



Leids Universitair
Medisch Centrum

Annual Report 2023

LUMC Association for PhD Candidates (LAP)

Fostering Unity, Advancing Excellence
LAP's 2023 Journey



LUMC Association
for PhD Candidates

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THE LAP BOARD

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1. Introduction

Immerse yourself in the pages of our Annual Report for 2023 by the LUMC Association for PhD Candidates (LAP). This report serves as a comprehensive account of our mission, activities, achievements, and the dynamic journey we embarked on throughout the year.

2. About LAP

As the LUMC Association for PhD candidates (LAP), we are here to help PhD candidates navigate this part of their working lives. LAP is a non-profit organization that represents the interests of all PhD candidates at the LUMC. We tirelessly advocate for our members, locally within the LUMC, as well as regionally and nationally through our involvement in various committees and councils. Our mission extends beyond representation; we are committed to creating a supportive and enriching environment for our community of researchers. Here are some of our core activities:

- **Advocacy:** LAP represents LUMC PhD candidates locally (e.g., with the Executive Board/Dean, Boerhaave committee, Graduate School council), regionally, and nationally (LEO/PhDoc/Leiden University Council/PNN).
- **Events:** We organize a diverse range of events, including educational workshops, networking events, and academic lectures, to empower and connect our members.
- **Information Dissemination:** Keeping our members informed is essential. We provide vital information on topics ranging from academic resources to research ethics.
- **Support:** LAP is dedicated to supporting PhD candidates during their academic journey. We tackle specific PhD-related problems and have an appointed confidant to address concerns confidentially.

3. Highlights of 2023

This chapter provides an overview of the significant events and activities that transpired during the year.

Table 3.1: Summary of LAP Key Events

Event Name	Date	Attendees	Theme
Round Table Discussion - "Use of AI in Research" with Young Medical Delta	March 20, 2023	LAP Board Members; YMD Members; PhD Candidates	AI and Research

Event Name	Date	Attendees	Theme
LUMC PhD Day 2023	April 19, 2023	LAP Board Members; Prof. dr. Frank Willem Jansen (Gynecologist), Jan van Staalduinen, dr. Tanja Alderliesten, dr. Andre Krom, Stephan van Duin (Co-founder of The Online Scientist), dr. Frank Garten (Facilitator, Speaker, and Consultant), Nienke Wijnants (Psychologist and Career Advisor), Paulien Stegehuis (Consultant at Gupta Strategists), Aile van Huijstee (Consultant at Gupta Strategists), Charlotte den Bakker (PhD Candidate in Medical Education), Kim van Nieuwenhuizen (PhD Candidate specializing in Sustainability in Gynaecological Surgery at LUMC); PhD Candidates	Academic Celebration
Masterclass - Bringing Innovations to Life	June 1, 2023	LAP Board Members; Josta Kevenaer, Evelyne Klaassen and Peter van den Berghe (Life Sciences & Health consultants)	Innovation
Workshop Proefschriftspecialist "Printing and Layouting Your Thesis"	June 7, 2023	LAP Board Members; Proefschriftspecialist; PhD Candidates	Thesis Formatting
LAP x LBSP Career Event	June 13, 2023	LAP Board Members; LBSP ; PhD Candidates	Career Development
Summer Boat Trip Leiden	July 27, 2023	LAP Board Members; PhD Candidates	Social Gathering
Gildeprint Thesis Printing Workshop	November 8, 2023	LAP Board Members; Gildeprint; PhD Candidates	Thesis Printing
LAP x LBSP Connect	November 14, 2023	LAP Board Members; LBSP; PhD Candidates	Networking
Closed-door session for all PhD candidates of the LUMC	November 23, 2023	LAP Board Members; Eline Slagboom (LUMC Confident), Henk-Jan Guchelaar (interim dean of the faculty of medicine), Alexandra Langers (portfolio holder for education), Bob Siegerink (coordinator of the LUMC Graduate School); PhD Candidates	Open Dialogue
Christmas Drinks LAP x LEO	December 13, 2023	LAP Board Members; LEO; PhD Candidates	Holiday Celebration

3.1 Event 1: Round Table Discussion - "Use of AI in Research" with YMD

On March 20th, 2023, our partner organization, Young Medical Delta (YMD), organized a thought-provoking round table discussion on the use and ethics of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in research, featuring a presentation and in-depth discussions. This event provided a platform for attendees to delve into the intricacies of AI, particularly focusing on ChatGPT, its functionality, and its ethical implications in the realm of research.

The discussion explored questions such as how ChatGPT works, the various applications of AI in research, and the ethical considerations surrounding its usage. Participants had the opportunity to engage with an AI programmer, and gain insight into both the technical and the ethical dimensions of AI in research.

This event played a crucial role in fostering a deeper understanding of AI's role in the research landscape. It encouraged attendees to contemplate the ethical boundaries and possibilities presented by AI technologies like ChatGPT. Following the stimulating discussion, participants had the chance to unwind and continue the conversation over refreshments, strengthening the sense of community and collaboration among researchers.

The Round Table Discussion on the "Use of AI in Research" with YMD exemplified LAP's commitment to facilitating dialogue and knowledge sharing on emerging research topics that are of paramount importance in today's academic landscape.

3.2 Event 2: LUMC PhD Day 2023

The LUMC PhD Day 2023, held on April 19th, 2023, was a hallmark event, epitomizing LAP's commitment to nurturing and empowering PhD candidates for their academic and professional journey. Themed "PhDo, PhDid, PhDone," the event unfolded with a vibrant atmosphere, commencing with a shared lunch and an engaging information market, where attendees could explore opportunities and resources.

The day was enriched with insightful plenary sessions and workshops, offering participants a diverse range of topics to delve into. The morning began with an engaging exploration titled "The Art of Observation in Medicine," hosted in Lecture Hall 1. Led by Prof. dr. Frank Willem Jansen, a distinguished gynecologist, this session delved into the intriguing nexus of art, observation, and healing. Attendees were drawn into a captivating discourse, prompting a reevaluation of the role of perception in both research and clinical practice. Participants embarked on a journey of introspection, laying the groundwork for a day of profound exploration and discovery.

