



Menteal Health by Design
***From Competition to Capacity in
Dutch Phd Research***

From resilience to infrastructure

At universities, wellbeing is often conceptualized as an **individual** problem. So that is where the solutions should be found.

The problem is not only whether PhD candidates are resilient enough. The problem is also whether the system is designed responsibly enough.

VU VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM Education ▾ Research ▾ Current ▾ About VU Amsterdam ▾

Last updated on 12 May 2026

Are you looking for social activities, opportunities to develop yourself alongside your studies or options to improve your physical and mental wellbeing? Find an overview of all initiatives in the Wellbeing Calendar!

Whether you are looking for workshops, lectures, meditation sessions, sports activities or social events, this calendar reflects the comprehensive overview of opportunities at VU to promote your wellbeing and lead a balanced life. New initiatives and activities are added to this page throughout the year.

Scroll down to discover what VU can offer you!

Social activities

- Book Club: The Fire Next Time #3 – 12 May
- VU's Got Talent – 12 & 13 May
- Book talk: The Zionist Left & the Making of the Palestinian Nakba – 13 May
- Arts & crafts night – 14 May
- Jewellery workshop – 15 May
- Study Session – 18 May
- Game night with BG – 19 May
- Book club – 20 May
- Diaspora Dialogues in 3D with FAM – 20 May
- Ethnographic Filmday 2026 – 21 May
- Anime Movie Night – 22 May
- Board games – 26 May
- DnD night – 27 May

Why should you care?

Well - PhDs are no(t only) resources. They happened to be people.

Doing research should be intellectually demanding.
But intellectual challenge is different from structural insecurity.

A good PhD trajectory requires proper conditions:

Time. Supervision. Feedback.
Continuity. Social Safety. Room for
trial and **error**. Realistic Expectations.

Not only relevant for wellbeing: conditions shape
the research that becomes possible.



THE ORIGIN OF THE THESES

There is quite some research ...

... suggesting a strong relationship between PhD trajectories and mental health problems.

Research Policy 46 (2017) 868–879

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Research Policy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/respol



Work organization and mental health problems in PhD students 

Kati
Joh

scientific reports

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Published: 13 July 2021

ic review and meta-analysis of depression, nology

Journal of Health Economics 104 (2025) 103070

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect



Journal of E

  Perspectives on
Medical Education

EDITORIAL ▶ [Perspect Med Educ. 2020 Dec 15;10\(2\):71–72. doi: 10.1007/s40037-020-00639-4](#)

 **frontiers**
in Psychology

[10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1437819](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1437819)

as a predictor of mental health outcomes in ed Kingdom

[uri](#)^{1,*}, [Soljana Çili](#)^{1,2}

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In the eye of the storm: the mental health situation of PhD candidates

[Lucille M S Mattijssen](#)¹, [Josephine E Bergmans](#)², [Inge C M van der Weijden](#)^{2,✉}, [J Christine Teelken](#)³

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PMCID: [PMC7737569](#) PMID: [33320304](#)

give me photo of a phd supervisor

Thought for a couple of seconds >



Edit



 Edit Image

Supervision as organized capacity

Not a one-on-one “master-apprentice” relationship.
It takes a village

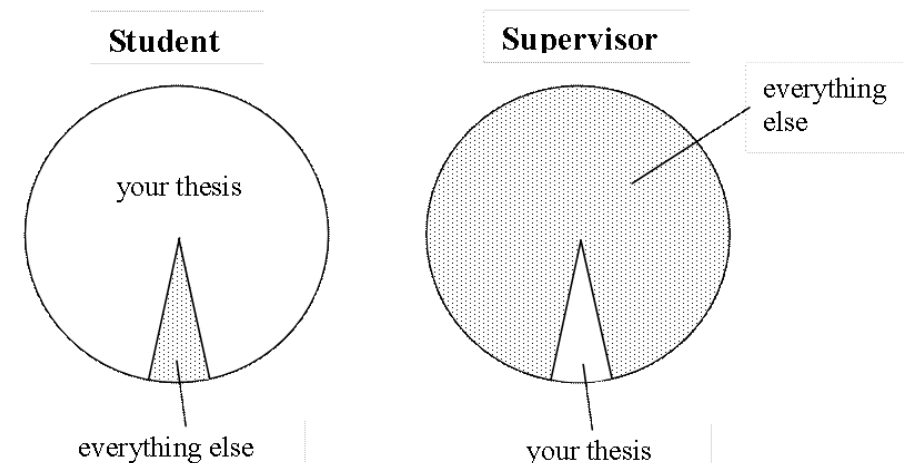
Good supervision requires:

Time for feedback. Substantive expertise.

Continuity. Role Clarity. Conflict mediation. Career

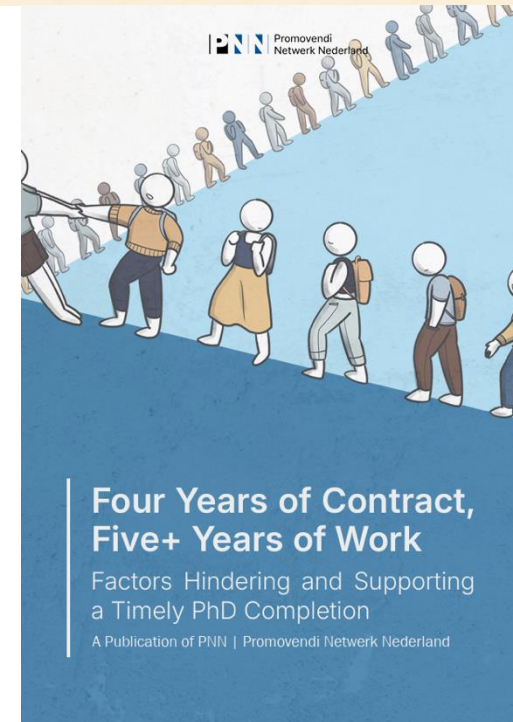
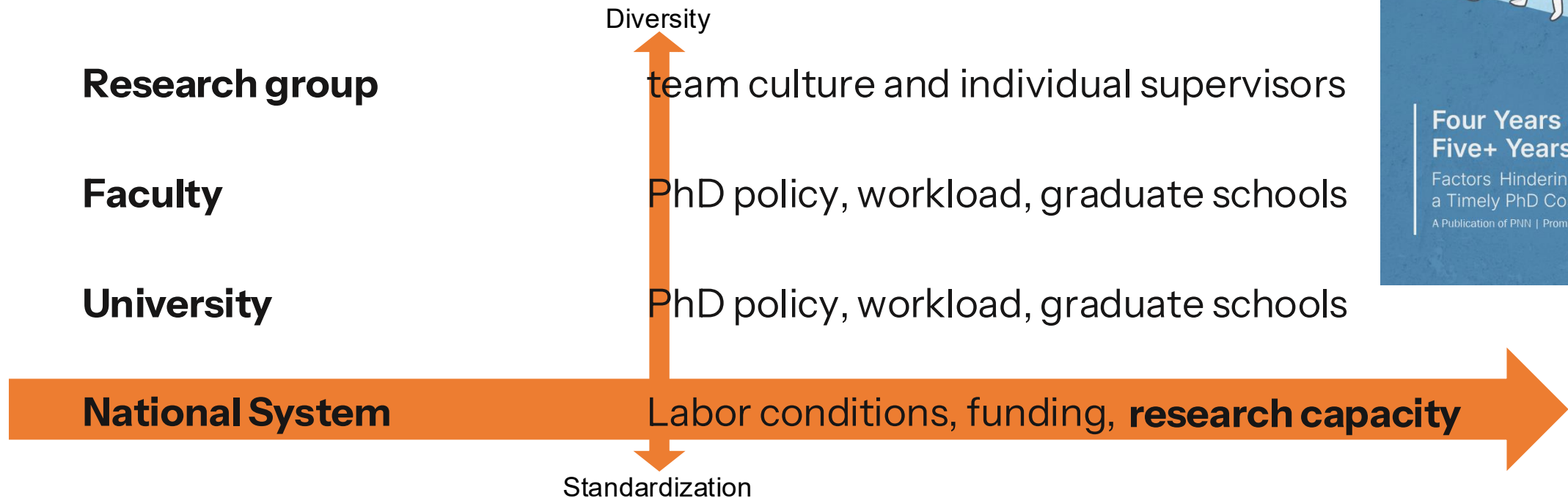
Guidance. Protection from too many other duties.

