OTEC PhD Guide
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For whom this brochure?

This brochure is intended for individuals who seek to apply for a PhD candidate position at the Educational Technology Expertise Centre (OTEC) or have recently started as a PhD candidate. Note that it mainly focuses on regular PhD candidates and not so much on staff members who are working part-time on obtaining a PhD or external PhD candidates (i.e., working outside OTEC under supervision of a promotor from OTEC).

Why this brochure?

Most of those applying for or beginning on their PhD thesis work are ‘only’ used to ‘being a student’. Working on a PhD, and thus being a PhD candidate is very different from this. The PhD-candidacy is a comprehensive four-year exercise on a single topic (some would even call it an obsession) in collaboration and cooperation with different people and groups. The candidate is not a full-fledged staff member or researcher in that s/he still has a lot to learn. But this same candidate is not a student. There are very few ‘real’ courses to be followed, they are expected to show a good amount of independence, there are no examinations, and the proof of the pudding—the thesis and defense thereof— is proof of competency.

Since a PhD candidate is so different from a student, the Educational Technology Expertise Centre (OTEC) of the Open University of the Netherlands (OUNL) has produced this brochure for future and present PhD candidates, as well as their supervisors. It offers information about OTEC and the OUNL, but its main focus is on the issues PhD candidates will encounter during their doctorate study and the preparations for ‘the big day’. This brochure is in English, as this is the primary language of communication with the research community outside OTEC. If you are a foreign PhD candidate, you might also want to check the advise from previous foreign PhD candidates on the wiki [http://homer.ou.nl/otecwiki/doku.php](http://homer.ou.nl/otecwiki/doku.php).

PhD candidates at OTEC have (in general) a four-year appointment, in which their primary task is to work on a doctoral dissertation. This dissertation consists mainly of published or submitted articles. The usual format is an introduction, a theoretical framework (article), two or three further studies, often describing experiments (articles), a concluding chapter, and a summary. This implies that the process of writing the dissertation starts very early in the PhD period. However, there is more to being a PhD candidate at OTEC than writing a dissertation. Taking your PhD also involves taking courses, participating in other OTEC projects, and – last but not least – participating in a research community, not only at OTEC, but also on a national and international level.
The Organization

The Open University of the Netherlands

The Open University of the Netherlands (OUNL) offers open, higher, distance education (both Bachelor and Master degree level). It is divided into three departments: the Educational Technology Expertise Centre, Business Services, and Support Services and six schools that develop and provide educational materials and conduct educational programmes – the schools of Management, Cultural Studies, Computer Sciences, Natural Sciences, Psychology and Law. The central office is located in Heerlen, and there is a network of regional study Centres in various parts of the country, in Belgium, and in the Dutch Antilles, where students can get information about OUNL courses.

It is open higher education because the OUNL is open to anyone aged 18 or over, regardless of prior education. Students are free to study where and when they choose and generally there are no compulsory classroom or tutoring sessions. This is realized by using an electronic learning environment next to other learning materials that students receive at home or can consult in the study Centres: textbooks, workbooks, audio- and videotapes, CD-ROM and DVD. Each student has his own digital ‘workplace’ in the electronic environment and most courses have discussion groups that can be accessed via this environment. Most of the instruction is based on guided individual study, most study materials are ‘self-instructing’ to enable students to study without help from a teacher or mentor, but if necessary, they can contact a mentor via telephone or e-mail. Students may enrol at any time, are free to study at their own pace, and can generally decide for themselves when they are ready to take an examination. Exams are taken in the study Centres (which is where occasional face-to-face mentoring meetings are held as well).

The modular system of instruction means that students can enroll either for full-length degree programmes or for individual courses. Students can combine their course credits to obtain a diploma or degree if they so choose.

The mission of the OUNL consists not only of offering students an alternative form of higher education, but also of encouraging and supporting innovation in higher education, and contributing to the reduction of the shortage of teachers in primary and secondary education. The expertise required for innovating higher education is channelled through the Educational Technology Expertise Centre (OTEC).

A good overview of the organisation including its mission, facts and figures, study methods, and objectives can be found in the brochure Learning forever! A profile of Open Universiteit Nederland in 2004.

