

PhD Geosciences Survey

Summary of results

31 January 2017

PhD Council of Geosciences

Why this survey?

PhD council for Geosciences signalled:

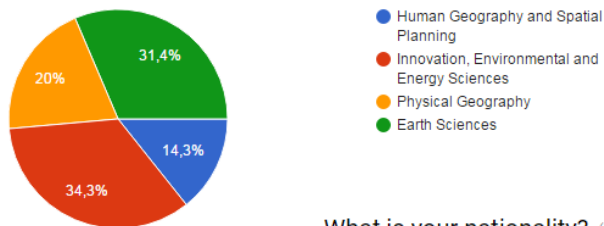
- PhD candidates sometimes feel lost through a lack of information, supervision and help
- PhD's at Geosciences hardly know what the Graduate School is and does
- Recent surveys showed PhD's at Dutch universities are unhappy and drop-out rates are increasing ([e.g.](#))
- Identify key priorities for Geosciences PhD council for 2017 to formulate recommendations for the Graduate school

So, we collected data...

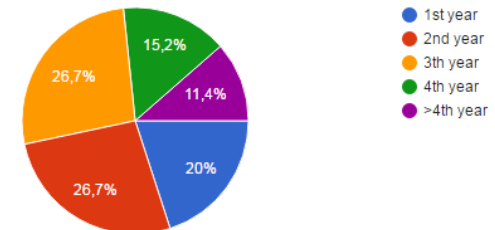
Survey Overview

- Survey conducted November 2016
- PhD students and junior researchers from Geosciences
- 105 responses (54 female, 51 male)
- Topics:
 - Supervision and guidance
 - PhD courses and training
 - Teaching
 - Communication and the graduate school

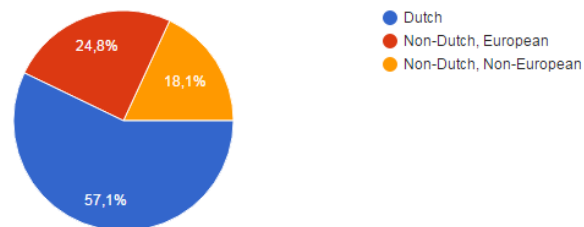
In which department do you work? (105 reacties)



In which year of your PhD are you? (105 reacties)



What is your nationality? (105 reacties)



Supervision & Guidance

Main issues identified

- Most PhD candidates are **happy with supervision on the content** (78%), but feel that **more help is required with planning** (44%)
 - One third of PhD's have **experienced depressive feelings**, but nearly half of all students **don't know whom to contact** when they experience stress or depressive feelings
 - Many (47%) PhD's do not know whom to contact if they have problems with their own supervisor
 - PhD's complain about the lack of clear guidelines regarding the requirements to graduate (receive the actual PhD), such as the number of publications or the min/max. number of promotor. Supervisors say different things.
- 👎 *“My promotor never acknowledges the hard work I put in”*
- 👎 *“My supervisors are never prepared for meetings, they don't read the things I have prepared”.*

Supervision & Guidance

Possible Solutions

- **Mentoring system** like that available in Human Geography (senior staff member outside own research group acts as mentor to PhD's) rolled out to the whole faculty
- **Training for supervisors on how to supervise a PhD**, apart from content
- **Clear and general guidelines** of 'the rules of your PhD's' and what is 'normal' within your group, regarding:
 - Number of publications
 - Extent of co-authorship of promoters and co-promoters
- Yearly A&D (B&O) PhD and supervisor: reflection of supervisors on own functioning during the project, **serious filling in** of the **TSA** form.
- **One central place** to find all the information regarding personal help

Teaching

Main issues identified

- **Disparity between teaching requirements** and expectations within and between departments
 - Some have no formal teaching requirements, others have >15%
 - In some faculties supervision of BSc/MSc students doesn't count for education, others it does
- For most respondents (65%), duties are **in accordance with supervision** agreements
- >75% had **no experience or training** in teaching before giving classes.
- While training is available e.g. 'Start to Teach', many (40%) PhD's **don't know about it**, some report not being allowed to do it by their supervisor. Also, need to be teaching in order to participate.
- Perception that PhD teaching not valued by students or department