A good supervisor cannot compensate indefinitely for a system without time, support or capacity.



The right scale. Why PNN asks this nationally.

The problem looks different at different levels.



How can working conditions for PhD researchers be improved at the scale of the national system?

The Dutch Capacity problem. In numbers.

The Dutch system has strongly expanded PhD research over the past 25 decades.

Completed doctorates

1898 in 1991 → 5595 in 2024

Paid PhD research time

8044 FTe in 2009 → 13182 in 2024

Professors + Associate Professors

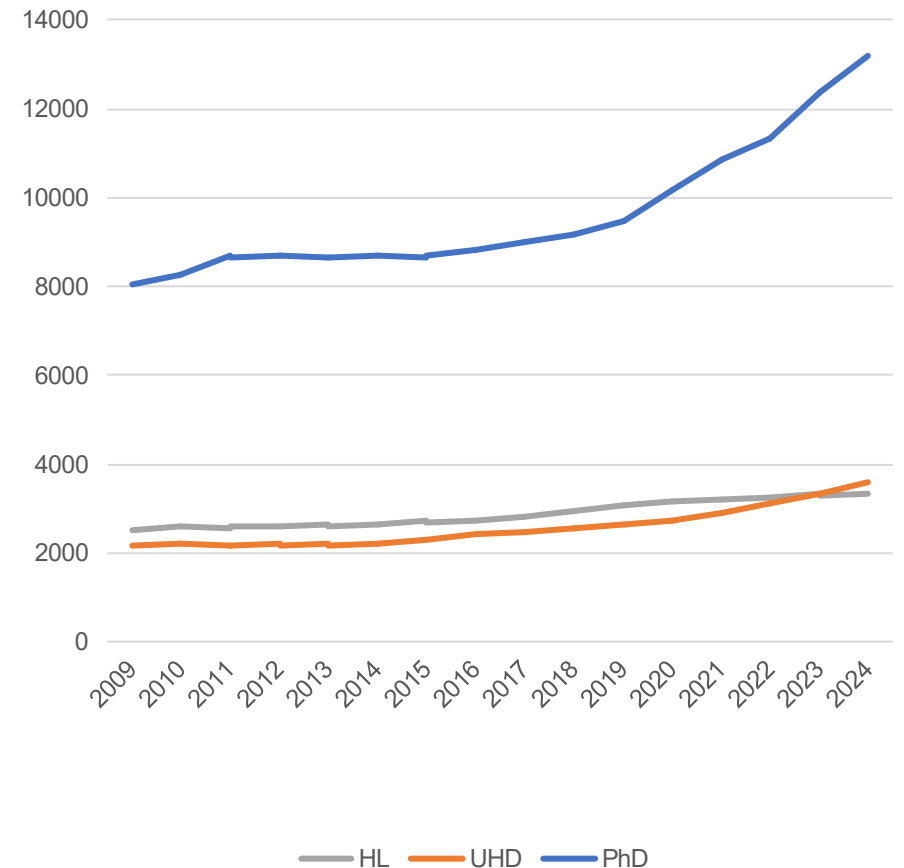
4668 FTe in 2009 → 6974 FTe in 2024

Total PhD candidates in 2025

40929 > 6 PhDs per fte supervision

Paid PhD research time grew by about 64%

Senior formal capacity grew by about 49%



The system has expanded PhD research faster than it has expanded the formal capacity expected to carry it.

From “profkippen” to team capacity.

We agree that concentration of PhD per supervisor is concerning.

But is redistribution enough?

