



The (added) value of a PhD?

Career planning for junior researchers

Dr. Ilse Van Damme, Dr. Stefanie Kerkhofs, & Dr. Nele Nivelde
Hasselt University, Belgium

*9th Annual Meeting of the EUA Council for Doctoral Education
Tarragona, 16-17 June 2016*

Overview

- Hasselt University
- Doctoral schools
- GP 1: workshop 'Career development'
- GP 2: event 'PhD 2.0: What's next?'
- GP 3: competency framework
- Discussion

▶▶ 7 faculties

▶▶ 16 bachelor programmes

▶▶ 2 campuses

▶▶ 20 master programmes

▶▶ 6 research institutes

▶▶ 3 doctoral schools

▶▶ 6.417 students

▶▶ 522 PhD students

▶▶ Top 8% of best universities worldwide (U-Multirank)

▶▶ 1.220 staff members

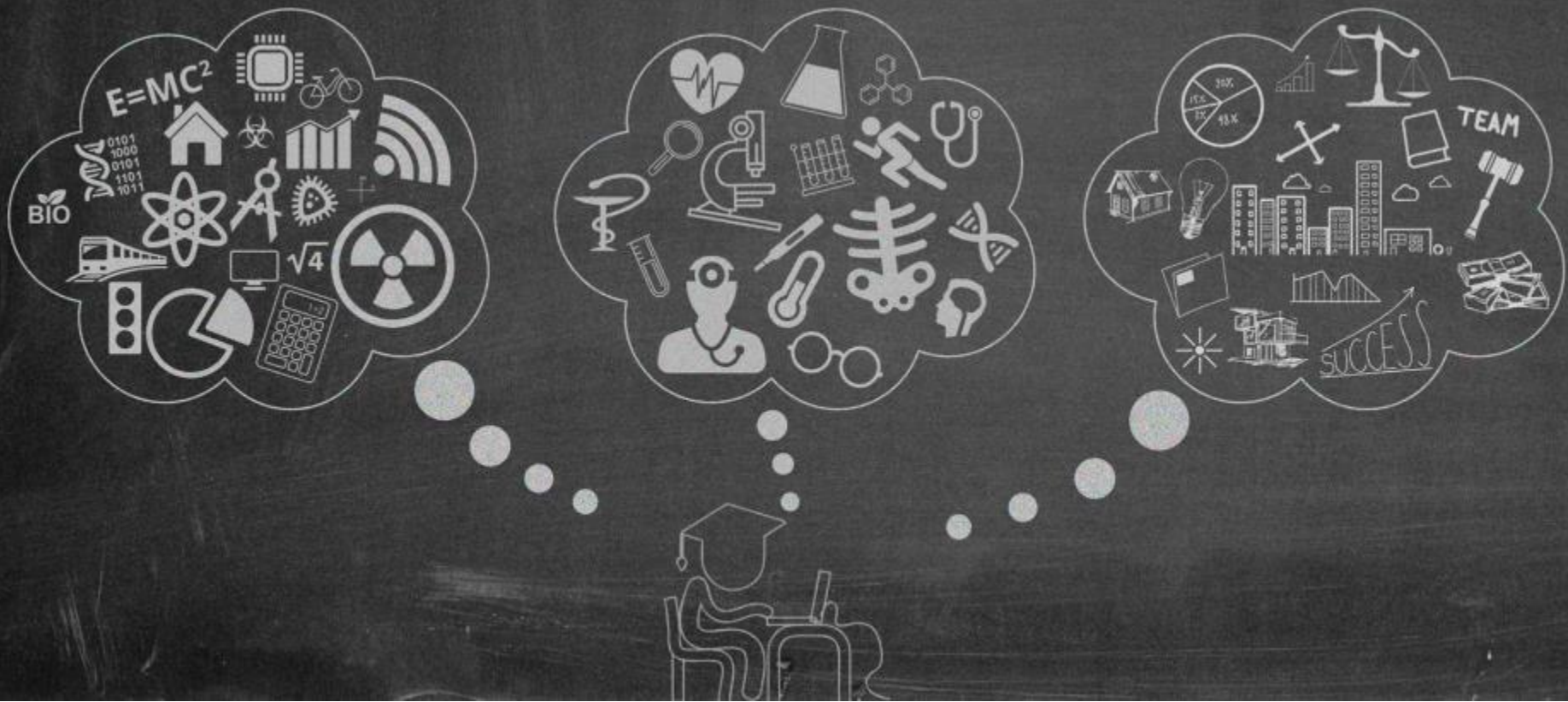
▶▶ 680+ international partners for research and education