The Educational Technology Expertise Centre (OTEC)

The Educational Technology Expertise Centre (OTEC) focuses on educational innovation and technology i.e. the use of innovative methods and technologies at Open Universiteit Nederland and other institutions of higher education. The projects are directed towards competency-based learning in higher education, using educational technology.

OTEC wants to be a leading party, nationally and internationally, in the field of educational technology. This mission leads to the following core activities:

- Research in the field of educational sciences and educational technology (Research programme)
- Development of new learning technologies (Technology Development programme)
• Implementation of the latest insights in the field of education and educational technology in the courses and curricula offered by the OUNL and her partners (Implementation programme)
• Developing and offering educational programmes in its field of expertise. Since September 2003, the OTEC offers a MSc programme Active Learning. (Educational Institute)

In practice, the PhD candidate will primarily work within the Research programme or the Technology Development programme. For this reason, these programmes will be described in more detail. For more information about the other programmes, as well as the organization and management of the OTEC, the reader is referred to document on the OUNL intranet.

The OTEC Research programme

OTEC’s research history is relatively short. Its first research programme “Instructional Design for Competency-based Learning in Post-secondary Higher Education”, ran from 1999-2003. This programme had three themes, chosen according to their relevance for scientists working in educational technology, the field of post-secondary higher education and the Open University of the Netherlands: Design, Delivery and Diagnosis. This programme was audited in the spring of 2003, and based upon both that audit and the developments made in the research programme in its five years of existence the second research programme was formulated. This second programme, “Instructional Design for Open Tasks, Environments, and Communities” is operative from 2004-2008. The research foci, chosen because of their relevance to current developments in both the practical field of higher education and the scientific field of educational design and development, are:

• Domain-specific expertise development and its implications for instructional design for complex learning
• Learner guidance and support mechanisms in learning communities and environments based on rich learning tasks
• Development of (alternative) forms and techniques for formative and summative assessment of complex performances

The full text of the programme can be found on the OUNL intranet. All research projects within the OTEC research programme fit within its foci. In addition to PhD candidates’ projects, there are research projects of varying duration, carried out by the senior staff.

The Learning Technology Development programme

The current LTD programme Learning Networks (2003-2008) has the long term aim to develop a coherent set of learning technologies to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, accessibility or attractiveness of lifelong, formal and informal learning. The programme integrates a variety of current approaches to learning and ICT technologies to create “Learning Networks” in various professional areas and domains of knowledge, and will try to establish learning related interactions between distributed actors and resources that are not possible today in an efficient manner. Efficient here means that the intensity and learning quality of the interactions between learners and learning (support) resources and those among learners are increased, without increasing (or even decreasing) the workload for staff members.

The programme develops projects in the following themes:
a. Learning Networks Integrated  
b. Development and Use of Learning Activities and Units of Learning  
c. Positioning in Learning Networks  
d. Navigation in Learning Networks  
e. Ubiquitous access to Learning Networks  
f. Social Interaction in Learning Networks

The Learning Technology Development programme is involved in a number of European projects, which address the topics noted above. These projects include TENCompetence, Cooper, Mace and ProLearn.

Project funding

Most PhD projects in the OTEC research programme are financed either by the OUNL or by a public organization such as the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). PhD Projects in the development programme are also financed by EU funds. In day-to-day practice, there is little distinction between projects of candidates financed by the OUNL, or by external funds: the candidates receive the same salary; have the same collective labour agreement (CAO) from the Association of universities in the Netherlands (VSNU); have to live up to the same standards of quality and progress, etc.

A Ph.D. project has a typical duration of 1+3 years, with a formal evaluation that results in a go/no-go decision after the first year (see under 'progress: first-year evaluation and subsequent yearly evaluations' in the next section). This is based upon a full time appointment (1 Full-time equivalent, or FTE). Although it is possible to opt for a reduced appointment with a minimum of 0.8 FTE, there is one important restriction: the trajectory has to be successfully completed (with a PhD degree) within four years and ten months after the appointment of a candidate. Also, if a candidate decides during the trajectory to switch to a 0.8 FTE appointment, the total duration is not necessarily prolonged to four years and ten months.

