

PhDoc Election Program  
2026-2028

# OUR TIME IS NOW



Defending the interests of PhDs and postdocs at Leiden University

A massive thank you to the colleagues who supported our candidate list and who commented on this programme.

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# PhDoc Candidates

#1 WEI PING YOUNG



Faculty of Archaeology  
Archaeological Sciences

#2 MARIE KOLBENSTETTER



Faculty of Archaeology  
World Archaeology

#3 TULLIO ABRUZZESE



Faculty of Archaeology  
World Archaeology

#4 EMMA DE VRIES



Faculty of Law  
Public Law

#5 EMANUELE BERARDI



Faculty of Science  
LIC

#6 CAROLINE SCHEP




Faculty of Humanities  
LUIH

#7 EVA SIEVERS




Faculty of Science  
CML

#8 RENZO KNOL




Faculty of Science  
LIC

#9 CATHERINE MERGEN



Faculty of Science  
LACDR

#10 TAHMINA FARIABY



Faculty of Science  
LACDR

# PhDoc in a nutshell

## Principles

PhDoc defends the interests of PhDs and postdocs at Leiden University. We have had a consistent presence in the University Council since 2012. We are a group of energetic early-career academics who care about the future of our university. In a nutshell, PhDoc is guided by the following three principles:

- **Transparency and trust are our foundation**

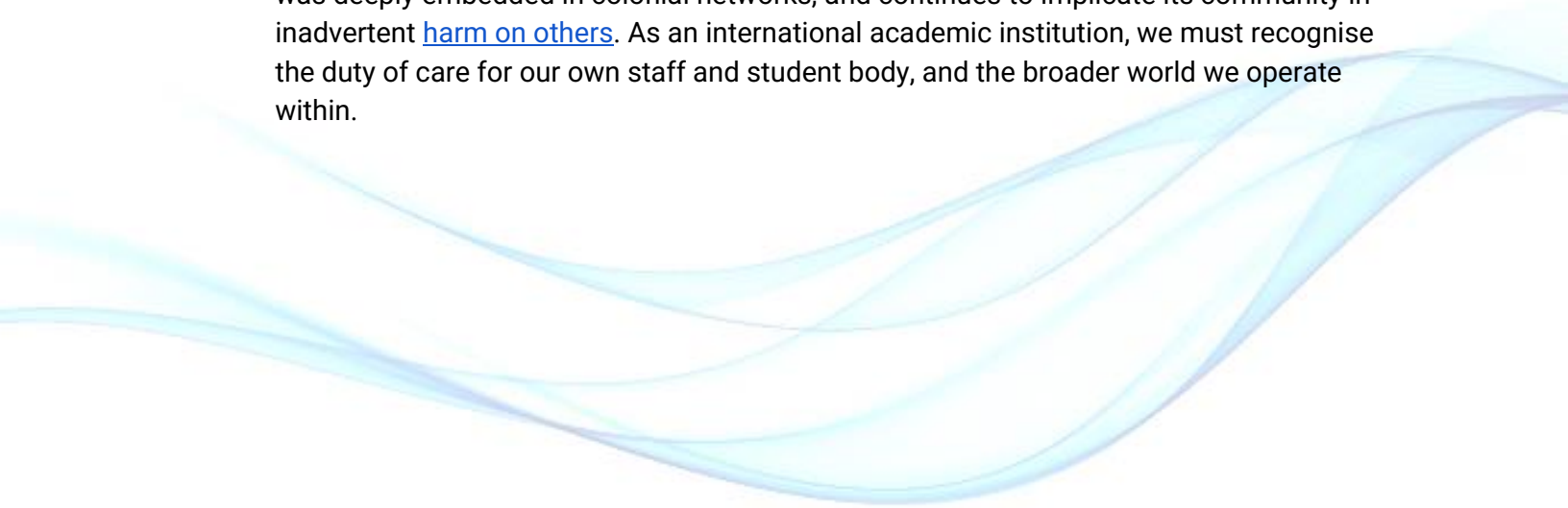
Dialogue should not be avoided on the basis of [controversy](#). All the more, these topics need to be addressed and should not be left to fester. This unwillingness to engage contributes to the [lack of social safety](#) in our university environment, where many feel unsafe, unsupported, and isolated time and time again. At the heart of these problems lies a lack of trust in each other, leading to a lack of transparency. We need to actively engage in conversation with each other to build respect and trust, and to eliminate fear.

