

Jury report Supervisor or the Year award 2015

NIG PhD council

As probably everyone knows or has experienced, supervision can be one of the key factors that makes a PhD project successful. While the importance of supervision is generally acknowledged, good supervision is not self-evident. Nevertheless, in contrast to the horror stories we've all heard, we should not forget that there are also positive examples. We feel that these examples deserve attention, not only to acknowledge their good work, but we also want to show other supervisors what it is that PhD researchers value in the work of their supervisors.

At the beginning of October we asked all PhD members of the NIG to nominate their supervisors if they felt that they would deserve the supervisor of the year award. To nominate a supervisors the PhD researchers had to write a letter of nomination indicating why he or she deserves the award. To encourage PhD students in the first two years of their PhD project as well as PhD students who are finalizing their dissertation to nominate their supervisor – if he or she would be worthy of the title of course – we did not ask them to pass definitive overall judgment on the quality of supervision, but we asked them to highlight which aspects of their supervision they valued highly and why. As such, we were looking for best practices instead. After all nominations were collected, we as a PhD council critically reviewed the letters of nomination, ranked them, and based on our combined rankings we selected the winner.

This year, we received seven nominations, resulting in the nomination of eight different supervisors. Six supervisors were nominated individually, and two supervisors were nominated as a team. Even though we decided on one winner in the end, we think it is only fair to pay attention to all nominees. After all, being nominated reflects the supervisor's qualities, but actually winning is as much about the writing qualities of their PhD students as it is about them.

In random order, the first nominee for this year's award is Thomas Schillemans. As an associate professor he works at Utrecht University. In his nomination letter he was praised by one of his PhD students for being very involved in the PhD process, not only by paying attention to the content of the project, but also by keeping an eye on the process. He is considered to take PhD-researchers' interests seriously and together with them tries to find ways to accommodate them.

The second nominee is the team Victor Bekkers and Vincent Homburg. Both are working at Erasmus University Rotterdam. Victor Bekkers as a professor of Public Administration and Vincent Homburg as an associate professor They are among others valued for arranging fixed and regular meetings, for sharing personal experiences and for sharing their knowledge of the debate in the broader research field.

The third nominee is now being nominated for the second time in a row, namely Kees Aarts, who is a professor of Political Science at Twente University. In his case, the PhD-researcher who nominated him

drew attention to his efforts to improve the researcher's language skills and for encouraging international collaboration. Moreover, like more of this year's nominated supervisors, also the time that he devotes to his PhD-researchers is valued a lot.

Jasper Eshuis of Erasmus University Rotterdam, next, is our fourth nominee. His PhD-students, or at least the researcher who nominated him, very much appreciates the extent to which he is invested in the project. More importantly, personal well-being is of key importance, where he also adapts the style of supervision to the needs of the PhD-researcher. This does not only mean that the frequency of meetings is adjusted, but also the intensity and the kind of topics that are addressed.

Out fifth nominee is Sandra Van Thiel, who is professor of Public Management at Radboud University Nijmegen. While also numerous aspects are mentioned in support of her nomination, an interesting one that has not been discussed so far is the tutoring or guidance she provides her PhD-students in light of their teaching obligations. As the PhD-students writing the nomination letter state "we might, sometimes, not lessen the teaching burden on our department staff, but instead, we are trained to become good instructors of our own". Consequently, PhD-students are supported to develop all skills relevant for a future career in Academia.

Next, Esther Versluis of Maastricht University is nominated. The PhD-student who nominated her stressed as one of the most important qualities that she is dependable and really on the side of the PhD-student. When necessary, she fights stronger forces in the university together with the PhD-student to safeguard their interests. Moreover, Esther Versluis is considered to be a true mentor as she makes an effort to build strong professional and personal ties, for example by providing career guidance and initiating joint publications and presentations.

Finally, Mirko Noordegraaf is our seventh nominee for this year's Supervisor of the year award. Working as a professor of Public Management at Utrecht University, he is valued for his easy accessibility and quick response time. In addition, he promotes his PhD-researchers self-esteem and motivation by not only providing feedback on the PhD-researchers work, but by also asking for input on his own research. Combined with not prescribing what PhD-researchers should do, this stimulates independent thinking and really makes the PhD-student owner of his or her own project.

As is clear from the above descriptions, the nominated supervisors are valued for various reasons. Consequently, deciding on a winner was difficult. In the end, the evidence presented in the nomination letters (by means of example) about the extent to which a supervisor goes that extra mile was decisive. As such, the winner of this year's supervisor of the year award is: Esther Versluis of Maastricht University.