As the morning progressed, attendees transitioned to the second plenary session, "AI in Healthcare & Research." PhD fellow Jan van Staalduinen, alongside dr. Tanja Alderliesten and dr. Andre Krom, expertly navigated the complexities of AI applications, sparking lively discussions and probing reflections on its ethical implications. Against the backdrop of rapid technological advancement, participants grappled with pressing questions surrounding trust, accountability, and the human dimension of healthcare.

Throughout the day, attendees immersed themselves in a diverse array of workshops, each offering a unique opportunity for personal and professional growth. From crafting compelling science communication narratives with Stephan van Duin (co-founder of The Online Scientist) to exploring cultural differences and their impact on teamwork with Dr. Frank Garten (facilitator, speaker, and consultant), every session fostered deep engagement and empowered attendees to navigate the complexities of their academic journey with confidence and resilience.

Amidst the buzz of workshops and networking, the third plenary session beckoned, drawing attendees back together for a compelling exploration of "Navigating Dilemmas in the Thirties." Guided by Nienke Wijnants (psychologist and career advisor), a seasoned psychologist and career advisor, participants embarked on a poignant journey of self-discovery and reflection. Attendees gleaned invaluable strategies for charting their path with clarity and authenticity, embracing the journey ahead with renewed purpose and confidence.

Furthermore, participants delved into strategy consulting in healthcare with Paulien Stegehuis and Aile van Huijstee (consultants at Gupta Strategists). Gupta Strategists provided insights into decarbonizing the Dutch healthcare landscape, offering a perspective that diverges from traditional academic approaches.

In another workshop, led by Charlotte den Bakker (PhD candidate in Medical Education), attendees explored strategies for maintaining motivation during the challenging journey of pursuing a PhD. Through theoretical insights and practical tips, participants learned how to sustain their drive and enthusiasm amidst the rigors of academic research.

Additionally, Kim van Nieuwenhuizen (PhD candidate in Sustainability in Gynaecological Surgery at LUMC), led a session on sustainable healthcare and research, addressing sustainability-related challenges encountered in clinical work or research. In retrospect, the LUMC PhD Day 2023 stood as a testament to LAP's unwavering commitment to fostering a supportive and vibrant community for PhD candidates.

Through its eclectic blend of plenary sessions, workshops, and networking opportunities, the event illuminated pathways to growth, discovery, and camaraderie, propelling attendees towards a future brimming with possibility and promise.

3.3 Event 3: Masterclass - Bringing Innovations to Life

In June 2023, LAP organized an enriching Masterclass entitled "Bringing Innovations to Life." This event provided attendees with a unique opportunity to dive into the world of innovation consultancy and gain insight into the critical role that innovation consultants play in driving impactful projects.

Participants had the exciting opportunity to explore real-world case examples and engage in interactive sessions. This immersive experience offered a comprehensive understanding of the methodologies employed by top innovation consultants. It offered first-hand insight into the journey from ideation to market implementation, transforming groundbreaking ideas into life-changing products for both patients and the market.

Whether attendees were affiliated with academia or the Life Sciences & Health (LSH) industry, this Masterclass was designed to cater to their curiosity and professional aspirations. It aimed to provide attendees with a fresh perspective on how to breathe life into innovative ideas and create tangible impact.

The Masterclass covered essential topics, including the essence of innovation consultancy, its role in driving innovation success, the typical trajectory of an innovation project, and the strategies required to develop a compelling business case.

The program offered a blend of knowledge sharing and networking, with a dedicated Q&A session followed by an opportunity for attendees to socialize and enjoy drinks.

This Masterclass attracted an enthusiastic audience, marking another successful LAP event that contributed to our ongoing mission of empowering and enriching the experiences of PhD candidates within the LUMC community. We look forward to continuing to provide such valuable opportunities for our members in the future.

3.4 Event 4: Workshop Proefschriftspecialist "Printing and Layouting Your Thesis"

In June 2023, LAP hosted a workshop in collaboration with Proefschriftspecialist. This event catered to PhD candidates in the final stages of their doctoral journeys, focusing on the printing and design of their theses, which is a crucial final step towards the successful completion of this endeavor.

During the workshop, Proefschriftspecialist offered expert insights and guidance, accompanied by a complimentary lunch. Attendees learned about key aspects of thesis production, such as interior layout design, cover creation, production considerations, available options, and timelines for the thesis printing and design process.

This workshop exemplified LAP's commitment to supporting and empowering its members by providing essential resources and knowledge for a successful thesis publication journey.

3.5 Event 5: LAP x LBSP Career Event

In June 2023, LAP collaborated with the Leiden BioScience Park (LBSP) to host an exciting career event. This inaugural event provided a platform to explore the latest developments within LBSP, discover innovative ideas, and showcase the talents of LUMC PhD candidates.

The event featured engaging rounds of speed-dating, enabling small groups of PhD candidates to engage in discussions with representatives from various LBSP companies. Attendees had the opportunity to delve into the unique offerings of these companies and gain insights into potential career pathways.

Additionally, the LAP x LBSP Career Event included an enlightening plenary session on entrepreneurship, where Stefan Ellenbroek delivered a captivating lecture.

The evening concluded on a sociable note with informal networking and drinks, fostering valuable connections among participants.

This event marked a resounding success, and LAP is thankful to all attendees for their active participation. We eagerly anticipate future gatherings that continue to facilitate collaboration and career opportunities within the LUMC community.

We extend special thanks to our event sponsor, Talentmark, and acknowledge the valuable contributions of participating companies: Bristol Myers Squibb, Janssen Nederland, Rapidemic, Batavia Biosciences, VarmX, MyLife Technologies, BaseClear, and the gracious host, BioPartner Leiden.