- **Diversity is not decorative: ensuring inclusivity and equity requires introspection and radical change**

Ensuring an inclusive academic environment is not a [box-ticking exercise](#) accomplished within closed sessions. Too often does the burden of fulfilling diversity outcomes fall onto individuals when it should be the responsibility of the institution. Too often are diverse voices [ignored and excluded](#). Should we have more female professors? Yes. Should our buildings and events be accessible to all, regardless of disability? Yes! Should the cultural diversity of students, PhDs and postdocs be better represented higher up in our hierarchy? YES!

- **Actions with integrity and empathy**

There is a lot on everyone's mind: climate crisis, war, budget cuts, higher costs of living. Building a supportive institutional environment demands recognising the ways we fall short. The rich and impressive history of Leiden University [does not exist in isolation](#). It was deeply embedded in colonial networks, and continues to implicate its community in inadvertent [harm on others](#). As an international academic institution, we must recognise the duty of care for our own staff and student body, and the broader world we operate within.



# Themes

Our principles feed into the five main themes we will cover in this election program:

1. **Representation:** No voice should go unheard in university decision-making.
2. **Well-being:** Moving from work pressure to work enjoyment.
3. **Personal growth:** Balancing guidance and freedom to foster growth.
4. **Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI):** Everyone deserves a fair chance.



# Achievements 2022-2026

Below you can find a short overview of what we did with our single seat in the University Council in 2022-2026. We will leave it up to you to imagine what we could do with more seats.

**5. Building trust with PhDs and postdocs.**

PhDoc values in-person interaction above all else. Since the previous election, we have had 143 meetings with and for PhDs and postdocs, not counting official University Council meetings. This is how we build trust with PhDs and postdocs throughout the university, and how we ensure the right topics are on the University Council agenda.

**6. Improving the university commuting allowance.**

We have [consistently called for](#) better reimbursement of commuting costs, with [a focus on public transport](#). The university budget for 2024 now includes a €1.2mln mobility fund to improve the commuting allowance. This has since then transformed into the *Shuttle* program.

**7. No more misuse of annual agreements.**

PhDoc wrote a [report](#) on the problematic misuse of annual agreements at Leiden University, which were resulting in the consistent loss of holiday hours for junior staff. Despite [initial inaction](#) by the university board, PhDoc collaborated with the labor unions in ensuring annual agreements are now no longer permitted for junior staff. We explained in a [interview](#) with AOb magazine why this was an important step.

**8. Fighting for early-career academic inclusion in R&R.**

PhDoc has been very active in the Recognition & Rewards (R&R) movement. Our [workshop at the 2023 R&R festival](#) paved the way for the inclusion of PhDs and postdocs in national R&R decision-making. At Leiden University, we were one of the main drivers behind the introduction of the [lay talk](#) at PhD defenses, which started in September 2024.

**9. Equity for external PhDs.**

PhDoc actively supported the taskforce external PhDs, whose 2023 report contains many recommendations to [improve equity between internal and external PhDs](#). We have continuously raised awareness about the report recommendations, which include giving external PhDs voting rights in university elections. We further opposed a resolution to [implement tuition fees for external PhDs](#) and were involved in developing new PhD guidelines which clearly dictate what a Leiden PhD is owed.

**10. And much, much, much more.**

Interested to learn more about what we do? Or want to join the PhDoc team? E-mail us at [w.p.young@arch.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:w.p.young@arch.leidenuniv.nl) or [m.m.kolbenstetter@arch.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:m.m.kolbenstetter@arch.leidenuniv.nl).

# 1. Representation


*No voice should go unheard in university decision-making*

'No taxation without representation,' as the old saying goes. Yet, external PhDs are quite heavily taxed, in terms of the work they do for our university, without having the right to vote during university elections. PhDoc strongly believes that no voice from our community should go unheard in university decision-making. To achieve this, we need to strengthen our institute councils and ensure postdocs have an active community through which they can voice their concerns.