Positions and Roles

The OTEC research and technology development programmes are staffed along similar lines from the OTEC capacity group. A programme typically consists of:

- The Director of the programme  
- PhDs / senior staff  
- PhD candidates (regular, staff, and external)

Regular PhD candidates have a temporary contract for the period of their PhD-research. Permanent staff are mostly *Universitair Docenten* (UDs, also referred to as Lecturer or Assistant Professor), or *Universitair Hoofddocenten* (UHDs, also referred to as Senior Lecturer or Associate Professor), and are typically associated with two of the four OTEC core activities. In addition, there are some staff members who are employed temporarily for the period of a project and spend most of their efforts on this project.

The directors of the programme are responsible for the coordination between projects and the quality of the programme. Senior staff members manage and/or conduct research projects of their own, supervise PhD candidates, and take part in one of the other OTEC programmes. Staff PhD candidates are involved in their doctorate study next to their appointment in one of the other
OTEC programmes, and contract PhD candidates have a four-year (or four-year and ten months) appointment to work primarily on their Ph.D. project within the research programme.

The Dutch national research funding system makes use of research schools. All members of the research programme participate in the Interuniversity Centre for Educational Research (Interuniversitair Centrum voor Onderwijsonderzoek – ICO). Only the senior staff members who are members of ICO can supervise PhD candidates.

Members of the development programme participate in the Dutch research school for Information and Knowledge Systems (SIKS). Again, only senior staff members who are members of SIKS can supervise PhD candidates.

OTEC works in a project-based manner. Most activities are carried out in the context of a project, and time spent on projects is registered systematically using the BigBen system.

General (non-PhD) projects have a project team, consisting of a project leader (who is responsible for the project’s quality, planning, finances etc), one or more project team members (who carry out the project), and one or more project assistants (who contribute specific expertise to the project in certain phases).

PhD projects are sometimes linked to other general projects, but the candidate can also be the sole team member. In addition to a project leader and possible assistants, there are some more ‘actors’ involved. The roles are described below.

The PhD supervisor
The supervisor (promotor) assumes responsibility for the progress and quality of the project together with the daily supervisor. PhD candidates have scheduled meetings with their supervisor on a agreed upon interval of somewhere between every three or six weeks. The candidate submits an agenda for the meeting, as well as documents (articles, experimental designs) s/he wants to discuss, and makes a short memo containing the points and future actions agreed upon.

The daily supervisor
The daily supervisor (dagelijks begeleider) is the project leader of the PhD project, and is responsible for both the coaching of the candidate (process) and the progress of the project (product). Candidates usually have scheduled meetings with their daily supervisors once every week. The daily supervisor has expertise in the domain of interest, next to more general methodological expertise.

The scheduled meetings are a way of reserving time in the full schedules of daily supervisors, but in general, candidates can drop in on their daily supervisors at any time.

The supervisory committee
Apart from a supervisor and daily supervisor, each PhD candidate has a supervisory committee (begeleidingscommissie). This commission consists of the supervisor, the daily supervisor and researchers with expertise in the field of study in which the candidate is doing the research. This committee has a scheduled meeting after the first year (see under ‘progress: first-year evaluation and subsequent yearly evaluations’ in the next section), but if necessary, its members can be consulted during the entire period of research. Used well, they form a resonance group for the candidate’s ideas and products.

Project assistants
Some people within OTEC have specific technical or programming expertise, and can be called on to assist in PhD projects, when for example a special computer program has to be created, or when a logging tool has to be built or adjusted.

*Non-project-related relevant others: peer coach and confidant (vertrouwenspersoon)*

In the first half-year of their research period, PhD candidates have a peer coach, a candidate in her/his second or third year or someone who has recently completed the process. Perhaps coach is too strong a term, as coaching is carried out by the daily supervisor. PeerHelpDesk (PHD) is probably a better term. The PHD helps the beginning PhD candidate to find her/his way in the OUNL/OTEC organization and the beginning candidate can ask the PHD about all sorts of things in the daily life of candidates, for example about the content of ICO-courses, where to find certain information, the PHD's experience with their supervisors, etc.