3.6 Event 6: Summer Boat Trip Leiden

In July 2023, LAP hosted an enchanting Summer Boat Trip along the picturesque canals of Leiden. This delightful outing offered PhD candidates from the LUMC community a perfect opportunity to unwind and connect with their peers.

The boats embarked from the charming Babbels in Leiden, setting the stage for a leisurely two-hour cruise through the beautiful canals of the city. LAP ensured the comfort and enjoyment of all participants by providing an assortment of snacks and refreshing beverages.

This casual event provided an ideal setting for PhD candidates to mingle, foster camaraderie, and create lasting memories with their fellow researchers. Registration for this memorable boat trip was free of charge, making it an accessible and enjoyable experience for all.

3.7 Event 7: Gildeprint Thesis Printing Workshop

In collaboration with Gildeprint, LAP hosted the Gildeprint Thesis Printing Workshop on November 8th. This workshop offered PhD candidates valuable insights into the printing and design process of their theses, making it a must-attend event for those looking to polish their thesis presentation to perfection.

The workshop was preceded by a complimentary lunch, fostering a convivial atmosphere among participants. Additionally, one fortunate attendee had the chance to win a discount voucher worth €250, which could be applied toward their future printing expenses.

Throughout the workshop, attendees delved into the captivating realm of thesis printing, gaining an in-depth understanding of the intricacies that contribute to an exceptional thesis presentation. From the art of print mastery to the underlying science, the workshop provided a unique learning experience.

A noteworthy highlight of the event was the announcement of the lucky participant who walked away with the €250 printing voucher, adding an extra layer of excitement to the day. For those who couldn't make it, LAP assured them of more engaging workshops and opportunities on the horizon.

3.8 Event 8: LAP x LBSP Connect

In collaboration with the Leiden Bio Science Park (LBSP), LAP hosted the second LAP x LBSP Connect event on November 14, 2023. This career event provided a unique opportunity for LUMC PhD candidates to engage with various companies within the LBSP, exploring the latest innovations and groundbreaking ideas in the field.

The event featured multiple rounds of speed-dating sessions, allowing small groups of PhD candidates to interact directly with company representatives. Participants had the chance to learn about into the LBSP's ongoing projects and discover how their expertise as LUMC PhD candidates could contribute to these endeavors.

Following the dynamic speed-dating sessions, attendees were invited to join networking drinks, providing an excellent platform for further discussions and inquiries with the company representatives.

The event registration was facilitated through a provided link, and LAP looked forward to welcoming all interested participants. This event was made possible through the generous support of the Ondernemersvereniging Bio Science Park OVBSP Leiden.

Several prominent companies participated in the LAP x LBSP Connect event, including Talentmark, Toxys, Bio-Inspired Think Tank, Pelagen, Picamed, and SeraNovo. These companies offered valuable insights and engagement opportunities to LUMC PhD candidates, enriching the overall experience and expanding horizons for potential collaborations and career paths.

3.9 Event 9: Closed-door session for all PhD candidates of the LUMC

The Closed-Door Session for All PhD Candidates of the LUMC, held in November 2023, stands as a pivotal event in the annals of the LUMC PhD community, signaling a profound impact on the institution's trajectory. With a robust turnout of approximately 281 PhD candidates, this exclusive gathering provided a platform for open discussions, addressing pressing concerns and charting a course for transformative action within the LUMC.

At the onset, introductions by the LAP board set the stage for a constructive dialogue, laying bare the challenges faced by the LUMC and underscoring the imperative for systemic enhancements. Despite initial skepticism, as evidenced by pre-session surveys, the discourse swiftly evolved into a candid exploration of the prevailing issues.

Eline Slagboom's insights, shared from her tenure as the LUMC confidant, shed light on the escalating support-seeking behaviors among PhD candidates, spotlighting the urgent need for cultural reforms and empowerment initiatives. Proposals for enhanced guidance committee frameworks and clearer graduation requirements resonated strongly, reflecting the collective resolve to instigate tangible change.

The ensuing open discussion provided a platform for PhD candidates to articulate their concerns, ranging from transparency in graduation requirements to the prevalence of unpaid work post-contract expiration. Calls for structured interventions, such as soft skills training for PIs and supervisors, echoed throughout the discourse, underlining the imperative for holistic reforms.

In response, stakeholders, including Henk-Jan Guchelaar, the Interim Dean of the Medicine faculty, and Bob Siegerink, the Coordinator of the LUMC Graduate School, voiced their commitment to effecting substantive change, endorsing proposals for enhanced oversight mechanisms and targeted interventions. The substantial momentum generated by the session culminated in a consensus on actionable next steps, including a follow-up session in early 2024 and the formulation of an inclusive action plan for improvement.

As LAP, we remain persistent in our commitment to championing the voices of PhD candidates, facilitating meaningful reforms, and fostering a culture of transparency and support within the LUMC community.

For a comprehensive overview of the meeting proceedings, including detailed notes and insights, please refer to the appended document titled "Meeting Notes: LAP x LUMC Graduate School – Closed Door PhD Session."

3.10 Event 10: Christmas Drinks LAP x LEO

In December 2023, LAP and LEO (Leids Promovendi Overleg) collaborated to spread the festive cheer with the LAP x LEO Christmas Drinks Event. This heartwarming gathering was a delightful way to usher in the holiday season and foster a sense of community among PhD candidates.

The evening was filled with the merry spirit of Christmas, offering attendees the opportunity to sip on delicious drinks, savor festive treats, and engage in uplifting conversations at the charming Grand Café de Burcht in Leiden. It was a time to relax, connect with peers, and celebrate the joys of the season.

This event marked the culmination of LAP's activities for the year, wrapping up 2023 on a festive note.