1. Who supervises how many PhDs?
2. How many PhDs can the system responsibly supervise?



From “profkippen” to teal

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But is redistribution enough?

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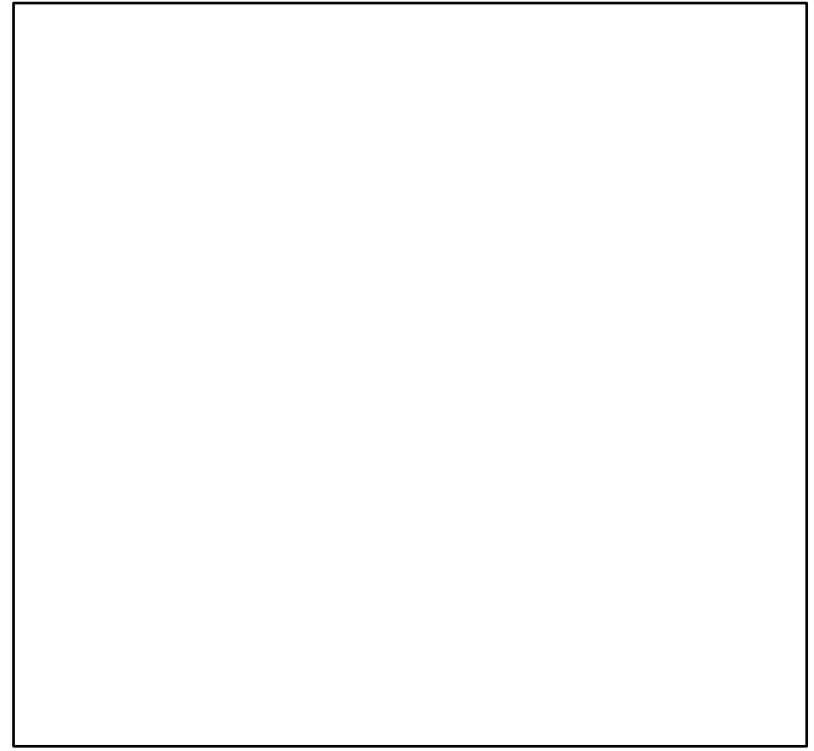
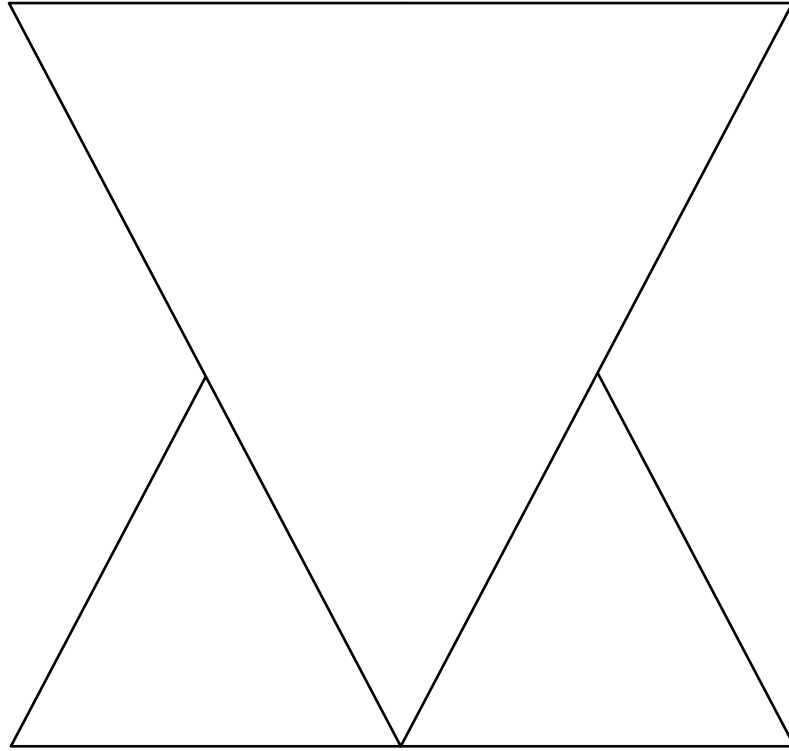
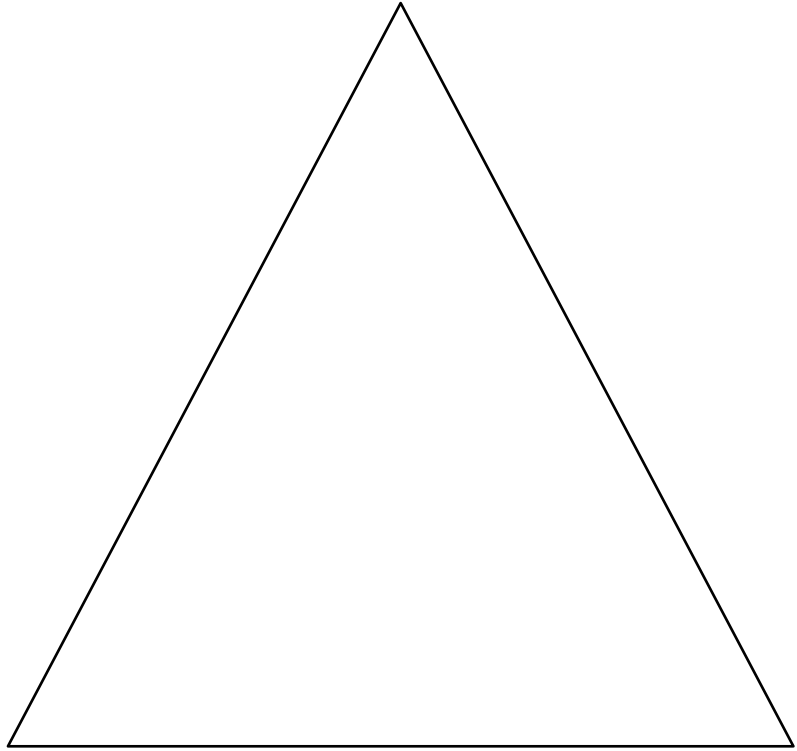
It cannot resolve **scarcity**.