OTEC also has a confidant (a trusted representative), to whom all employees can turn with matters they want to discuss, but cannot or do not want to discuss with others in the organization. Everything discussed with the confidant is treated with confidentiality.
Getting your PhD: more than writing a thesis

Getting your PhD involves more than conducting experiments or developing and testing technology and writing a thesis. At OTEC, PhD candidates divide their time over three activities: (1) research, (2) education, and (3) participation in other OTEC projects or performing activities that are of use for OTEC or the programme.

PhD candidates spend most of their time working on their projects. This work is based upon a project plan, which contains a detailed research proposal and provides the candidates with a clear goal. Some differences exist between the nature of the work carried out in the research and development programmes.

The Research Programme

To allow the candidate to get acquainted with the research topic, a literature study is usually carried out first, which may lead to adjustments on the original research proposal and often leads to a detailed theoretical research framework. The initial period described above is followed by a first experiment to test the main research questions that were outlined in the research proposal and the theoretical framework that evolved from the literature study. Finally, two or more experiments will follow to find a better and better answer on the research questions. If it fits the project plan, especially financially, it is possible to carry out one or more experiments in a foreign country.

Publication & Communication

The results of the literature study and the experiments are reported in research articles that have to be submitted to international journals for publication. Only journals that are registered by the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) or by the research school (ICO) are considered to be proper outlets for the articles. At the OTEC it is custom that the international publications form the basis of the thesis that has to be ready at the end of the project. It has to be noted that this does not mean that every chapter in the dissertation has to be accepted for publication by international journals before one is admitted to the thesis defence. Usually, at the end of a PhD project at least half of the chapters of the dissertation has been published or accepted while the other half has been submitted.

In addition to publication in international journals there is another important outlet for a candidate's work, namely conferences. During the research period, a PhD candidate attends both national and international conferences. It is customary that candidates present their work at the conferences they visit. Important conferences in the educational field are the annual Educational Research Days (Onderwijs Research Dagen –ORD) held in the Netherlands or Belgium, the bi-annual EARLI (European Association of Research on Learning and Instruction) Conference held in Europe and the annual AERA (American Educational Research Association) Conference held in the USA. For more information with regard to the publication and communication policy, see “Publication and Communication Policy 2004-2008”.
The Technology Development Programme

We define technology development as:

The systematic creation of new artifacts (models, methods, prototypical tools and interoperability specifications) that meet the criteria of internal consistency and effectiveness for the improvement of a certain problem situation or the fulfilment of a need.

The motivating factor behind all technological activity is the desire to fulfil a need. Although it builds upon the results of science, technology is marked by different purposes, different processes a different relationship to established knowledge and a particular relationship to specific contexts of activity. Change in the material environment is the explicit purpose of technology, and not, as is the case with science, the understanding of nature; accordingly its solutions are not right or wrong, verifiable or falsifiable, but more or less effective from different points of view.

At the centre of technology lies design. The design process in technology is a sequential process which begins with the perception of a need, continues with the formulation of a specification, the generation of ideas and a final solution, and ends with an evaluation of the solution. The TD programme distinguishes between the following types of technologies:

- **Artefacts ('technology as object')**
  - The artefacts are developed to demonstrate and validate the specifications and technological theories and models. Typically these are called 'prototypes' and have the format of (virtual) tools, instruments, agents, etc. that support the actors in the teaching learning process to fulfil their tasks.

- **Specifications ('technology as activity')**
  - Specifications are documents that describe how learning artefacts are made and used. This involves sub processes like reuse, searching, finding, sharing, interoperability, etc. The format is: methods, procedures, architectures and (pre-)standards.

- **Technological knowledge ('technology as knowledge')**
  - The (further) development of theories, models and rules that underlies the functioning of the artefacts and specifications. The knowledge is typically stored in the knowledgebase of journal articles, books and conference proceedings.

There is a strong relationship between the three types of technologies, and all three will be present in most projects; however the accent can be different.

**Publication & Communication**

As is the case in the research programme, results from the PhD work are reported in research articles submitted to international journals for publication. The field of Advanced Learning Technologies (or Technology Enhanced Learning as it is called in Europe) is growing rapidly. Many researchers from different disciplines (computer science, cognitive science, psychology, educational sciences) are working in this field and there are also
many journals available that publish their work. However, it is currently not easy to select the best journal to publish your work. To help scholars, especially PhD students, to make adequate choices about the journals in which to publish, the TENCompetence Project publishes a list of journals which are the most important ones in the field. The list is agreed upon and controlled by a scientific committee whose members are highly recognized scholars in the field.