4. *New Board Members and Chair*

In 2023, the LUMC LAP board underwent significant changes, introducing five new members who brought diverse backgrounds and expertise to the organization:

New Board Members

1. **Gregory Helmich (Chair):** Gregory, a dedicated researcher focusing on rheumatoid arthritis and optimizing therapeutic options for undifferentiated arthritis, leads LAP as its current chairperson. His expertise in managing two randomized clinical trials underscores his commitment to advancing treatment approaches in rheumatology. As LAP chair, Gregory represents all LUMC PhD candidates to formal organizations, fostering connections and advocating for their interests within and outside the LUMC community. He spearheads the organization of lectures, educational sessions, and networking events, aiming to enrich the academic and social experiences of PhD candidates.
2. **Esther Fousert (Secretary):** Esther, a second-year PhD candidate at the Ear, Nose and Throat department develops organoid models for new therapeutic interventions against deafness. As the secretary of the board she answers all PhD-related questions and keeps in contact with other organizations at the LUMC.
3. **Simone Jansen (Public Relations):** Simone, a third-year PhD candidate in Anesthesiology, is dedicated to advancing patient safety and healthcare practices. She actively promotes LAP initiatives and events as a PR representative, fostering social connections among PhD candidates at LUMC.
4. **Ivana Kancheva (General Board Member):** Ivana, a first-year PhD candidate from Bulgaria at the Department of Radiology, contributes to the 'MODEM – Mechanisms of Dementia' project. Her research aims to uncover translational biomarkers for cerebral amyloid angiopathy. Ivana's role as a general LAP board member involves event organization and international (student) representation to enhance diversity and inclusion.
5. **Amar Levens (General Board Member):** Amar, a pharmacist and PhD candidate at the Department of Clinical Pharmacy and Toxicology, specializes in personalized medicine, focusing on Pharmacogenomics and Therapeutic Drug Monitoring. He represents LUMC PhD candidates on the Boerhaave committee and seeks to enhance LAP's visibility and recognition within the LUMC community.

The process of selecting these new board members was conducted meticulously within the LAP board itself. Vacancies were identified, and candidates were thoroughly discussed among the existing board members, ensuring a thoughtful and informed selection process. This approach aimed to ensure that the new leadership team aligned with the LAP's goals and values, representing the interests of LUMC's PhD community effectively.

In addition to welcoming these new board members, there were notable role changes within the LAP leadership. Gregory Helmich assumed the role of Chair, leading the LAP board and representing all LUMC PhD candidates to formal organizations, both within and

outside of the LUMC. Elissa Polomski transitioned from her role in Public Relations to become the Head of Events & Promotion, leveraging her expertise in managing LAP's communications and events. Dejvid Veizaj, previously a general board member, took on the role of Treasurer, overseeing financial matters and contributing to LAP's event organization efforts. These shifts in roles were part of LAP's strategy to ensure a well-rounded and effective leadership team to support the needs and aspirations of LUMC's PhD candidates.

Board members who left the board in 2023:

1. Annelieke Lemij (Chair)
2. Elise van Wijk (Secretary)
3. Lente Lerink (General Board Member)
4. Vesna Miladinovic (General Board Member)
5. Carlijn Hoekx (Head of Events)
6. Pranav Mehta (Treasurer)
7. Thaïs Tong (Promotion and Communication)

The LAP board members by the end of 2023 were as follows:

- Gregory Helmich (Chair)
- Esther Fousert (Secretary)
- Dejvid Veizaj (Treasurer)
- Elissa Polomski (Head of Events & Promotion)
- Simone Jansen (Public Relations)
- Ivana Kancheva (General Board Member)
- Amar Levens (General Board Member)

5. *Conclusion*

In conclusion, LAP's journey in 2023 has been marked by significant achievements and valuable contributions to the LUMC PhD community. The Closed-Door Session for All PhD Candidates of the LUMC stands out as a pivotal moment, where the voices of PhD candidates were heard, and concerns addressed, setting the stage for meaningful improvements. All other events contributed to community building, fostering connections, and promoting personal and professional development. The introduction of new board members and role transitions further strengthened LAP's leadership, ensuring a well-rounded team to support the needs and aspirations of LUMC's PhD candidates. As we move forward, LAP remains committed to being a vital advocate and resource for the LUMC PhD community, fostering an environment of growth, support, and collaboration.

6. *Acknowledgments*

LAP extends its heartfelt gratitude to all members, partners, and sponsors for their steadfast support throughout the year. Their unwavering dedication has been instrumental in LAP's accomplishments and contributions.

A special thank you is extended to the former LAP board members for their invaluable contributions and dedication to the organization. Their hard work has been greatly appreciated, and LAP wishes them the best in their future endeavors.

Furthermore, LAP would like to express appreciation to the LUMC Graduate School for their collaboration and pivotal role in facilitating the Closed-door sessions for PhD candidates.

Additionally, LAP thanks all the PhD candidates at LUMC who actively participated in LAP's events and sessions, providing crucial engagement and feedback that has helped shape the organization's activities and ensure they meet the needs of the LUMC PhD community effectively.

LAP looks forward to the continued support and participation of its members, partners, and sponsors in the coming year, as the organization remains dedicated to serving the LUMC PhD community.

7. *Future Plans*

LAP's plans and goals for the upcoming year (2024) are centered around further enhancing the experience of LUMC's PhD candidates. The organization aims to continue its advocacy for the rights and well-being of PhD candidates, ensuring their concerns are heard and addressed effectively. LAP plans to organize a series of engaging events, workshops, and networking opportunities to foster a sense of community and facilitate personal and professional development among PhD candidates. The organization will also focus on strengthening its partnerships with key stakeholders and sponsors to expand its impact and resources. In 2024, LAP remains committed to being a vital advocate and support system for the LUMC PhD community, promoting a culture of growth, collaboration, and success.

8. *Contact Information*

For contact and further information, LAP can be reached via email at LAP@lumc.nl. Detailed updates and insights into LAP's activities can be found on their official website, which is accessible at <http://www.laplumc.org>

Additionally, LAP maintains a strong online presence on both LinkedIn and Instagram, where everyone can stay connected and informed about their initiatives. These platforms serve as valuable resources for updates, news, and opportunities to engage with LAP and the LUMC PhD community.