Opinie Promotietraject

Opinie: Minder promovendi, betere wetenschap

Er worden te veel promovendi opgeleid voor te weinig banen aan de universiteit, stelt psychiater Joeri Tijdink.







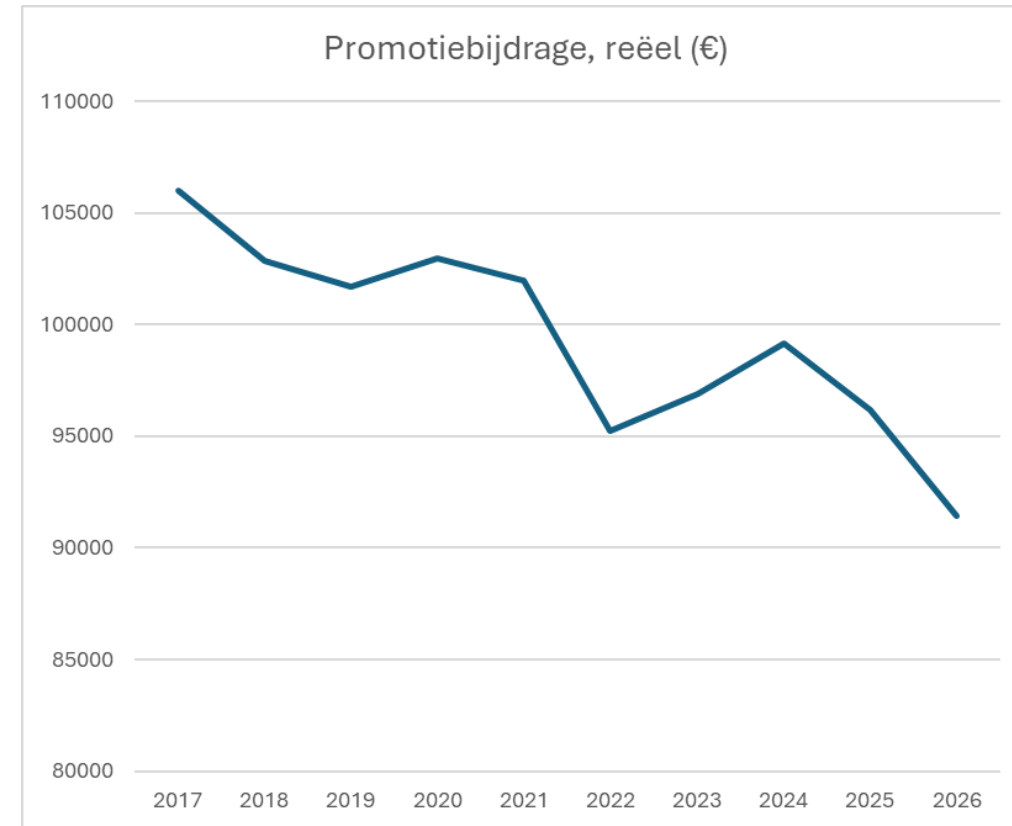
PHDs as incentive.

