

CARIM's Coaching System for PhD-candidates

Background and aims

The coaching system is part of CARIM's PhD programme and aimed to introduce new PhD candidates into CARIM, to create an easily accessible infrastructure for questions and advice for PhD candidates, to discuss topics such as personal development, career prospects, work-life balance and to be able to recognize problems in an early phase. The coaching system is meant to allow PhD candidates to openly discuss non-scientific issues and professional relations with a CARIM staff member not directly involved in the daily research activities of the PhD candidate.

As a new PhD candidate you will be assigned a coach. Your coach primarily serves as the go-to person for questions and challenges not directly related to your research, and for issues you might prefer to discuss with somebody outside your research team. Therefore, the coach is a CARIM staff member from another division than the PhD candidate. In case your coach is not independent from your supervisory team or research group, you can send an email to secretariaat-CARIM@maastrichtuniversity.nl, so that you can be coupled to another coach.

As new PhD candidate you will meet your coach in the first month, approximately 6 months after the start of the PhD program, and halfway during the PhD trajectory for the third time. Although we expect the PhD candidate to take the initiative to schedule the meetings with the coach, scheduling the meetings is a shared responsibility between the PhD candidate and the coach.

The purpose of the first meeting is to become acquainted with each other. In the second meeting aspects (first experiences, problems encountered, etc.) inherent to the start-up phase can be discussed. The third meeting serves to evaluate the past 2 years (the extent to which plans have been realized and expectations have been met) and to look forward to the last 2 years (development as researcher, chances to finish in time, career plans, etc.). Additional in-between meetings will be based on your own needs and initiative.

General guidelines

Although it is helpful if your coach knows what research topic you are working on, discussing or advising on the contents of your research remains the primary task of the supervisory team.

Instead, meetings with your coach should focus on secondary aspects. Aspects to be discussed during the meeting are the personal and professional hurdles and challenges met during your PhD career so far. A list of guiding questions that could be discussed is given below.

Most PhD trajectories come with certain challenges such as experimental setbacks and rejection of papers, which all belong to the life of a scientist and should be absorbed. The question is how these challenges are perceived by the PhD candidate and the supervisory team and if these hurdles are taken in good consent, and turned into a constructive learning experience. Remember, doing a PhD is no walk in the park, and some hurdles and challenges need to be met as a person to prepare the candidate to become a mature scientist.

If hurdles seem to be beyond regular challenges belonging to a PhD trajectory, or are unacceptable in any other way, the coach can intervene and seek for assistance if needed.

Back-up:

The CARIM PhD guide, which can be downloaded from the PHD Programme page of the CARIM website, provides a detailed overview on support that is available for PhD candidates. In case you have questions or problems your coach cannot answer or solve, you can always contact the CARIM PhD-coordinator or the HR advisor of CARIM. Below you can find an overview of available support.

Confidential advisors:

In case of serious matters you can contact the CARIM confidential contact person, the confidential advisor of the FHML or the Concerns and Complaints Point (CCP) of Maastricht University, based on your own preference. More information about Confidential Advisors and the CCP is provided on the PhD Programme page of the CARIM website.

Coaching:

PhD candidates that are employed by the university can contact the Staff Career Centre (SCC) of Maastricht University for training, coaching and mentoring.

Health issues:

PhD candidates that are employed by the UM can contact the Company Doctor of the UM for health issues, including mental health-related aspects. Other PhD candidates are advised to contact their General Practitioner.

Scientific integrity:

For scientific integrity issues, the UM confidential advisors on scientific integrity can be contacted.

Confidentiality:

It is crucial that you feel free to discuss subjective issues with your coach. This can only be achieved when the content of your meetings remains strictly confidential. Only after mutual consent by both PhD candidate and coach, issues can be brought to the attention of third parties.

Guiding questions:

- Why was a PhD-trajectory chosen (why CARIM)?
- Plans after obtaining PhD degree?
- Feeling settled in work environment as well as private environment?
- How was the start-up phase perceived? Problems encountered?
- Satisfied with drafting and contents of TSP and PRP? (has it helped to get clearer focus on research and tasks?)
- Tasks involved in outside the research project? Balance between tasks? Enough time for research?
- Workload/stress perceived? Balance private life/work?
- Sufficient time/moments to discuss the research with supervisors?
- Opportunities to discuss non-research related matters with supervisors?
- Feeling part of, integrated in, the research team?