Doctoral schools

**Sciences
& Technology**

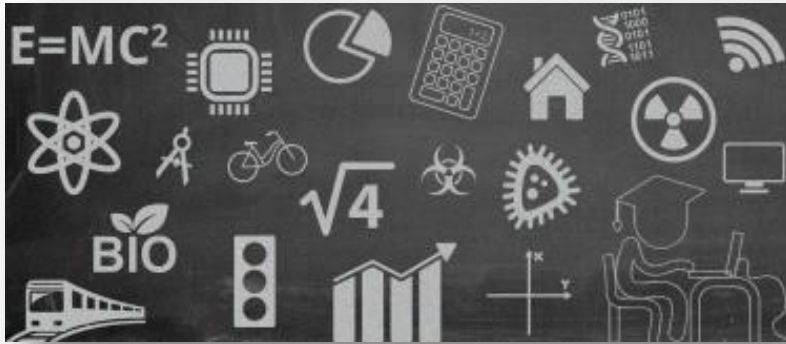
**Medicine
& Life Sciences**

**Behavioral Sciences
& Humanities**



(°2011)

-



(°2013)

- Faculty of Engineering Technology
- Faculty of Sciences
- School for Transportation Sciences

(°2014)

-

Why & how?

- Flemish government
 - € 4 million for 5 universities
- total budget Hasselt University: ± € 340.000
- **support of young researchers**
 - training in both discipline-specific and transferable skills
 - career development
 - internationalisation
 - collaboration with other universities