Conference publications are also an important outlet for results from the technology development programme, such as the IEEE International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies (ICALT), and the conference proceedings published as Springer Lecture Notes in Computer Science.

**Progression: first-year evaluation and subsequent yearly evaluations**

The first year is especially important in a PhD research period. The expected results for this year have to be clear for all project members at the beginning of the project. After 12 months, a progress meeting is held with the candidate and her/his Supervisory Commission to evaluate whether the project is on schedule, whether the quality is acceptable and whether any changes need to be made in the project. If necessary, problems or bottlenecks can be tackled. The commission is asked the following questions:

1. What is your opinion of the scientific quality and clarity of the working documents/articles that have been delivered thus far?
2. What is your opinion about the feasibility of the planning for the coming period?
3. What is your opinion of the quality of the experimental design and methods of the next experiment?
4. Has there been enough progress in the first year of the project to warrant your confidence in its completion within the agreed upon period of four years (also with respect to the planning for this first year)?
5. Do you have any suggestions and/or comments that can help the candidate, daily supervisor and/or supervisor in the future execution of this project?

The documents that are sent to the committee in advance should enable the members to answer these questions:

1. A covering letter (supervisor) inviting the members; specifies attachments
2. An agenda (supervisor) specifies project, committee members, structure of the meeting, and evaluative questions.
3. The reflective report
4. The project proposal
5. The Education and Supervision plan
6. A (concept of the) theoretical framework/article
7. A (concept of the) design of the first experiment

Based on this first-year evaluation a decision is made as to whether the candidate is allowed to continue his/her PhD project for the rest of the project duration. Of course, this is also the moment that candidates themselves can decide whether they want to continue the project. When a decision is made to continue the project, a yearly evaluation (functioneringsgesprek) takes place with the daily supervisor and in special cases with both the daily supervisor and the supervisor. In these evaluation meetings the following issues are discussed: the progress of the
project, the supervision, the education, the participation in implementation projects. More information on the yearly evaluations is found on the OUNL website.

**Education**

*The Education and Supervision Plan*

During the four-year appointment there are 1200 hours (150 days) available for further education. How these hours are filled in is specified in the Education and Supervision Plan, a document that is formulated at the beginning of the PhD period. In addition to a short research outline and a research plan, an educational programme (curriculum) is formulated, and agreements are made with regard to amount and frequency of the supervision. This plan is handed to the management team of OTEC for approval, and when approved signed by the PhD candidate, the daily supervisor and the supervisor. If necessary this plan can be revised, usually based upon the results of the yearly evaluations.

*The research school: ICO*

As mentioned earlier, OTEC participates in a Dutch research school: the Interuniversity Centre for Educational Research (Interuniversitair Centrum voor Onderwijsonderzoek –ICO). The Association of Research Institutes (Vereniging van Onderzoek Instituten –VOI) acknowledged ICO in 1990. ICO offers courses especially for PhD candidates to educate them to be ICO-certified researchers. As a standard at OTEC, 600 hours of education are filled in by courses of ICO, in the following way: an introductory course (200 hours), three master classes, covering methodological and content subjects (100 hours each) and an international summer/winter school (100 hours). Exemption from ICO courses is possible, dependent on the initial qualifications and research experience, in case the PhD candidate has already participated in other courses of similar statue. Exemption is granted by the ICO director of education, based on a written request by the PhD candidate, in consultation with the course coordinator and the supervisor of the PhD candidate’s research project. The other 600 hours can be invested elsewhere (this is a right, though, not an obligation), for example, at the OUNL or other research schools such as, EPOS or NICCI. For up-to-date information about the ICO courses and requirements, see [http://projects.edte.utwente.nl/ico/](http://projects.edte.utwente.nl/ico/).

*Research School SIKS*

The mission of SIKS is to perform high-level fundamental and applied research in the field of information and computing science, more particularly in the field of information and knowledge systems; to organise a high-quality four-year educational programme for its Ph.D. students, employed at 10 different Universities in the Netherlands or at leading companies in the field of ICT; to facilitate and stimulate co-operation and communication between the School and its stakeholders, including leading (industrial) companies in the field of ICT.