For 2026-2028, our goals are:

- **English as the official communication and co-participation language**  
Dutch, as the official administrative language within the university both in communication and in co-participation, is standing in the way of adequate representation and of proper integration of the University community. To foster a healthy international academic community, the first initiative to be proposed by PhDoc in the new term will be a resolution to ask for the progressive phasing out of Dutch as the default administrative language, starting by providing translation of all documents pertaining to (proposed) policy at Central and Faculty level.
- **Grant active and passive voting rights to external PhDs by 2028.**  
The taskforce external PhDs concluded in their [report](#) that we should seriously investigate the possibility of giving external PhDs voting rights in university elections. Although the resulting investigation concluded there are no legal barriers, and several universities already allow scholarship PhDs to vote (see e.g., [UU](#), [TiU](#)), the university board has refused to grant voting rights. This means external PhDs will not be allowed to vote in the upcoming election. PhDoc believes this is absolutely indefensible, and that external PhDs should have active and passive voting rights by the time of the 2026 elections. Additionally, we need to investigate how we can ensure LUMC PhDs have a say in decision-making that affects them, such as changes made to the PhD regulations.
- **Appoint a central postdoc coordinator to support the postdoc community.**  
There is currently not a single FTE at Leiden University responsible for developing a postdoc vision and policy, while there are around [400 postdocs](#). We cannot expect to properly represent this group when nobody at our university is responsible for the postdoc community. We need to appoint a central postdoc coordinator for 1 FTE to develop a postdoc vision and to reinvigorate the [Leiden University Postdoc Assembly \(LUPA\)](#). From 2026-2028, this postdoc coordinator should investigate what is needed at our different faculties to better support and represent postdocs.
- **Provide free training and support to institute councils.**  
Whereas the role of the University Council and Faculty Councils is specified by law, the role of institute councils and PhD committees is often only informally agreed upon within an institute. This hinders the ability of institute councils to properly control and advise institute boards. All institute councils should receive the same free training on co-

participation provided to the University Council and Faculty Councils. Additionally, institute councils should receive support in writing statutes that formalize which topics the board has to discuss with the council and the compensation that is received by council members.

- **Increase and formalize PhD representation by creating a PhD representatives platform**  
By meeting regularly with PhD and postdoc representatives of all faculties/institutes, we want to make sure that we provide the best representation possible for our constituency. We will continue to organize individual meetings, but also participate in the creation of an apolitical PhD & Postdoc platform to meet four times a year to act as sounding board for new policy changes.
  - **Centralize and unify the graduate school system**  
The current fragmentation of graduate school regulations stands in the way of equal rights within the PhD community across the different faculties and institutes of Leiden University. PhDoc favors a centralization of the graduate school system. To make sure that all PhDs have equal rights, are subject to the same expectations and have the same access to university resources, we aim to propose the creation of a PhD Dean position to preside over all graduate schools and the Doctorate Board. We propose that this be considered as a separate entity within the university, with its own advice and co-participation body composed of PhDs. This entity would have several aims, such as reducing PhD dependency on the supervising team and the local graduate school for information, allowing for a real PhD community to be formed, and facilitating interaction and collaboration across faculties.
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## 2. Well-being

### *Moving from work pressure to work enjoyment*

Multiple reports over the past years have brought to light a concerning level of work pressure in Dutch academia. With growing student numbers and increased bureaucratization, the problem has only gotten worse. Many of our new administrative responsibilities in academia (e.g., data management plans, cybersecurity, sustainability reporting) are here to stay, so the solution cannot come purely from efficiency gains. PhDoc believes that the priority should lie with improving employee agency and increasing work enjoyment, through a united movement to bring the personal touch back to our employee well-being strategy.