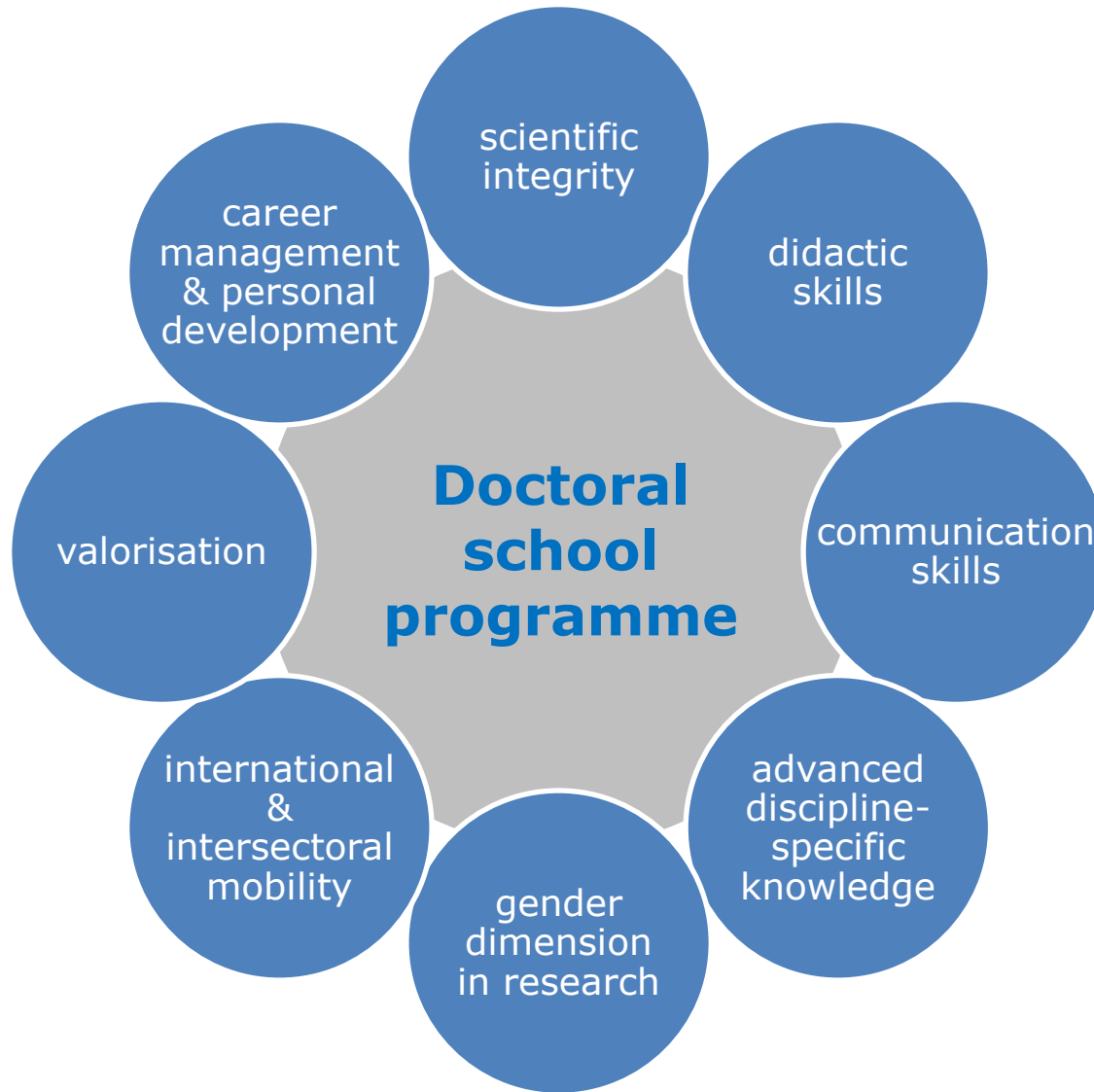
Mission

***"train excellent, internationally oriented
research professionals
who are broadly employable,
both in and outside academia"***

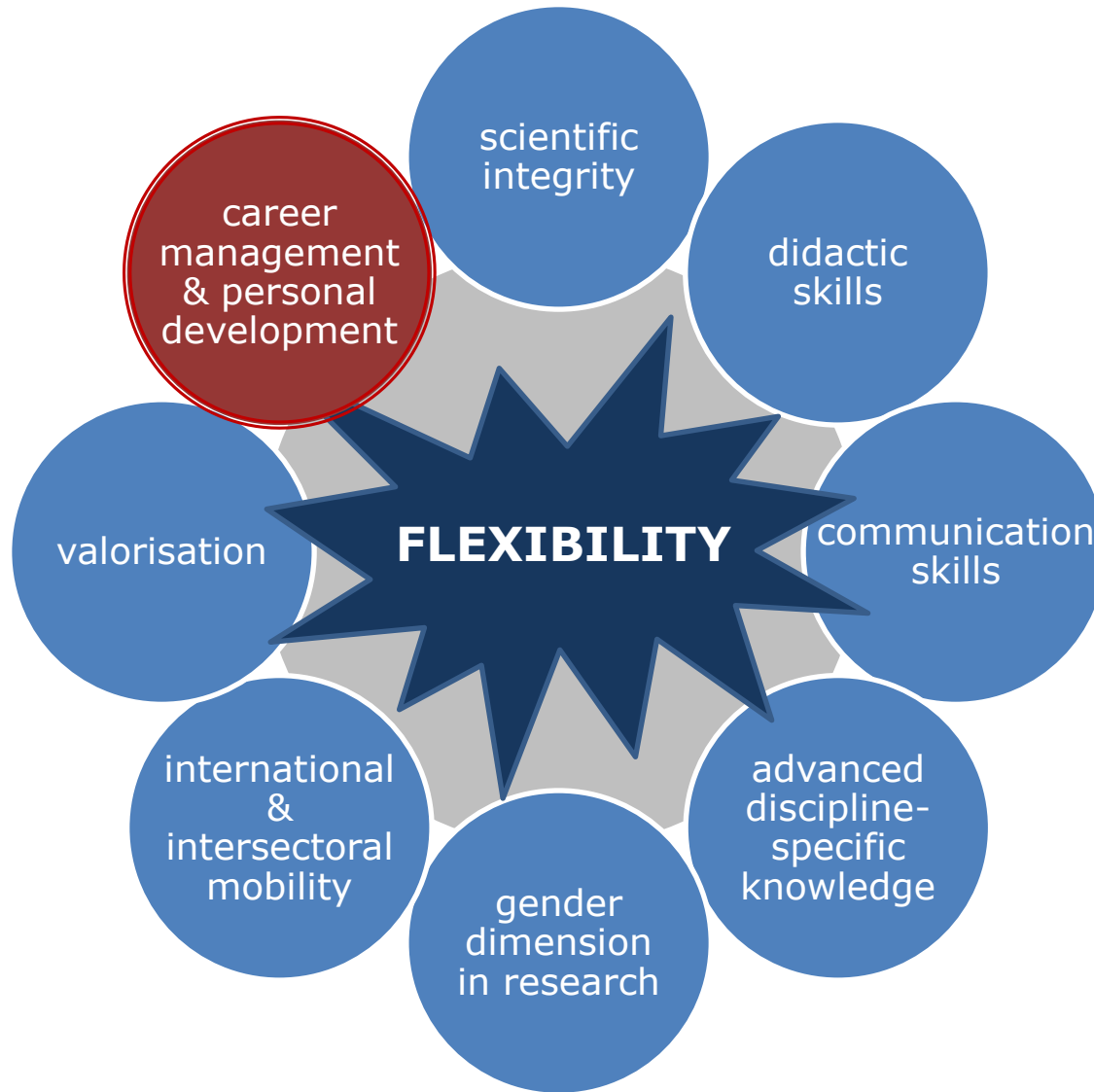
- wide range of courses
- 'minimal requirements'