9. *Appendices*

9.1 Meeting Notes: LAP x LUMC Graduate School – Closed Door PhD Session

Date: November 23rd, 2023

Time: 09:00 - 10:00 (extended to 10:30 due to many remaining questions by PhD attendees)

Location: LUMC Main Building, Lecture Hall 1 (Route 768)

Presence:

- Henk-Jan Guchelaar (Interim Dean of Medicine faculty)
- Bob Siegerink (Coordinator of LUMC Graduate School)
- Eline Slagboom (LUMC Confidant)
- Alexandra Langers (Portfolio holder for education)
- LAP board, including:
 - Gregory Helmich (Chair of the board)
 - Esther Fousert (Secretary)
 - Dejvid Veizaj (Treasurer)
 - Elissa Polomski (Promotion & Communication)
 - Simone Jansen (Public relations)

General Board Members:

- Lente Lerink
- Vesna Miladinovic
- Ivana Kancheva
- Amar Levens
- Approximately 281 PhD candidates signed-up for the meeting and attended it in-person.

Note on meeting notes:

Although the meeting was announced as a closed-door setting, we also communicated during the meeting that we wanted to make minutes of the meeting to share. We aim to maintain transparency regarding the discussions that took place among all PhD candidates at the LUMC. Furthermore, this provides a chance for PhD candidates who did not attend to determine if they can identify themselves in the raised concerns or if any matters were inadvertently omitted. The current procedure (share the meeting notes with the PhD community while ensuring anonymity with the exception of the invited speakers) is more in line of the so called Chatham House Rule and fits better with the overall goal of the meeting.

1. Welcome and introductions:

All attendees were welcomed by Gregory Helmich, the chair of LAP, and all relevant parties were introduced: the LAP board, Henk-Jan Guchelaar who was appointed as the interim Dean, Bob Siegerink who is the Coordinator of the LUMC Graduate School, Alexandra Langers who is the Portfolio holder for education, and Eline Slagboom who is the LUMC Confidant. The board of LAP outlined some information on what the board does in order to support PhD candidates as well.

2. Bob Siegerink speech:

- After that, the coordinator of the LUMC Graduate School Bob Siegerink offered a welcome to everyone and introduced the Graduate School. He said that the Graduate School has received various worrisome signals in the past and that in light of those, the recent events in the LUMC were likely not surprising but were nevertheless very concerning.
- Bob Siegerink outlined that since May 2022 the Graduate School has really tried to start introducing changes for the PhD candidates and provided several examples of that. One example is the Supervision action plan that has been developed and the Golden rules for PhD supervision that have been introduced in order to improve PhD candidates' understanding about their rights and responsibilities, and those of their supervisors. However, he voiced his concern that the recent events in the LUMC show that there is a need for more improvements to occur and he ended his welcome-speech by emphasising that the Graduate School encourages all PhD candidates to actively partake in the action plan to improve things for the PhD community together.

3. Ice-breaker questionnaires and probing PhD candidates' pre-session opinions:

After the opening statements, the session was continued by asking some ice-breaker questions to the audience in the room. The first question was about how happy PhD candidates were with their PhD trajectories and most candidates in the room raised their hand and seemed to be happy with their trajectories. The second question was about whether PhD candidates believed that this meeting would elicit a real change in their PhD trajectory and almost no people in the room raised their hand. This was used as a point of concern, but also inspiration that could fuel future improvements within the LUMC and the PhD community.

Next, Gregory – the chair of LAP – talked about the questionnaire that was administered by LAP among PhD candidates online, prior to the closed-door session, in order to probe the opinions and feelings of PhD candidates about their PhD trajectories in advance of the session. About 140 PhD candidates had filled-in this questionnaire before the meeting and Gregory presented the findings from the survey.

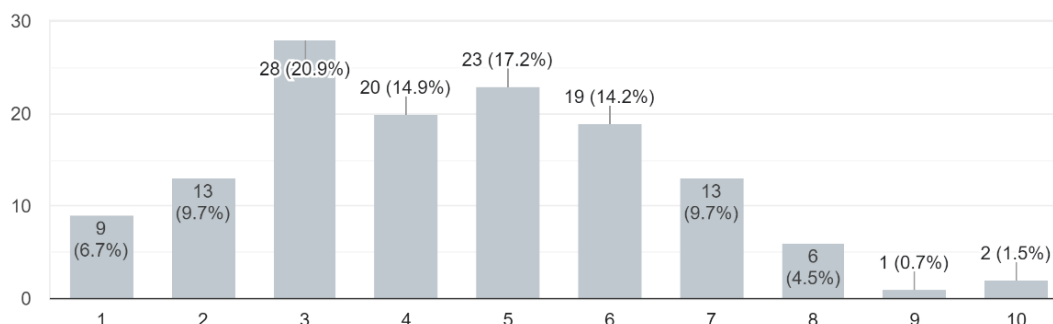
Results from the survey showed that **65.9 %** of the PhD candidates who filled it in are **not aware of their rights**, as shown in the figure below;



- **68.1 %** of PhD candidates are **feeling any form of mental distress** as part of their PhD trajectory, as depicted by the figure below;



- On a scale from 1 to 10, most PhD candidates do not **believe change can happen as a result of the closed-door session**, as graphically presented below;



Overall, the mood within the PhD community is not very positive. It is worth mentioning that this was already the case before the former Dean stepped down from his position and so the recent events within the LUMC only served to further exacerbate an already negative and somewhat pessimistic feeling among PhD candidates about how well the LUMC is doing in terms of ensuring their rights and wellbeing.