For 2026-2028, our goals are:

- **Ensure PhD psychologists have fixed positions, and availability for postdocs.**  
PhDoc helped to pave the way for two PhD & Postdoc psychologists, who are often fully booked. We recommend adding a third, hoping this will create room to offer the mental support PhDs need, but also wish to stress that psychologists should be available to postdocs, who are lacking many mental health resources.
- **Appoint an independent PhD & Postdoc coach at every research institute.**  
Several research institutes at our university have very positive experiences with (semi-)independent PhD coaches in helping to create a welcoming and safe work environment. A coach serves as a trusted advisor for PhDs & Postdocs, helps to prepare for yearly evaluation meetings, and can be the first point of contact in case of issues with a supervisor. PhDoc believes every institute/department should have a PhD & Postdoc coach.
- **No PhD should work for the university while formally unemployed.**  
An average PhD trajectory takes [more than five years](#) to complete, whereas contracts are for four years. PhDs are regularly forced to complete their dissertation while unemployed. Financial responsibility for PhDs going over time needs to shift away from PhDs and to institutes. We need to provide more clarity about options for contract extensions and ensure nobody is working for our university while formally unemployed.
- **Normalize taking holidays and sick leave.**  
It needs to become more normal to take the holiday leave you have a right to. Creating transparency about holidays can be the first step. And while nobody plans on getting sick, long-term term sick leaves need to be available to those who need them. Guaranteeing the access to extensions on grounds of sick leave in the function-base contracts is a moral obligation of the University. Making training and supervision plans more flexible for PhDs to still allow them to complete the dissertation within their contract despite long-term sick leaves is further essential.
- **Create the incentive to supervise well by including supervision in yearly evaluations.**  
Supervisors, just as the university, have a duty of care towards their PhDs. Whether this supervisory duty is performed well needs to be externally monitored, and supervisors actively trained in mandatory courses. Supervisors who allow PhDs and postdocs to flourish are not recognized and rewarded for this time investment. Similarly, supervisors

who mistreat their PhDs and postdocs are often not disciplined or fired. Supervision is an important part of the work of senior academics, and it should be included as part of yearly evaluations. We are currently actively lobbying for this to be implemented as soon as possible.



# 3. Personal growth

## *Balancing guidance and freedom to foster growth*

PhDs and early-career academics should get the right level of guidance to develop themselves, but should also get the freedom to choose their own path. Striking the right balance between structure and autonomy is difficult. We need to provide more clarity on how we will holistically evaluate education and research, while also ensuring to recognize and reward young academics who dare to take steps on less well-trodden paths (e.g., outreach, policy, volunteering).

For 2026-2028, our goals are:

- **You can teach (if you want to).**

PhDs and postdocs are often asked to do more than they can handle. It is not easy to say no because there is no maximum percentage of teaching and supervision specified in their contracts. To prevent this, an essential step is to specify the percentage of time spent on teaching and supervision in all contracts. Many PhDs and postdocs start teaching and supervising students with no preparatory training. Like other universities (e.g., [UU](#), [RU](#)), Leiden should offer a 'Start to Teach' course to employees starting their career in education. Additionally, we need to provide much more clarity to PhDs at the start of their trajectory on the options to get teaching experience when it is not foreseen in their position, and to obtain a [\(partial\) university teaching qualification](#). We are currently actively lobbying for this to be implemented as soon as possible.

- **Improve PhD and postdoc career development opportunities.**

Postdocs are not getting the support they need to prepare for the next steps in their career. PhDs and pPostdocs who wish to obtain the university teaching qualification should get the chance to do so. Finally, all postdocs and PhDs should have access to a specialized job coach upon reaching the final year of their contract, both to help them navigate the academic job market, as well as to facilitate transition outside of academia.

- **Diversify and adapt transferable skills requirements**

Transferable skills courses are a mandatory aspect of all training and supervision plans for PhDs. However, (free) access to them depends on availability of graduate school funding. While some PhDs see them as a beneficial addition to their trajectory, some PhDs experience these courses as an additional burden. To tailor this requirement to the diversity of Leiden PhD experiences, we propose to (1) lower the amount of mandatory transferable skills courses in the training and supervision plans and (2) to make them more accessible on a voluntary basis, so that people who experience them as beneficial can continue to follow them. Finally, we propose the addition of free language courses to be counted towards these transferable skills.

## 4. Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

*Everyone deserves a fair chance. And we mean it!*

Leiden University has a diverse community of students and staff, but not everyone has the same freedoms and opportunities. Examples are students with disabilities that cannot easily navigate certain buildings, colleagues that do not speak Dutch who cannot take part in co-participation, or colleagues who have a lower chance of rising in the ranks because of their gender or ethnicity. It will take a concerted effort to make Leiden a more equitable and inclusive place to work. But, if you ask us, the effort is worth it.