In **2026**. Total “Rijksbijdrage” **€7.3 billion**. Research component **€3 billion**. Flexible, parameter-based research component **€900 million**.

Distributed based on PhDs and patents **€500 million**.

Historically understandable proxy indicator: university makes costs for doctoral training. But works as a relative distribution mechanism within a largely fixed budget.

A university’s share of the 500 million depends on the number of completed **PhDs compared to other universities**.



The macro level problem.

It does not mean: **Every** university cynically maximizes PhDs for the sake of it. **Every** supervisor is overburdened. **Every** PhD trajectory is badly supervised.

Yet – PhD volume is rewarded. Supervision capacity is not recognized in the same way. Staffing decisions remain institution-specific, but national incentives matter.

This can make more PhD trajectories administratively rational, even when supervision capacity is under pressure.



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For PhDs themselves
delayed feedback
unclear expectations
supervisor dependency
contract uncertainty
difficulty using formal rights
stress and isolation



Solution: why not *another* variable?!

An indicator that relates **the number of completed PhDs** to senior academic capacity (associate + professors)

To anticipate reallocation differences: **2027** 90% total PhDs; 10% new variable; **2031** 80% total PhDs 20% new variable; **2035** 70% total PhDs 30% new variable.

$$B_i = \left(\frac{\frac{S_i}{P_i}}{\frac{S_{total}}{P_{total}}} \right) \times B$$

B : total budget
 I : institution
 S : fte (associate) professors
 P : completed doctorates

Universiteit	Prof (fte)	Assoc. prof (fte)	Phds (#)	Rijksbijdrage 2026 (mln)	Proposal (mln)	Difference (mln)
UL	299	248	505	45.1	43.7	-1.4
UU	343	359	562	50.2	48.5	-1.7
RUG	328	305	661	59.0	56.7	-2.3
EUR	187	223	424	37.8	40.1	2.3
UM	161	166	412	36.8	38.0	1.2
UVA	326	367	626	55.8	53.9	-1.9
VU	300	277	422	37.7	37.8	0.1
Radboud	259	201	437	39.0	38.1	-0.9
TiU	165	152	102	9.1	12.8	3.7
TDU Delft	289	430	449	40.1	37.9	-2.2
TU Eindhoven	169	181	377	33.6	31.6	-2.0
UR	177	222	232	20.7	20.8	0.1
WUR	165	236	362	32.3	31.2	-1.1
OU	48	36	25	2.2	8.1	6.0
Total	3217	3404	5348	499.1	499.1	0

To conclude

For PhD candidates, capacity is not abstract or macro-level only;

It becomes **receiving feedback now or months later**. Having more than one person to turn to. **Knowing what is expected**. Being able to use sick leave. **Having a realistic contract**. Feeling safe to raise concerns.

Mental Health by design means creating infrastructural conditions beforehand.

From individual coping to institutional design. From **competition** on PhD volume to national planning around **capacity**.



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