Focus points



Focus points



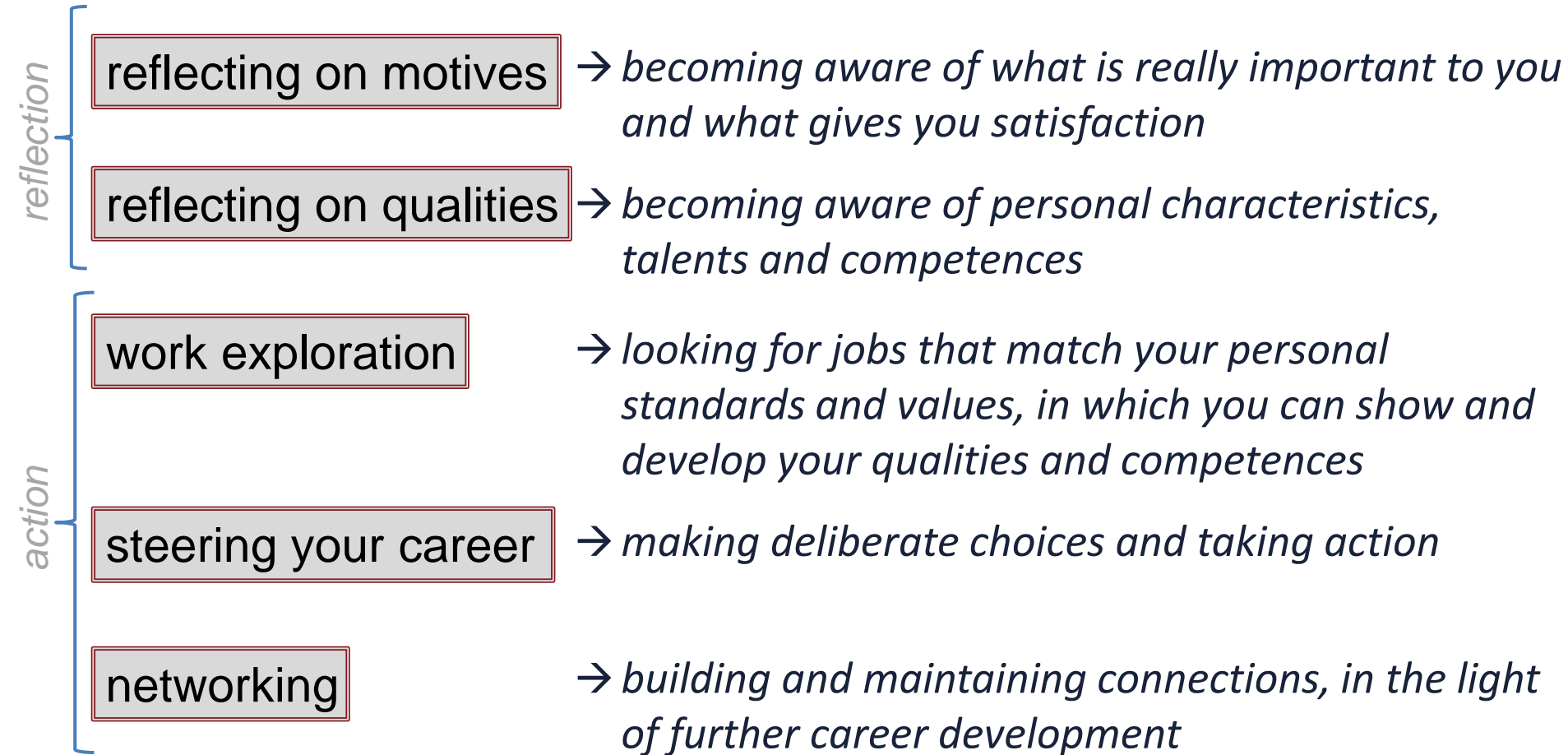
GP 1: workshop 'Career development'