👉 *“Having a course to teach us how to teach would be good and highly appreciated. This should ideally take place several times a year, so we don't have to wait a long time before getting the opportunity to participate”*

👉 *“...BKO possibility would be nice...”*

👉 *“It's weird that supervision of students does not count towards the teaching obligations... it takes up so much time!”*

Teaching

Possible solutions

- **Inform new PhD's about teaching courses** when they join e.g. 'Start to teach' or other opportunities, promote internally within the department and to senior staff
- Allow PhD's to follow 'Start to teach' training before teaching duties commence, or an alternative course so that they feel prepared
- Look at **aligning teaching requirements** between faculties
- Setup pathway for interested students to **gain their BKO** during their PhD as part of their long-term development

PhD Courses and Training

Main issues identified

Scientific integrity course

Majority of PhD's that attended:

- Do **not** find the course **useful** for their work (51 %)
 - Think that the **workload** is **too high** (54 %)
 - **Obligatory or not?** Confusion..
-
- Planning of the courses is unclear and becomes available on short notice, therefore difficult to plan in advance when to take a certain course.
 - Majority of the respondents request (79%) courses on:
 - **Statistics**
 - GIS
 - Programming (e.g. Python, C++)
 - PhD's also request courses on **personal development** (dealing with stress), **language** courses, and **career** related courses (time-management, transferable skills, CV), improvement of current courses

PhD Courses and Training

Possible solutions

- Most PhD's (90%) would like to have a **webpage** containing all information about PhD courses. Not only from the Geosciences Graduate School, but also from other graduate schools, different University faculties (education training) and language courses. On this page an overview of all the courses offered in the coming year (plus dates and times) could be given to allow PhD's to plan when to take a specific course.
- **Scientific integrity course:**
 - **Shorten it:** a two day introduction course with Geoscientists as teachers
 - Make it more **relevant:** PhD's know you shouldn't commit fraud or lie, but how do you fight temptation? How do you improve assertiveness? How can you say NO, when pressured to bend the facts? Use more examples with Geoscience relevance.
- **Software training:**
 - **Statistics:** good quality courses available at the **PE & RC graduate school** (Wageningen University)
 - **GIS:** 2-week good quality summerschool available at the **UU: Hands-on GIS**
Excellent online self-study course available with ArcGIS (ask Maarten Zeylmans)
 - **Programming:** available at **PE & RC graduate school & SENSE**, but a more advanced / geo-focussed course is needed.
- **Personal development** (dealing with stress), and **career** related courses (time-management, transferable skills, CV) need to be developed

Communication & the Graduate School

Main issues identified

- More than **half of PhD's** (53%) do not know what the Graduate School is, or what it can do for them.
- **Hardly any structured communication** at every point of PhD:
 - Beginning: lack of communication, e.g. filling in forms, other things to organise
 - During: Information on courses offered by Graduate School is inadequate. Many PhD's don't know that they are part of the Graduate School
 - End: Lack of information on 'gastvrijheidsovereenkomst' or use of facilities after end-date of contract. Often no information on 'work2work' or other programs. Lack of career services.
- 👎 *“There is hardly any communication when you start, not by the faculty nor from my supervisor. I had to figure everything out by myself”*
- 👎 *“There are probably many things the Graduate School can do for me that I know nothing about...”*
- 👎 *“The whole system at Geosciences seems very unorganized and PhD students could fall through the existing gaps”.*

Communication & the Graduate School

Possible solutions

- **Create a clear website** or booklet containing information on all issues concerning PhD's, such as: courses UU and non-UU, HR issues, help with housing/taxes, representatives from faculty and own department, where to seek help etc. (For example: [Graduate School of Life Sciences](#) or Erasmus University Rotterdam)
- Initiate a general **PhD introduction moment** from the Faculty of Geosciences to inform students about the role of the graduate school, key contact people, and services offered
- Appoint a **central contact person** regarding all Graduate School related topics

Summary

Key Recommendations for the Graduate School

- Prioritize **communication** between Graduate School, Supervisors and PhD candidates
 - new website/booklet, responsible person, introduction
- **Professionalize** PhD course program
- Discuss and **align rules** about PhD supervision and teaching duties between departments
- **Clarify** where PhDs can find help and support

All (anonymized) outcomes have been presented to the Board of the Graduate School of Geosciences.