SIKS’ educational programme has five aspects/stages:

1. Homogenization
2. Basic courses
3. Advanced components
4. General research skills
5. Independent research

SIKS students are considered to have 42 weeks available annually for four years. Of the 168 weeks that are available in total, they are expected to spend 25 weeks on the first four
components listed above. The division over these components is as follows:
Homogenization a maximum of 4 weeks in the first year; Basic course programme 8 weeks in
the first two years; Advanced components a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 17 weeks;
General research skills a maximum of 4 weeks.

Participation in projects of other OTEC programmes
Since the OUNL provides distance education the obligation for PhD candidates to teach
students is filled in differently than it is at regular universities. PhD candidates at other
universities are obliged to teach undergraduate students for a maximum of 20% of their time.
OTEC PhD candidates participate instead in projects in one of the other OTEC programmes or
perform a variety of non-research activities in European projects.
The internal organization of OTEC differs from ‘traditional’ capacity groups in that the staff is
expected to function in two or more programmes for a substantial amount of time. Hence, PhD
candidates are somewhat of an exception because they work primarily within a single
programme.

Formal and informal meetings
Formal meetings are held regularly in which PhD candidates are expected to participate.
Every month a plenary OTEC meeting (OTEC plenair) is arranged, chaired by the general
director of OTEC. In this meeting general information regarding the department is
communicated. News from or progress in each core activity (i.e., research, development,
implementation and education) is discussed.

An OTEC PhD candidate meeting is held four times a year (i.e., candidates of both the research
and development programmes participate). In the development programme there are weekly
lunch meetings. The goal of both of these meetings is twofold: the first is the exchange of
information regarding internal and external affairs that are relevant for the PhD candidates, and
in addition, it is a way to keep in touch with both the process (is everyone making progress,
feeling OK with what they are doing?) and the product (what methods or tools are used) of each
others research projects. Meetings around specific topics are arranged regularly. A publication
group and instructional design group, for example, have been formed to discuss specific issues.

The research and technology development programmes also hold regular meetings.

The Research Programme
The plenary research meeting (Plenair Onderzoeks Overleg – POO) is chaired by the
director of the research programme. The meeting consists of an hour long content-
related research colloquium in which researchers from OTEC or other institutes outside
OUNL present their work. This part of the meeting is open to all. The second part of the
meeting, which is only open to members of the OTEC research group, is a half-hour
meeting to discuss management and policy affairs regarding the research programme.

Externally, PhD candidates can participate in, for example, the ICO educational
committee, the interest group for PhD candidates of the Netherlands Educational
Research Association (VOR Promovendi Overleg – VPO), the PhD network of the
Netherlands (Promovendi Netwerk Nederland – PNN), and the Junior Researchers of
EARLI (JURE) network. The VPO organizes a meeting for candidates with workshops and presentations about a specific theme twice a year.

The Technology Development Programme

A plenary Technology Development programme meeting is held once per quarter, chaired by the director of the programme. During the meeting, each project in the programme presents an update, and one or two topics are selected for deeper discussion. External speakers such as visiting researchers are also invited to present their work. A project leaders’ meeting is held once per month, focusing on planning and administrative aspects of the projects. Finally, a lunchtime meeting is held each week during which individual members of the technology development programme give a short presentation of their work.

Depending on the project the PhD work is related to, the PhD candidate can also participate in the regular project meetings.

Externally, PhD candidates can participate in the European TENCompetence PhD candidates network and in the PhD network of the Netherlands (Promovendi Netwerk Nederland –PNN).