4. Eline Slagboom speech:

After that, the meeting continued with some words of Eline Slagboom. Eline Slagboom is the LUMC confidant whom PhD candidates can turn to in situations when they have struggles and problems with their PhD trajectories, supervision, progress, etc. Since January 2022 Eline Slagboom has been the confidentiality person. She is not a moderator or a psychologist in training but has been an experienced PI for 35 years, is a professor of Molecular Epidemiology, a supervisor of PhD candidates herself, and also a mother, so she has a lot of experience with different aspects of the academic and professional world.

Eline Slagboom shared some impressions based on her experience as the LUMC confidant:

- In 2022 about 40 PhD candidates had come to her for support and the steps she usually follows to intervene are as follows: she tries to have 3 conversations - 1 with the PhD candidate; 1 with the respective supervisor, and eventually a third follow-up conversation as well. Since autumn this year, however, Eline Slagboom shared that she has noticed a very high increase in candidates who share unhappiness and feel insecure and don't know how to discuss problems with their supervisors.
- Eline Slagboom emphasised that her support and help is confidential and that to be able to offer help in a meaningful way, she also needs some courage on the part of PhD candidates who should try to talk to their supervisors, as scary as it may be, as a first step to addressing their problems. She offers help and guidance in this process and can offer advice on how PhD candidates can talk and communicate with their supervisors. Eline can offer support by being present as a third party during a discussion between a PhD candidate and a corresponding supervisor, or by talking to a given supervisor directly, if necessary.
- She shared that she has noticed that many PhD candidates ask for her help way too late at the end of their PhD trajectories and highlighted that there is help available to PhD candidates at various different levels. The first line of help is the guidance committee that PhD candidates have. In this regard, one problem that Eline Slagboom has identified is that there are no guidelines for the selection process of the guidance committee. Several main issues that arise are: 1) oftentimes, the guidance committee members are not aware what their specific responsibilities are - 2) they don't have much free time for the PhD candidates; 3) they don't have real insight into what the issues of PhD candidates are; 4) they are friends of the supervisors, so they actually don't help PhD candidates due to not being truly independent from the supervisors in their capacity; 5) often do not take their role if the PhD trajectory is difficult.

- In response to Eline Slagboom voicing these observations based on her experience, PhD candidates in the room were offered the opportunity to interrupt and get involved in the discussion. One potential solution that was voiced by a PhD candidate and Eline Slagboom in conversation was that a document can be prepared for guidance committee members to know how to execute their role better. The latter can be challenging if feelings and problems are rarely spoken about or if there is an overall culture of no communication and too much emphasis on scientific results in the LUMC and this is where Eline can help with actions and advice and offer PhD candidates some tangible steps that they can undertake if they are facing issues.
- Overall, the conditions in the LUMC are not good for those PhD candidates who are struggling and there are two main aspects that need to change – first, the conditions at the LUMC should be shaped in terms of a culture that facilitates things for the PhD community and second, PhD candidates should become better-equipped to be brave, involved, and engaged in discussions surrounding their rights and wellbeing, and increase their resilience.

- **Meeting of PIs and formation of a PIs/Leadership board:**

Another suggestion that was raised by Eline Slagboom was to organise a meeting for all the PIs of the LUMC. The idea for the meeting is to discuss the problems PhDs addressed in the PhD closed-door session and to collect issues from PIs perspective. Supervisors must be aware of the general issues PhDs face and that PhDs are stimulated to speak up. Supervisors must then know how to best respond as PI and that an open discussion ideally should take place. A common problem that may arise if a given PhD candidate is not happy is that the candidate can address their concerns with their supervisor, but their supervisors are surprised by the issues or do not know how best to respond. This is why it is necessary and useful if PIs also know about issues faced by the PhD candidates and supervisors in their groups and departments, and this is where the utility of having a leadership board who can come up with concrete, explicit, and clear guidelines on how supervisors can intervene and respond to signals that are alarming come into place. Identifying the need to equip PIs and supervisors more properly with skills on how to supervise and build strong rapport with the PhD candidates is also identified and needs to be addressed formally.

- **5. Open discussion with PhD candidates and time for questions and suggestions:**

After Eline Slagboom outlined what her role is and how she can support PhD candidates, the floor was given to the PhD attendees in the room to share their questions, concerns, suggestions, and feelings. Please note that the entire discussion happened in a tone of confidentiality so that PhD candidates would feel safe to share any concerns they might have. The meeting notes follow the same principle of ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of all the PhD candidates who participated in the open discussion. Therefore, no names and/or departments were revealed during the discussion and the notes refer to PhD candidates without identifying them on an individual level.

Concerns raised by PhD candidates:

- **PhD candidate – Concerns about Guidance committee members:** One PhD candidate suggested that there should be better rules for guidance committee members. One potential solution is to create new guidelines for the guidance committee members ensuring that the members would be completely independent. Another suggestion is that all guidance committee members could be obliged to follow a course before becoming guidance committee members, so that they know how to execute this role better (for example, a social skills or leadership training course). Clearer and more explicit guidelines for the members should be created. It would be optimal if for every PhD candidate there would be 1 committee member from the LUMC; 1 may be from the same department as the PhD candidate so that they are aware and familiar with the struggles that a candidate has had, however, not to be related in a hierarchical fashion to the PhD candidate; 1 should be external and completely independent. The norm has to become that PhD candidates talk to their guidance committee at least once a year and a common problem is that many candidates do not communicate with their guidance committee members enough or that even if they do, this does not yield any improvements. There was general agreement by all the PhD candidates in the room that they should be allowed to request changes to their guidance committee members if they don't feel comfortable with the choice of guidance committee.
- People appointed to guidance committees should have enough time to combine their duties with their committee roles and the mindset should shift from PhD candidates being the only ones initiating conversations with the guidance committee members. However, typically the initiative should come from PhD candidates if they are experiencing issues.
- Eline Slagboom has given signals and reported to the former Dean and Board of Directors about previous issues with guidance committee members and she believes there has been a lag between initial signals about problems and actual improvements, which has made PhD candidates pessimistic. There was agreement in the room that now there is exceptional momentum for shaping a better mindset and also a mindset of arranging things better and addressing signals in a timely way in the LUMC. The initiative should also come from above in a top-down manner from the LUMC leadership for such a mindset to be cultivated and they should be both willing to, and equipped with, the instruments to help PhD candidates when this is needed.
- **PhD candidate – Disbelief among the PhD community:** Another candidate voiced a concern about the general disbelief among the PhD community following the misconduct of the former LUMC Dean. This disbelief comes from the knowledge that the PhD candidate who was the whistle-blower for this case had followed all the steps that were in place to do things right, including contacting their respective guidance committee members, and still, things didn't improve for this candidate until the problem became apparent to the wider public. Therefore, there is little hope among the PhD community that the management truly acknowledges problematic situations, which represents a major issue to be addressed by the interim Dean and Graduate School.