PhD Council of Geosciences



Innovation & Environmental Sciences

Dorith Vermunt
William Zappa

Human Geography & Spatial Planning

Marianne de Beer

Physical Geography

Jasper Leuven
Kim Hagemans

Earth Sciences

Karin Sant
Mariska Schimmel

Contact us!

utrechtgeograduates@gmail.com

<http://geophd.sites.uu.nl> (work in progress)

GeoPhD Council

Main issues identified

*Also some things for us
to work on!*

- **Transparency** of PhD Council and **communication** to PhDs can be improved, some students unaware of it
- **Different expectations** of PhD students on the type of events which should be organised by the council e.g. Casual vs. Professional

👉 *“Over the years it is mostly Dutch students on the board, and obviously foreigners have slightly different problems”*

👉 *“The PhD events are very stiff and not relaxing”*

👉 *“No idea what are they doing except for the events. No Idea how/when they elected also...they could arrange a general meeting to discuss any general problems/issues and possible actions to solve them”*

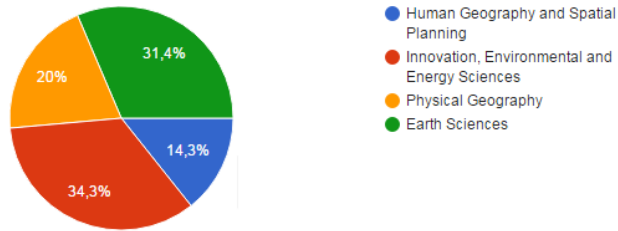
GeoPhD Council

Possible solutions

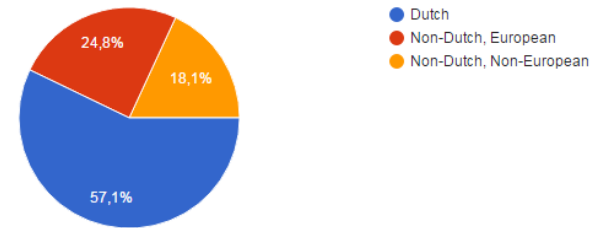
- **Create single website** for all Geoscience PhDs with all relevant information on PhD Council, current activities
- **Introduce GeoPhD council** at general Geosciences PhD Introduction Day, also by email to new PhD candidates
- Setup a Geosciences PhD **activity committee** to help brainstorm and organize both professional and fun events for all PhDs & junior researchers
- Update GeoPhD **policy plan**
- Initiate annual council 'recruitment' period, announce open positions on the council and setup more formalized joining process, improve diversity

Appendix: Full Survey Results

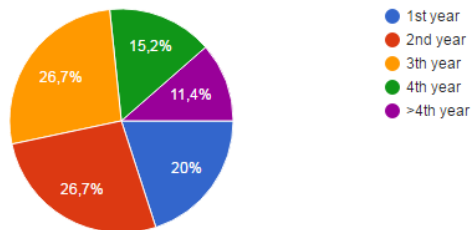
In which department do you work? (105 reacties)



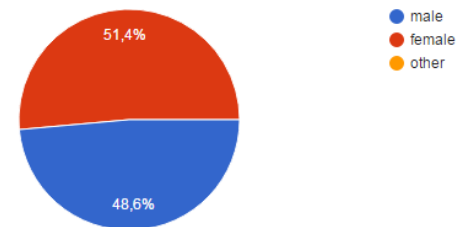
What is your nationality? (105 reacties)



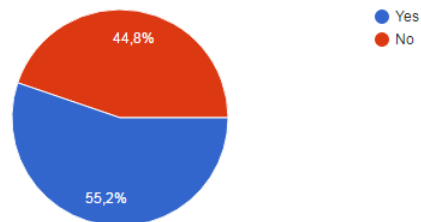
In which year of your PhD are you? (105 reacties)



I am (105 reacties)

