhD completion times Survey (brief) results

2024-09-24

Last OSC numbers (December 2022)

Incomplete numbers at time of data collection

Starting Year	Male	Female	Total (M+F)	Completed Y4	Completed Y5	Starting Year	Completed Y6	Completed Y7	Not yet finished	Discontinued
2015	9	5	14	7,1%	28,6%	2015	50,0%	7,1%	0,0%	7,1%
2016	22	8	30	10,0%	36,7%	2016	33,3%	3,3%	10,0%	6,7%
2017	17	7	24	4,2%	33,3%	2017	16,7%	0,0%	45,8%	0,0%
2018	12	7	19	5,3%	21,2%	2018	-	0,0%	68,4%	5,3%
2019	13	7	20	0,0%	0,0%	2019	-	0,0%	100,0%	0,0%
Total	73	34	07	5,6%	25,2%	Total	19,6%	1,9%	43,9%	3,7%

PhDs contract last **4 years**, and extensions only last **3 months** nominally.

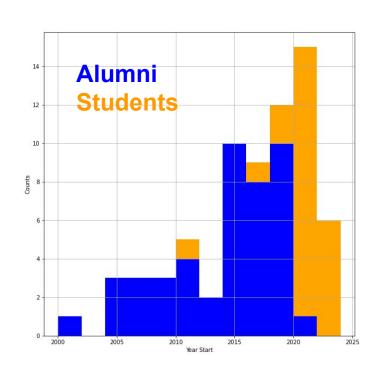
> **50%** finish in **over 5 years**, and some take considerably **longer than 5 years**.

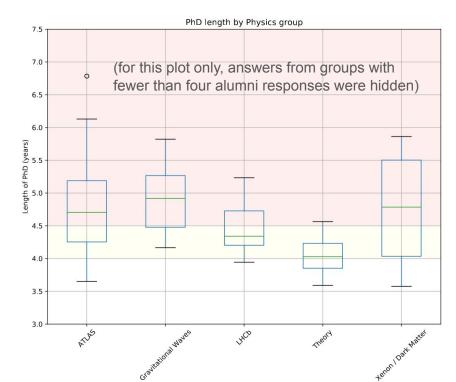
We are waiting for up-to-date, more precise numbers for time until thesis submission. In the meantime, we circulated a **survey** to get insights into the problem.

Who answered the survey? 71 responses total

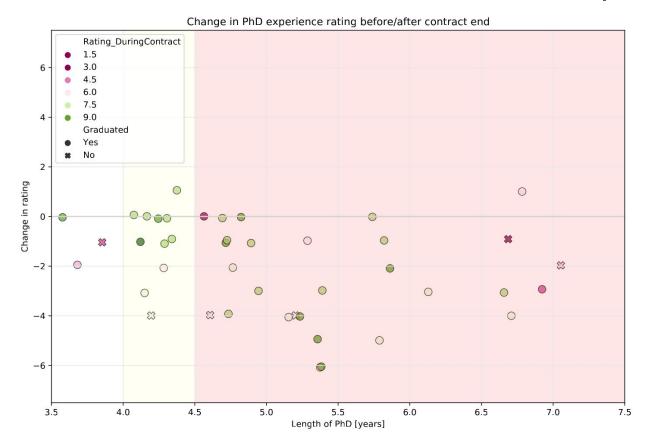
Responses are split 67% alumni, 33% students.

Only the Theory group had PhD durations which matched contract + extension durations





PhD duration and effect on student experience



We show the difference in experience rating (satisfied) out of 10, between before and after the end of the contract.

We see a median drop of 3 points.

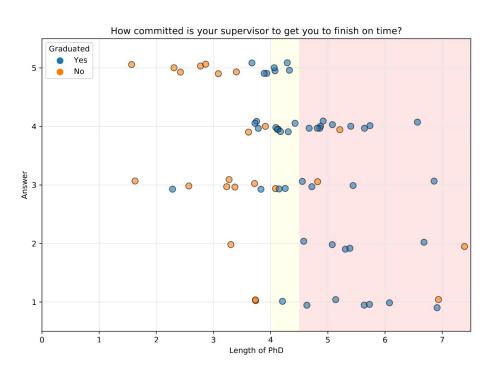
Post-contract experience

"With the end of my contract I had to tighten the belt for my routine, dig into my savings, look for a job, ask for unemployment and do related tasks to that, while working on my thesis."

"In my experience, you are increasingly treated as a failure and a disgrace when your PhD takes longer than the duration of your contract."

"No clear restrictions on menial tasks and teaching work, that you can use to deny cheap labour / simple work. In the end, due to a power imbalance between your supervisor, it's difficult to decline work that does not advance your research."

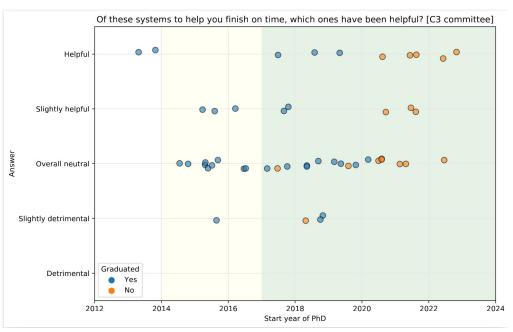
Supervisor commitment: Strong correlation with durations



When students perceive their supervisor as not committed into helping them finish on time, they overwhelmingly end up running over time by a significant margin.

Quality of supervision is felt as a very important topic by students. They are thankful to senior scientists, postdocs or older PhD students who take up the task of mentoring them when the responsibility taken by their official supervisor is experienced to be lacking

C3 committee: 33 out of 51 do not find it helpful



New students tend towards being positive (50% for those starting after 2020), while graduates and students in a late stage of their thesis tend towards neutral.

Long form answers:

- Happy with their C3 committee
- Formality with no effect on their planning/progress due to lack of interest from their C3 member
- Siding with their supervisor when issues arise
- C3 meetings end during the fourth year, but most PhDs run far longer than that.

We need your help!

We are looking for supervisors or universities with a reputation for keeping their students on time, in the Netherlands or abroad. If you know of any, please let us know! We would like to organize a talk or roundtable at Nikhef to find concrete solutions to this problem. Any other initiatives you know of would also be welcome!

There are many other things we want to look into, but lack the personpower. If you want to get involved, please send us an email!

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