In addition to all these formal meetings, there are plenty of opportunities for informal ones, for example in the coffee corner, or outside office hours on the initiative of some of the PhD candidates.
The Big Day

About a year before the project ends, a final, detailed planning has to be made towards the big
day of the thesis defence. Usually, the defence date is planned ten months in advance, and fairly
close to the date that the project is due to end. It is very important to note that the dissertation
has to be finished in concept form (the manuscript) six months before the defence date. This
concept is sent to the supervisor and daily supervisor for their approval. Five months before the
day of the thesis defence - at the latest – the manuscript has to be sent to the evaluating
committee (which can, but not necessarily, have the same members as the supervisory
commission). This commission has six weeks to read the dissertation and give their approval.
The only question that they are asked to answer is: May the candidate be allowed to defend this
thesis? In these six weeks, the PhD candidate has the time to: design the cover, make an
appointment with the printer, and choose the ‘seconds’ (*paranīmfen* – two persons who
accompany and assist the candidate at the defence). If and when the committee gives its
approval, the dissertation has to be printed. A camera-ready version of the thesis has to be
delivered to the printer approximately two months before the date of the defence (printing takes
approximately a month and you want to distribute copies a month in advance). Finally, a number
of copies of the printed version of the thesis have to be sent to the Board of the University for
academic distribution and the candidate does the same to invitees about three weeks in
advance. See the promotion regulations [available on the intranet](#).
Tips from former OTEC PhD candidates

- Make choices; don't try to study everything.
- Make your expectations towards your supervisors explicit.
- Find out what your supervisors expect from you.
- Do not wait too long before carrying out your first experiment. An experiment often gives you insight and direction.
- Do not despair when your participants don't show up. It happens all the time and persistence does pay off.
- Do not work all alone but discuss your research with colleagues. This keeps you from thinking in circles.
- Use the Internet to find relevant statistical methods to analyze your data.
- Remember, no significant results are also results.
- Make use of the strengths of your supervisors and do not get annoyed at their weaknesses (they're only human).
- Take up some additional functions but do not forget that the dissertation has to be ready in four years. This is your main goal.
- Make a detailed 'to do' list about a year before your thesis defence.
- Make use of the experience of former PhD candidates to help you through the last year.
- Plan the thesis defence date with the College of Promotions about a year before the PhD contract ends.
- Keep track of the formal processes with regard to the thesis defence. Make sure that every form reaches its destination and verify every formal step with the secretary of the College of Promotions.
- Rehearse your thesis defence with colleagues. Formulate possible questions and answers.
- You may not realize it yet, but despite difficulties you may encounter, as a PhD candidate you've got a great job with many degrees of freedom, which is quite unique, so enjoy your position!
Useful information sources and addresses

Open University of the Netherlands:
http://www.ou.nl/

Educational Technology Expertise Centre (OTEC):
http://www.ou.nl/eCache/DEF/5/071.html

OTEC Research programme:
http://www.ou.nl/eCache/DEF/22/813.html

OTEC Technology Development Programme:
  – http://www.learningnetworks.org (external programme website)
  – http://dspace.ou.nl (literature, software, specifications produced by the programme)
  – http://homer.ou.nl/otecwiki/ (PhD wiki)
  – http://wiki.tencompetence.org (Journals list maintained by scientific committee)
  – http://www.siks.nl (research school)

Association of universities in the Netherlands
(Vereniging van (Samenwerkende Nederlandse) Universiteiten –VSNU): http://www.vsnu.nl

Interuniversity Centre for Educational Research
(Interuniversitair Centrum voor Onderwijsonderzoek –ICO): http://projects.edte.utwente.nl/ico/

Netherlands Educational Research Association
(Vereniging voor Onderwijs Research –VOR): http://www.ou.nl/open/vor

The Netherlands Educational Research Association’s interest group for PhD candidates
(VOR Promovendi Overleg –VPO): http://www.ou.nl/open/vor/VPO/_index.htm

TENCompetence PhD network

PhD network of the Netherlands
(Promovendi Netwerk Nederland –PNN): http://www.hetpnn.nl

The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research
(Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs -NWO):
http://www.nwo.nl/nwohome.nsf/pages/index

The European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI):
http://www.earli.org/welcome

The Junior Researchers of EARLI (JURE) network:
(accessible via) http://www.earli.org/jure/

The American Educational Research Association (AERA):
http://www.aera.net

The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT):
http://www.aect.org
Library and literature facilities:
OUNL catalogue (part of the larger Utrecht University):
http://www.intranet.ou.nl/eCache/INT/50/319.html#Bibliotheekdiensten

Utrecht University catalogue:
http://aleph.library.uu.nl/ALEPH?750291511

Picarta:
http://www.pica.nl/publiekwijzer/picarta.html