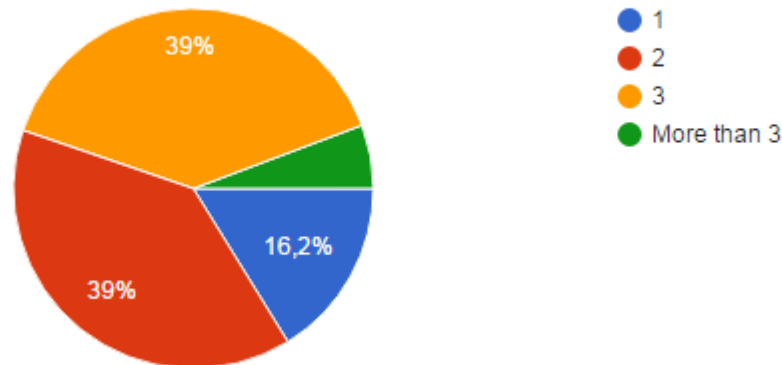


Did you do your MSc program at Utrecht University? (105 reacties)



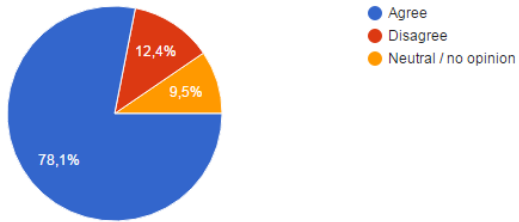
Supervision and guidance

How many official promoters and co-promoters do you have? (105 reacties)



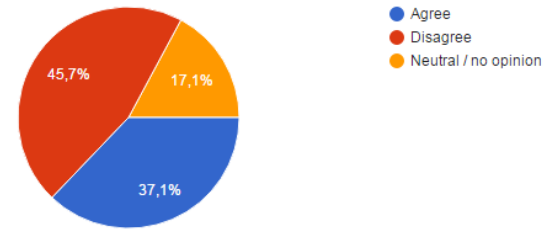
The supervision that I receive regarding the CONTENT of my PhD topic is adequate

(105 reacties)



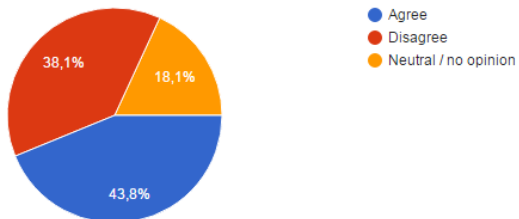
I know whom I should contact for help with issues like stress or depressive feelings

(105 reacties)



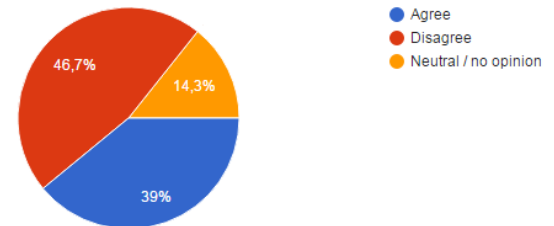
The supervision that I receive regarding the PLANNING of my PhD trajectory is adequate

(105 reacties)