- **Several PhD candidates – Lack of clarity about what is necessary to graduate on time (within the limits of one’s employment contract):** Another PhD candidate raised the concern that PhD candidates do not really know what they need to do to actually finish their PhDs - there is no clarity regarding what a finished dissertation entails in the first place and what is the associated timeline for completing a dissertation without complications; PhD candidates don’t know their rights and they feel powerless because the actual guidelines are not explicit, concrete, and clear enough as a starting point. Several PhD candidates agreed that if there are rules that are clearer, more explicit, and established about what a finished dissertation entails and what possible exceptions to a finished dissertation could exist, then PhD candidates will have the safety of knowing that there is a solid document that they can fall back on as a point of safety should they fail to meet the current requirements for graduating, but have otherwise accomplished significant work (for example, having completed 3 scientific papers). There should be clearer rules and not merely subjective interpretations of those rules. There was overall agreement in the entire room among the PhD candidates that the graduation/dissertation requirements are not clear (enough); that there is lack of transparent, explicit, and concrete guidelines that PhD candidates can count on, and that considerable ambiguity exists from department-to-department, and even from supervisor-to-supervisor when it comes to the graduation/dissertation requirements.
- **Several PhD candidates – Working without being paid after the end of the employment contract:** Several PhD candidates shared that they have published 3 articles and were still doing lab work and experiments in/after their final PhD year and were not allowed to graduate yet, further emphasising that in such ambivalent cases, it would be important to discuss the situation with the respective supervisor(s) and come up with action steps about how to graduate on time without having to carry out unpaid work to finish the PhD. Eline and Bob Siegerink reiterated the importance of voicing concerns about not being able to graduate on time as early as possible if PhD candidates think they might fall into this category because typically PhD candidates alert about those things way too late already in their 3rd, 4th, or even 5th year. However, unfortunately, for many candidates it has been the case that they have informed their supervisors of possible delays and no actions have been taken. This is a major issue that has to be solved.
- At this point in the discussion, Henk-Jan Guchelaar took the opportunity to say a few words about the importance of the concerns that were raised. He agreed that more explicit graduation/dissertation guidelines are necessary and emphasised that the quality of the written dissertations ought to be high but that some flexibility might exist when it comes to the chapters in a dissertation (for example, if a PhD candidate has used the same methodology for several articles vs. different methodologies, this could be considered an important point in deciding whether for instance, 3 or 4 articles may suffice for a PhD candidate to graduate).
- In response, Eline Slagboom emphasised that there should be more control over PIs whose PhD candidates do not graduate on time and that if there is a PIs/Leadership board formed, then this could facilitate such monitoring. Slagboom emphasised that by no means this should lead to a “witch hunt”, because extended, well-paid, and agreed upon extensions of PhD trajectories also occur. But if PIs know that certain supervisors in their departments work with PhD candidates who have not graduated on time and/or are performing unpaid work, this could facilitate the control and monitoring of such cases, and track should be kept of such instances, so that they do not occur or are only rare exceptions, but not the norm.

- If PhD candidates identify that they may not manage to graduate on time, within the time constraints of their employment contracts, they should address such concerns with their guidance committee members or seek the help of Eline, so that interventional steps can be undertaken earlier, rather than later. PhD candidates who have produced enough work to graduate, should be able to discuss with their supervisor whether a request can be sent to the Dean for graduation formalities to begin.
- **Several PhD candidates – Social skills training for PIs and supervisors and awareness of Dutch laws and regulations:** Several PhD candidates suggested that there should be soft skills trainings provided for PIs and guidance committee members. Furthermore several PhD candidates shared stories about working many unpaid hours outside their contracts. Also, PhD candidates mentioned that oftentimes their thesis is not finished once the 4-year PhD contract ends and PhD candidates are expected to write the thesis in their own time (or to consider applying for, e.g., unemployment benefits; or to write alongside their next job). Consideration was given by PhD candidates to include information on Dutch labour market laws and regulations in the PI skills training. The intent is to enhance awareness among PIs and supervisors regarding potential legal issues related to overtime and unpaid work by their PhD candidates, with an emphasis on the importance of preventing such situations. In this regard, the LUMC should also act upon the high dropout rate observed among PIs and supervisors in certain departments.
- **PhD candidate – Ethical subjectivism:** Another PhD candidate raised a concern about ethical subjectivism when there are cases where for example, 2 PhD candidates have worked on developing a methodology or carried out experiments, but only 1 candidate would be formally allowed to put the work based on those experiments in their dissertation and defend it. One of the guidelines about the PhD dissertation should concern situations where 2 or more PhD candidates have performed experiments together. Then, in principle, both candidates should share first authorship and should be allowed to include the same work in their respective dissertations as collaborative papers/chapters. Such arbitrary or exceptional situations should be able to be submitted as exemption requests to the Dean of the LUMC and supervisors should be supportive in such situations.
- Henk-Jan Guchelaar agreed with these points and emphasised that control mechanisms should be in place about how PIs and supervisors enact their roles, as well as clearer guidelines about the dissertation/graduation requirements without too many dependencies and ambiguous rules.
- Bob Siegerink also took the opportunity to thank all PhD candidates for their suggestions and very much agreed that there are no formal control mechanisms on PIs performance and behaviour, and that those should be established. He also shared that until recently, the Graduate School was only an administrative office working on platforms and formal procedures, such as Converis, where several people worked a few days per week or even part-time. This was suboptimal in terms of addressing issues beyond merely administrative complications. Different roles can be introduced in the Graduate School with people who are specifically appointed to intervene with the responsibility to monitor situations of misconduct, delays, and issues.
- Division heads and department heads should have formal mechanisms to also monitor their respective PIs and how things are going for the PhDs in their departments.