For 2026-2028, our goals are:

- **Take responsibility for the financial challenges faced by scholarship PhDs.**  
International scholarship PhDs regularly earn less than minimum wage. They may not be employees of the university, but they are our colleagues. We have a responsibility to make them feel welcome and to help them find a place to stay. We feel it is the University's duty to create a fund to match those scholarships, to allow access to the same resources employed PhDs have, such as travel for conferences and aid for dissertation printing costs.
- **Remove inequalities between external and internal PhDs.**  
The taskforce external PhDs presented their [report](#) in 2023, which included a series of recommendations for removing inequality between external and internal PhDs. While PhDoc has actively been working on new PhD regulations to provide clear guidelines on what Leiden PhDs are owed (regardless of internal or external), there are still ways to go in making sure external PhDs are actively included in the Leiden University community. All PhDs should always have a place to work, should be allowed to follow free Dutch and English courses, and should be informed of their rights and obligations as early as possible. We also will [continue to lobby](#) on behalf of external PhDs so that no tuition fee money will ever have to come out of their personal finances.
- **Increase support for parent PhDs and ECRs**  
Evidence shows that there is still a [large disparity in gender distributions](#) at Dutch Universities increasing between PhDs, Postdoc, Assistant Professors, Associate professors and Full professors. [Research suggests](#) parenthood may be a major factor in this disparity. We argue that adding extra support for parents, especially in the early stages of their careers, could help match this gap in the long term. This is why it is unacceptable for the university to [stop subsidizing child-care](#), which was a small but essential step in remedying the gender imbalance.
- **Improve accessibility and support for neurodivergent and disabled staff**  
Neurodivergent and disabled staff still receive very little representation at the university. Navigating the university administration and figuring out what accommodations are available are central to make the university community more inclusive. For PhDs and Postdocs, these accommodations can have a radical impact on how they will experience

their time in Leiden and on the success of their project. At this vulnerable stage of their career, it is essential for them to receive the right kind of support without fear of judgement. Information about accommodations should be readily available to PhDs and postdocs without explicit request. There further should be a clearly outlined path in seeking additional support to navigate the academic environment.



# Our stance on other issues

In these times of crises, PhDoc believes it is the duty of our university to take a proactive stance. Not only because of the university's role in society, but also because of our role as educators of the future generation of scientists, politicians, and innovators. We see defending PhD and Postdoc rights as inherently anchored in a progressive and collective political praxis. As such, on top of our strong positions on PhD and Postdoc issues, we will continue to take firm stances on following issues in 2026-2028:

- **Sustainability**

The university board [announced its intent](#) to limit ties to fossil fuel partners that do not commit to the Paris Agreement, unless projects contribute to the energy transition. We have serious doubts about a combined partner-based and project-based approach, as any project-based approach [opens the door to greenwashing](#). A partner-based approach, already implemented by [VU Amsterdam](#), is the only right way forward.

- **Decolonization**

We stand firmly behind [the trajectory](#) the university has started to address its role in colonization processes. We will continue to push for the university to take responsibility for reparations. We also broaden the understanding of (neo)colonialism as extending beyond direct colonial ties from the Netherlands, by including any place where Leiden researchers have actively extracted knowledge (botanical, medical, ethnographical, archaeological, etc.) with little to no counterpart. As such, we propose Leiden to have a special fund to facilitate people from places the University has a (neo)colonial ties with coming to Leiden to do their PhD.

- **Social safety**

For a work and study environment free from threats, we strongly aim to uphold the prohibition of discrimination foreseen in the Dutch constitution. This means that we will strongly stand up against any party who upholds such views that aim to discriminate on the basis of religion, race, nationality, sexual orientation and gender identity, which we believe do not align with the democratic values of *praesidium libertatis*.

We also stand against any form of harassment or intimidation. This means we will continue to call out discourses which uphold a "blame the victim"- mentality.

- **Human Rights**

Along with student party DSP-SC and other members from staff parties, we have consistently pressed the university to [sever the ties](#) with institutions which are implicated in genocide and apartheid regimes. We will also continue to stand with staff and students who have voiced the urgency for these topics to be part of the university life.