- **career coaching in group**

- *5 sessions of 4.5 hours each + 6th feedback session, spread out over 2.5 months*
- *homework in-between sessions*
 - 1) What do I want? (personal goals and values)
 - 2) What are my core qualities (strengths & weaknesses) and how do others perceive me?
 - 3) What are my main competences?
 - 4) What am I looking for?
 - 5) (Prepare for) action!
 - 6) Feedback session: free working time

Career = personal project

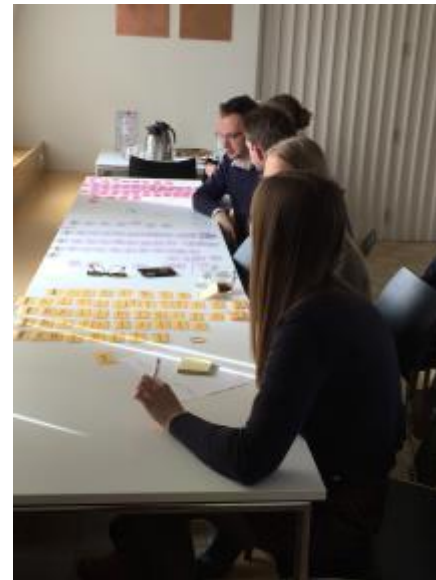
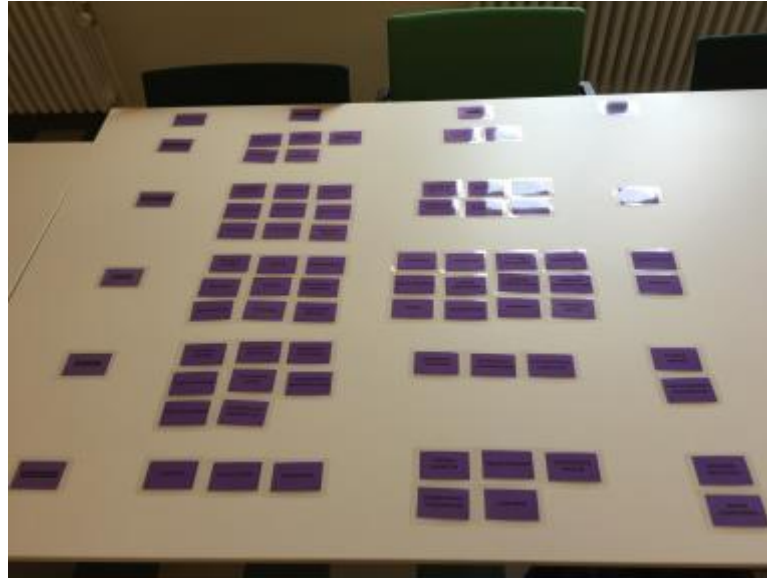
■ 5 career competences