- At this point, it was agreed that due to numerous concerns that were being passionately voiced in the room and many outstanding questions, the meeting would be extended with another 30 minutes with an opportunity for more suggestions by PhD candidates for improvement. Several ideas were communicated and are listed below (not in order of importance, but in order of mention during the session):
 - There should be formal mechanisms for division of control or hierarchy when it comes to decisions about what papers can be published in a dissertation and what quality is to be expected;
 - Set-up meeting with PIs on behalf of the leadership of the LUMC to create a PIs/Leadership board. Ensure that all PIs would be reached because they are very busy and may not prioritise a meeting to improve social openness. Generate a list of all the names of all PIs in the LUMC and ensure that all of them will attend a meeting dedicated to sharing their issues and improving the policies for PhD candidates and safeguarding against misconduct. Henk-Jan Guchelaar noted that the names of all clinical and non-clinical PIs in the LUMC are known and that setting-up several PI meetings should be feasible to organise to make sure that all PIs would become part of such a meeting and effort and not be able to find excuses to not attend (in cases where PIs 'do not care', as many PhD candidates shared that their PIs were not actively interested in the wellbeing of their PhD candidates);
 - Regulations from the university should be set up about how promotions work and when a PhD title can be rewarded;
 - The eBROK can be replaced by another course that is more useful for pre-clinical research PhDs or PhDs whose focus does not entail activities and tasks where knowledge of eBROK material would be useful;
 - The psychological safety in the LUMC has to improve because a bad culture has been perpetuated for way too long. Team building can be introduced in departments so that PhD candidates can also be familiar with their fellow peers and ask them for support in cases where supervisors and guidance committee members are not doing their job well. This can be another form of support to PhD candidates (peer-support) and PhD candidates can join forces in speaking up to their supervisors about ill-treatment; we want to prevent the "bystander effect" (if we see how a fellow candidate is ill-treated and not speak-up as a group of bystanders).
 - Setting up a list of possible guidance committee members that new PhD candidates can review and have at their disposal or discuss in a peer-to-peer fashion to help each other find a good match. This may be particularly relevant for international PhD candidates who are not from Leiden, do not know any potential committee members locally or do not know much about the LUMC or about how to select guidance committee members and what their responsibilities are. In reality, most of the time, it is the PIs who choose the guidance committee members, but in principle, PhD candidates can also offer suggestions or have a word in that choice;
 - Bind consequences to PIs for whom many PhD candidates do not finish their PhDs on time after 34 months. Set-up mandatory meetings for the supervisors and guidance committee members of such candidates after 34 months, so that they can discuss what has to be done so that the PhD candidate can actually graduate on time or with a very minor delay.

- Bind consequences to PIs whose PhD candidates repeatedly raise concerns and who do not demonstrate any change or improvement despite raised concerns/complaints/signals;
- Guidance plan of PhD candidates should be signed by the PIs and guidance committee members for transparency (sometimes PIs end up not signing the Guidance plans of PhD candidates due to lack of time);
- Offer guidance, leadership courses, and soft skills training to supervisors, PIs, group leaders, and academics who aspire to be appointed on such leadership positions;
- Make sure that also PhD candidates develop (if necessary by courses) the right skills early on to organise their work properly, act on work meetings (by making the right notes and follow up analyses steps and study designs).
- Come up with clearer regulations on the steps that can be taken in more extreme cases where for example PhD candidates and supervisors do not share scientific interests and can therefore not work fruitfully together; make sure that PIs are aware which processes can be followed if early on it becomes clear that a given candidate is unlikely to finish the PhD trajectory, which of course needs careful communication and attempts for improvement .
- An Asian PhD candidate also raised a concern about health insurance and financial compensation for PhD candidates from the Chinese community. Bob Siegerink said that, next to the scholarship top-up for CSC PhD candidates, which has already been rolled out, an additional 1 x 500 euros of compensation for healthcare costs is coming towards these CSC candidates. The decision has been made to execute this, but apparently it has not yet been rolled out. Bob Siegerink promises to follow upon this.

6. Concluding remarks:

After 90 minutes of an open and lively discussion, there were still many questions that remained unanswered, but the session had to be summarised and ended due to time constraints. Henk-Jan Guchelaar, Eline Slagboom, Bob Siegerink, and the board members of LAP said they were very grateful for PhD candidates' active participation and thanked all attendees for their input. Everyone shared the sentiment that it is very important to organise a follow-up meeting in the near future to give PhD candidates the opportunity to participate in an open discussion again and in order to track what changes/improvements and progress would be made by the current LUMC senior leadership between now and the near future. Therefore, consensus was reached about the following next steps:

- A follow-up session will be scheduled in the near future (beginning of 2024);
- An action plan for improvements will be prepared by the interim Dean in close collaboration with the Graduate School and LAP;
- LAP will send out a questionnaire to obtain suggestions for improvement by the LUMC PhD community and also to investigate how LAP can help fellow PhD candidates;
- The board of LAP encouraged PhD candidates to stay informed and up-to-date with the LAP newsletter and social media; to get involved in the coming initiatives and questionnaires and share input; to use the momentum to introduce improvements for the PhD community at the LUMC together.

Then closing remarks were made and the meeting was ended.

*Meeting notes were kept by Ivana Kancheva and agreed upon in discussion with the entire LAP board to ensure maximum objectivity.