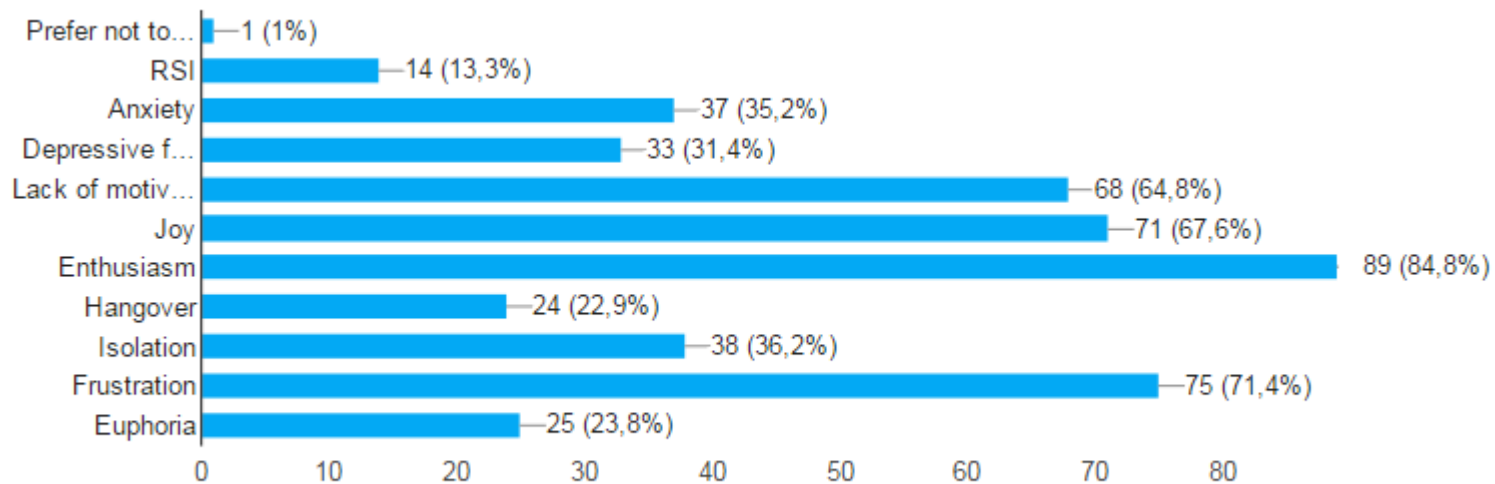


I know whom I should contact if I have problems with my supervisor(s)

(105 reacties)

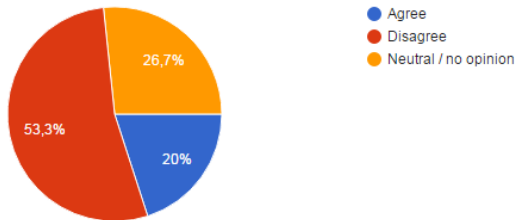


Which of the following experiences/feelings/issues have you had during your PhD?



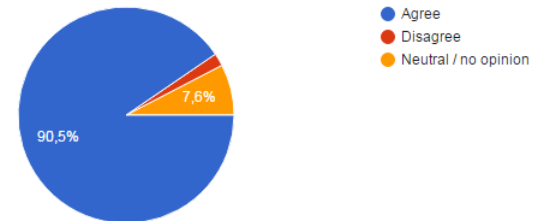
Communication and the Graduate School

I know what the Graduate School of Geosciences can do for me (105 reacties)



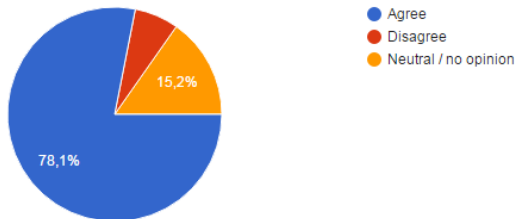
I would like to have one webpage containing all information about PhD courses

(105 reacties)



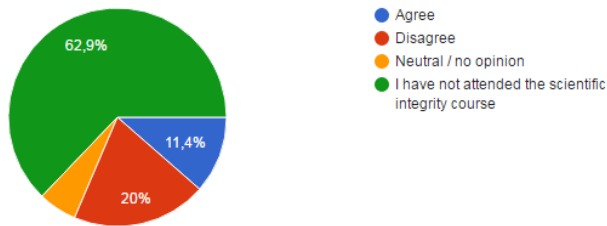
I would have liked to have a general PhD introduction day from the Faculty of Geosciences (for example to learn everything about my rights and options as a PhD in Geosciences)

(105 reacties)

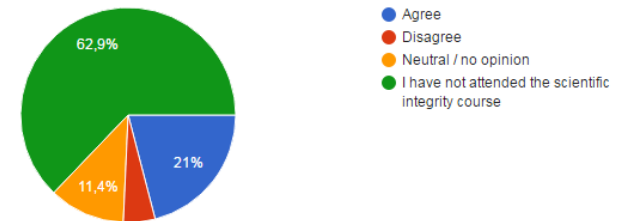


Courses and training

I found the Integrity course useful for my work (105 reacties)



I found the workload of the Integrity course too high (105 reacties)