Practicalities

- target group:
 - PhD students in second half of PhD
 - postdocs
- 2 editions / year: Dutch & English
- extensive oral evaluation
+ anonymous online survey
- teacher with academic background

'Nobody can chicken out'



Co-operative learning



GP 2: event 'PhD 2.0: What's next?'

part of: 'How to valorise your PhD? First aid in planning your career path'

= collaboration between

- Hasselt University's doctoral schools
- Flemish employment office VDAB
- regional Innovation Centre Limburg (ICL)

aim?

- provide information on career possibilities
- bring junior researchers (PhD students & postdocs) into contact with stakeholders from companies, hospitals, government instances, etc

Two sides to every coin

non-academic sector



"Your MBA and PhD degrees are impressive but what concerns me is your low number of Facebook friends."

PhD holders

- lots of skills / competences, but don't always see these themselves
 - used to communicate about themselves in function of their research topic
 - like what they are doing and think (too) little about what *else* they might like doing
- **difficulty selling themselves**

Collaborative project

1) individual career counselling for 25 junior researchers per year

- by the Flemish employment office VDAB
- goal: drawing up a professional action plan

2) event 'PhD 2.0: What's next?'



PhD 2.0: What's next?

- **workshop:** introduce yourself at job interview?
 - rehearsing & polishing up elevator pitch
- **panel session** (per DS)
 - introduce themselves to non-academic panel
(HR-)representatives from industry, hospitals, Flemish government & various employment agencies
 - job interview setting
 - feedback
- **networking reception**
 - talk informally
 - CVs handed to all panel members



GP 3: Competency framework

- **competency overview**

- goal?*

- broadening junior researchers' field of vision and helping them to find the right words to describe their own skills

- **competency profile**

- goal?*

- quality assurance

- *available online*

- *for every DS activity:
specification of competences addressed*



Competency overview

= (non-exhaustive) list of competences that might be developed during the course of a PhD

5 clusters

1. academic competences

e.g., subject knowledge, research methods, data management, ...

2. intellectual competences

e.g., analytical thinking, creativity, problem solving, ...

3. task-orientedness

e.g., project planning, progress monitoring, precision, ...

4. personal effectiveness

e.g., autonomy, flexibility, perseverance, initiative, ...

5. interpersonal competences

e.g., assertiveness, oral/written communication, coaching, ...



Competency profile

= list of competences one is expected to master by the end of a PhD

- input of a wide range of stakeholders
 - PhD students, postdocs, professors
 - (HR) representatives from industry, hospitals, government & various employment agencies
- get a better grasp of the skills valued and required by both academic and non-academic employers
- identify competences 'essential' to a PhD



Open minds & confident souls

- ✓ **better chances on labour market due to:**
 - broadening of horizon
 - enhanced self-knowledge
insight in own possibilities & ambitions
 - *more* than only research-oriented competences
 - more focused job search
 - better able to sell oneself
- ✓ **bridge (part of the) gap** between university and non-academic sectors



Questions? Thoughts? Comments?

Discussion questions with respect to GPs:

- Language: English vs. native language?
- What if low budget?
- Research worker bees vs. focus on self-development → how to create academic support?
- What about assessments by professional assessment agencies? Pros & cons?

General discussion questions:

- How can PhD students be stimulated to take responsibility for their own career development?
- Other ways to raise awareness of acquired competences?
- How to improve the 'reputation' of having a PhD?
- Other ways to establish collaborations with non-academic partners?





**THANKS FOR
YOUR ATTENTION
and
DON'T FORGET
to reflect on your career**

ilse.vandamme@uhasselt.be

doctoralschools@uhasselt.be

<http://www.uhasselt.be/PhD-Doctoral-Schools>