



Position Paper on '*Ius Promovendi*'

January 2024 – APNet

Rationale

In the Netherlands, '*Ius Promovendi*' (= the right to promote a PhD Candidate and award the degree of 'Dr.' to a PhD Candidate) is currently restricted to Full Professors ('Hoogleraren') and only in some cases Associate Professors ('Universitair Hoofddocenten', UHD). We asked our community of Assistant Professors ('Universitair Docent', UD) about the effects that the current implementation of '*Ius Promovendi*' has on their careers. We received a total of 40 survey responses, and we include here the outcomes of a round table discussion held on October 11th, 2023.

Implications for Assistant Professors' careers

The implications of the current *Ius Promovendi* for the careers of Assistant Professors in the Netherlands are: 1) an adverse position compared to their international peers who do have the right to promote PhD Candidates, 2) codependency of Assistant Professors to Full Professors, leading to a power-imbalance that can result in inequality, 3) invisibility of the leadership skills developed by the Assistant Professor through supervising and promoting a PhD Candidate and 4) mental stress, frustration and feelings of underappreciation, which reflects back on individual research groups, departments and the quality of the PhD Candidate's work (see next section).

Unlike other countries, for example in [Belgium](#), [Germany](#) and the [United States](#), Assistant Professors in the Netherlands do not have the right to promote PhD Candidates. Many of our community members have held similar positions to Assistant Professor in a foreign country, where the right to promote PhD Candidates was granted to anyone with a faculty position (Assistant/Associate/Full Professors with a permanent contract). Moving to the Netherlands is a step back in their career, because under the current *Ius Promovendi* policy they suddenly lose this right to promote a PhD Candidate. This means that they lose the responsibility and the recognition they had while working abroad. Assistant Professors in the Netherlands are therefore put at a significant disadvantage compared to their peers in other countries. This creates the risk of losing the competitiveness of Dutch universities in the international academic landscape.

The current implementation of *Ius Promovendi* does not properly recognize the workload of Assistant Professors in the promotion trajectory of a PhD Candidate. Because Assistant Professors are daily supervisors, but are not allowed to promote a PhD Candidate, the supervisory work done by Assistant Professors is not equally valued to that of their senior colleagues. The expertise, skills or capacities of Assistant Professors in supervising PhD Candidates are not recognized, because the Full Professor gets the credits for the supervisory work done by Assistant Professors. This leads to hierarchical power imbalances, unnecessary discussion about whether a PhD Candidate should be promoted and, most importantly, it



undermines the work of Assistant Professors who often have acquired the funds for the PhD project themselves from highly competitive funding schemes.

Especially in the case of personally acquired funding, Assistant Professors expressed in the survey to feel underappreciated and undervalued, because *Ius Promovendi* does not acknowledge Assistant Professors capable of supervising a complete PhD trajectory, including giving promotion. We want to emphasize that acquiring funding explicitly acknowledges the expertise of the applicant (the Assistant Professor) within the scope of the research itself. In other words, the person who acquired the funds (in this case the Assistant Professor) is the scientific expert and has the required knowledge to properly assess the work done on that specific project, and hence is qualified to grant promotion to a PhD Candidate.

In discussion with our community, Assistant Professors have reported to feel undervalued and underappreciated in their role as supervisors of a PhD trajectory, which poses an additional hurdle for Assistant Professors to deal with and has the potential to reflect negatively on the work of the PhD Candidate. The Young Academy is currently holding a [survey](#) to gauge the mental health of scientists, including Assistant Professors in Dutch Academia.

Quality of the PhD Candidate's work

To ensure the quality of supervision and limit delays in the PhD Trajectory, the role of 'Promotor' should be filled by the person who supervises the PhD Candidate on a daily basis (regardless of career stage, Assistant/Associate/Full Professor), especially when hired on project launched on self-acquired funding. The role of 'Co-Promotor' could be filled by someone who already promoted PhD Candidates successfully, and who ideally has some affinity with the work of the PhD Candidate. Redefining the roles of Promotor and Co-Promotor has the advantage that 1) quality of the PhD Candidate's work can be continuously monitored through the PhD trajectory and therefore better guaranteed, 2) first-time supervising Assistant Professors will have access to the information and expertise from experienced colleagues in a more equal, ideally mentoring-type, professional relationship, 3) credits will go to the person with the largest involvement (both in terms of expertise, supervision and time) in the project, and 4) no unnecessary workload is added to the tasks of Full Professors.

Within the Dutch academic hierarchy, the fallacy persists that the quality of the work a PhD Candidate produces is linked to the supervisor's status or seniority. *Ius Promodeni* is used as a control measure on the daily supervisor, regardless of the experience of the supervisor and purely based on the career stage. This contrasts with the broader consensus from our community on [recognition and rewards](#), which advocates that quality can be delivered by any expert and that a more correct assessment and recognition of the work done is required. When a PhD candidate's daily supervisor is an Assistant Professor, who likely acquired the funding for the project and who is often more knowledgeable about the project and more involved in the day-to-day research activities of the PhD Candidate than the attached Associate Professor or Full Professor, the Assistant Professor should receive the recognition and reward attached to it. By only giving Full Professors the right to promote PhD Candidates,



only a few individuals are being given an extremely important task, which can result in bias and power imbalances in a department.