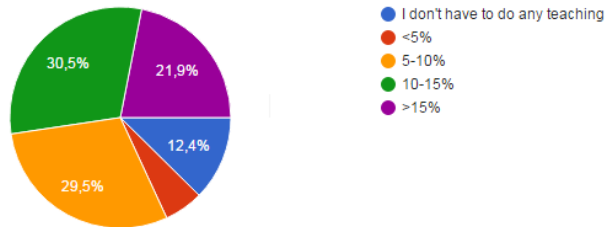


Which courses would you like to see organized by the Graduate School/Career Office

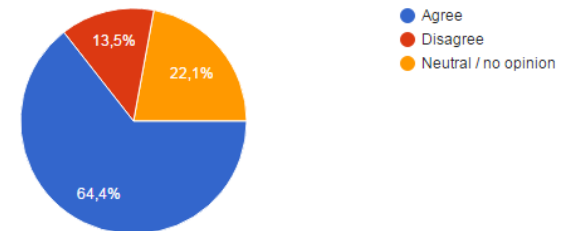


Teaching activities (1)

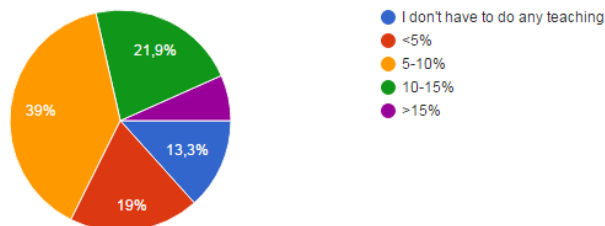
I teach ...% of my time, INCLUDING supervision of master/bachelor students
(105 reacties)



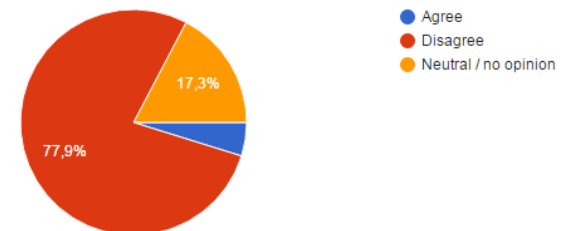
The % of teaching I specified above is in correspondence with my contract and/or the agreements I made with my supervisor(s)
(104 reacties)



I teach ...% of my time, EXCLUDING supervision of master/bachelor students
(105 reacties)



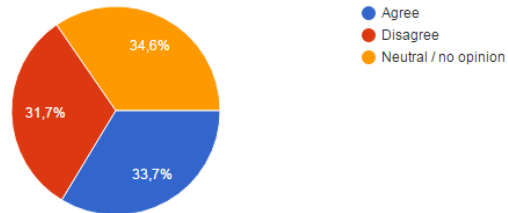
I received training in teaching during my PhD, before I started to teach
(104 reacties)



Teaching activities (2)

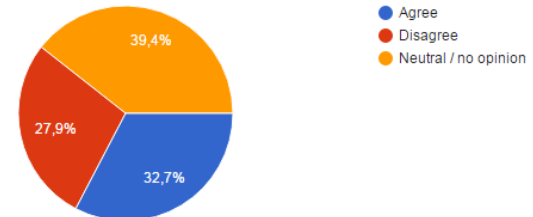
I felt I had the necessary skills and was adequately prepared to teach before I was assigned education duties

(104 reacties)

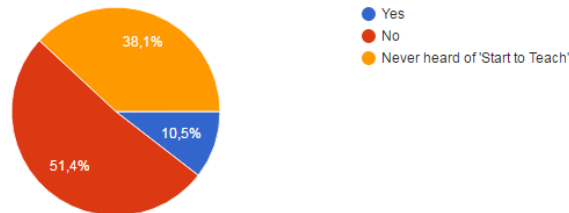


The division of the teaching load between different PhD's in my department is fair

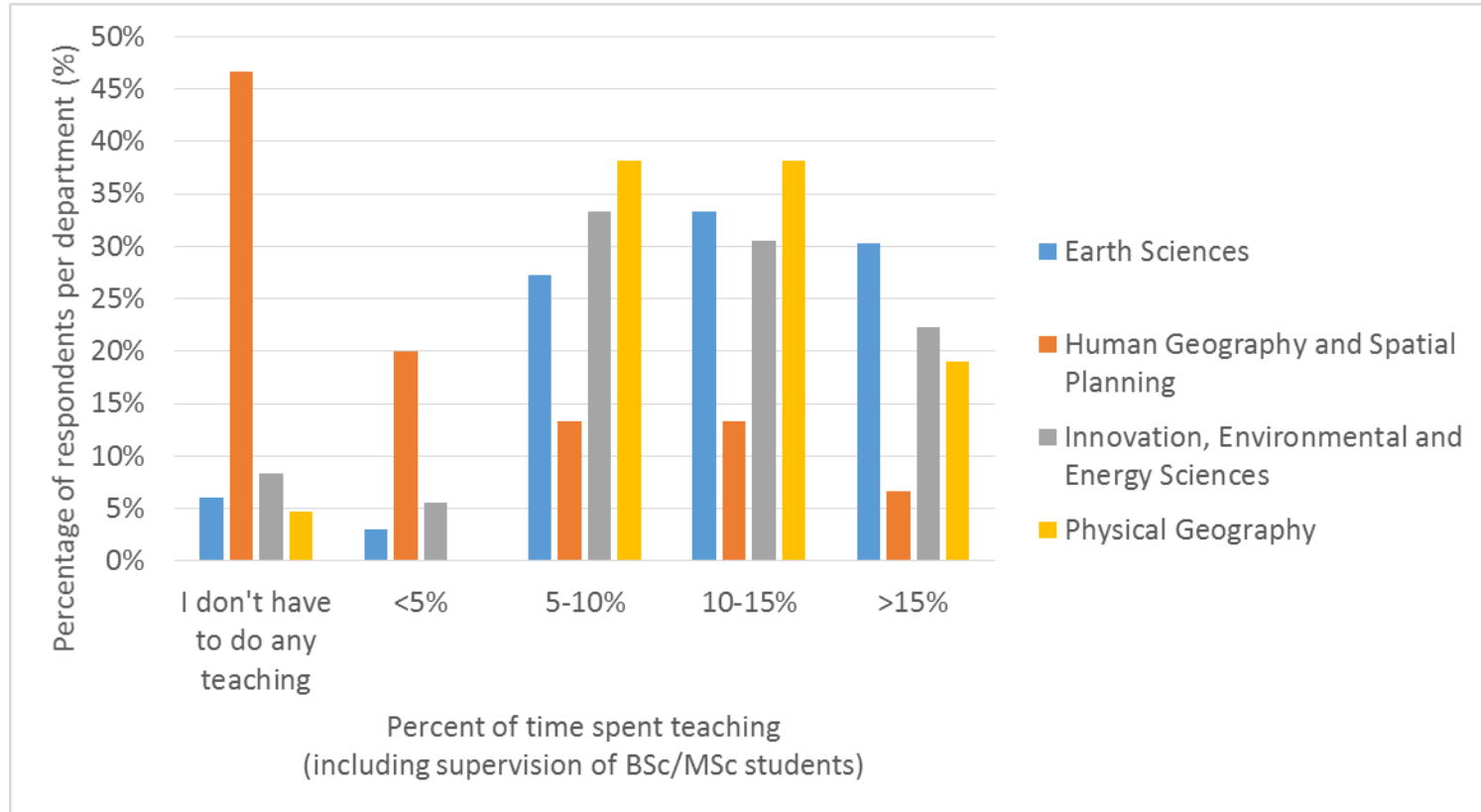
(104 reacties)



Have you participated/registered for the 'Start to Teach' training? (105 reacties)



Teaching activities (3)



Note: Depending on funding source, some PhDs are not permitted to teach

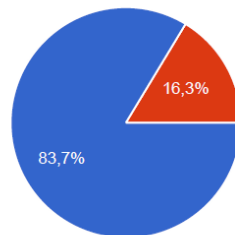
PhD Council (1)

What activities do you prefer to be organised by the PhD council?



Career events (such as the PhD day)	72	80%
Social events (such as the PhD drinks and movie night)	62	68.9%
Other events: ... (please specify below)	10	11.1%

Do you feel that the PhD council contributes to the representation of PhD candidates at the Faculty level?



Yes	82	83.7%
No	16	16.3%