In Dutch Academia, promoters still tend to be Full Professors and are often just formally attached to a project when the daily supervision is done by an Assistant Professor. These dynamics completely undermine the expertise and workload of the daily supervisor, the Assistant Professor. As a result, the quality of a PhD Candidate's work cannot be guaranteed, because the Promotor (often a Full Professor) who is only formally attached to a PhD trajectory may lack time and interest in being actively involved with the PhD Candidate's work. This may lead to unnecessary delays in the PhD Candidates' progression and graduation. It remains unclear how the Dutch system can justify that a person, who might not be directly linked to the field of expertise, but who happens to be the Promotor of a PhD Candidate because of their seniority and/or academic status, can properly assess the quality of a PhD Candidate's work.

Challenges identified with *Ius Promovendi* and how to overcome them:

1. Reinforcing the expertise of Assistant Professors

We propose that PhD Candidates will be supervised by a team of supervisors which can consist of scientists from different career stages. The daily supervisor who has a permanent position (Assistant/Associate/Full Professors) will be the main Promotor and has the right to promote the PhD Candidate. In this way, the daily supervisor (Assistant/Associate/Full Professor on a permanent contract) gets the recognition for the supervision, while receiving guidance from and exchanging know-how with more senior staff members (if needed) during the process. This reinforces the expertise of the daily supervisor and ensures their independence based on experience, instead of career stage.

2. Ensuring the quality of PhD work

By giving the daily supervisor (Assistant/Associate/Full Professor on a permanent contract) of a team of supervisors the right to promote the supervised PhD Candidate, the quality of the PhD work can be better assessed than in the current system that uses the career stage as a control measure. The daily supervisor ideally is the main expert in the team of supervisors who can best assess the quality of the scientific work of the PhD Candidate. The complete team of supervisors has the responsibility to request a promotion, which will ultimately be assessed by the promotion committee. More experienced supervisors in the supervising team ideally have, besides their role as expert, a more mentoring and guiding role if required. Assistant Professors have already proven that they can perform highly quality scientific work and they know how to assess this. Guidance on managing/leading people to a successful PhD defense is a more appropriate role for more experienced scientists in a team of supervisors that are led by a daily supervisor with limited or no experience in PhD supervision.

3. Smoothen the process of promoting PhD Candidates

Assigning the supervision of a PhD Candidate to a team of supervisors will be beneficial for both the PhD Candidate and the supervising team. Such a team typically includes experienced supervisors that together guide and mentor the supervision process. The promotion rights



should go to the daily supervisor (Assistant/Associate/Full Professor on a permanent contract). Such a setup, with a supervising team, will ensure that throughout the PhD trajectory, the complete team will see the progression of the PhD Candidate's work. This will eliminate the unnecessarily long discussions about the eligibility to promote a PhD Candidate between the daily supervisor and Promotor, which will lead to a smoother, less administratively heavy promotion process and higher quality work.

4. Ensuring uniformity and transparency

Transparency and uniformity at a national level about *Ius Promovendi* through explicit guidelines and best practices are required. These best practices should be provided by UNL to ensure that Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Full Professors at Dutch Universities and research institutes have the same right with *Ius Promovendi* across the Netherlands (which after the 2017 ruling has not been the achieved).

In conclusion

The results of our survey show that Assistant Professors are negatively affected by the current execution of *Ius Promovendi*. They do not feel recognized by the work done, they feel their expertise is not valued and they do not feel the needed guidance is provided during the supervision of a first PhD Candidate. We conclude with several suggestions to eliminate the feelings Assistant Professors have of being put in a position of dependency and being undermined their expertise, knowledge and skills.

1) We suggest making the supervision responsibilities, now executed predominantly by a single person, the explicit shared responsibility of a research team in the promotion trajectory.

2) We propose to redefine the role of Promotor and Co-promotor in a PhD trajectory. Within a team of supervisors, the daily (or leading) supervisor (Assistant/Associate/Full Professor with a permanent contract) should be the official Promotor of the PhD Candidate, being able to promote the PhD Candidate (and thus have the *Ius Promovendi*). The Co-Promotor position could be filled by a colleague or colleagues who have experience in the supervision of PhD Candidates and who mentor the first-time Promotor.

Granting *Ius Promovendi* to the daily (or leading) supervisor of a supervision team (Assistant/Associate/Full Professor with a permanent contract) will a) lead to higher quality of the PhD work, b) decrease the workload of Full Professors, c) ensure that the daily (or leading) supervisor receives the recognition for their supervisory role and d) lead to a better alignment with the international standards of promoting PhD Candidates.