

***Improving the process of recruitment and  
selection of internal PhD candidates at  
FHML/CAPHRI***

***A manual for supervisors***

To: Departments / selection committees of internal PhD candidates  
Persons concerned: Maurice Zeegers, Martijn Streefkerk, Anke Oenema, Frans Feron, Nanne  
de Vries, Bart Haex, Erik Haakma, Hannerieke van der Boom  
Authors: Erik Haakma, Hannerieke van der Boom  
with contributions by Jolanda Roemen and Tilly Houtmans, eHRM  
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## 1.1 Introduction: improving the process of recruitment and selection of internal PhD candidates

This 'manual for supervisors' is one outcome of the wish of FHML and CAPHRI (FHML/CAPHRI) to improve the quality of the process of recruitment and selection of internal PhD candidates. It will be made available digitally to supervisors and members of selection committees as well.

Until now, the process of recruitment and selection has been entirely decentralised. HR is involved only in publishing the Academic Transfer vacancy text and collecting the cover letters and CVs. It is not involved in the actual selection process and only plays a role again once the selected candidate is appointed. However, the contact persons at FHML and CAPHRI are in touch with the PhD candidates throughout the process, as they conduct appointment and assessment interviews (the formal go/no-go moment in the 10<sup>th</sup> month), personal progress and problem interviews and the digital monitoring of the candidates' progress and satisfaction using the PhD TRACK system. It has emerged from these interviews and monitoring moments that things do not always go well.

Feedback from CAPHRI supervisors also shows it can at times be difficult to select a candidate with the right competences for a specific project and to assess whether the candidate can complete the PhD trajectory successfully. The objective of guiding the PhD candidate towards the PhD degree and to enable the candidate to develop into an independent researcher who is well-equipped for the job market requires time, effort and good supervision. But it is not easy to get a good, well-rounded impression of a candidate as early as during the relatively short selection phase, as well as predicting how the candidate will develop in the years to come and whether his/her way of working will match the supervision team's preferences.

## 1.2 Objectives and measures

The objective FHML/CAPHRI has set for itself is to improve the recruitment and selection process and to help selection committees make considered choices to get the 'right person (m/f) in the right place', without wanting to interfere in the decision-making process. It does, however, want to improve the preconditions and to underpin the expertise of the selection committees by making this manual available and by developing a clear FHML/CAPHRI PhD profile, which the selection committee can complement with transparent requirements with respect to candidates for the specific PhD trajectory and setting. The end goal is to improve the success rates of PhD trajectories: by optimising the matching of the candidate to the project and supervisors even before the appointment, it is hoped that the average dropout and duration of CAPHRI PhD trajectories can be further reduced.

Specifically, FHML/CAPHRI proposes the following measures:

- To define a School-wide '**FHML/CAPHRI PhD profile**' which formulates those competences which FHML/CAPHRI considers to be essential for completing a PhD trajectory successfully;
- To hand tools to the selection committee members which allow them to have **effective selection interviews** with improved predictive value of the candidate's future behaviour (in the form of the STARR method, examples of questions per competence);
- To have the final two or three candidates prepare a brief written assignment (preferably in English) and presentation for the follow-up selection interview, and to have these

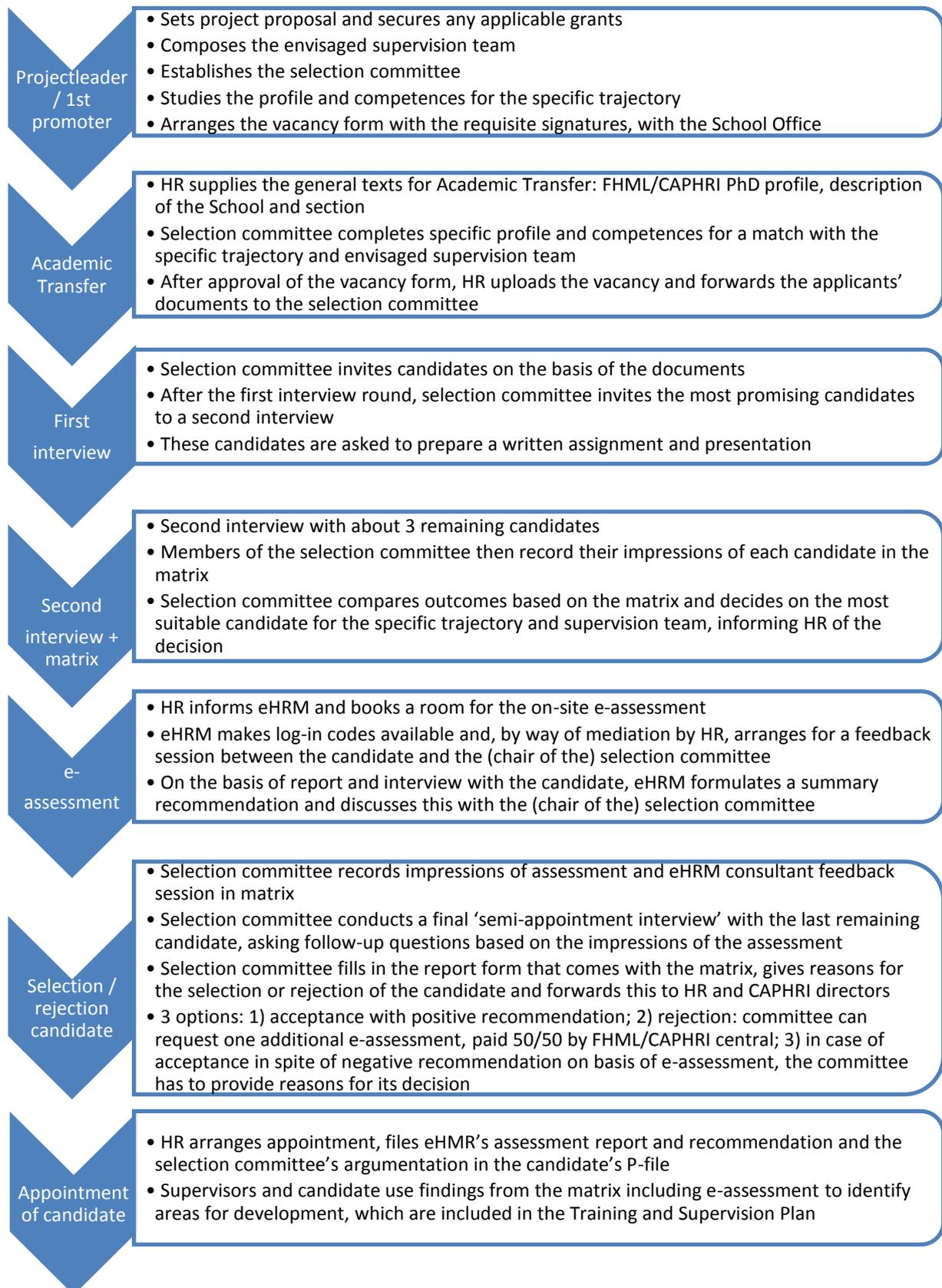
candidates send their master's thesis in order to gain insight into their written and verbal skills and their ability to work under time pressure;

- To develop a **matrix** in which the impression of the final remaining candidates, composed from various steps and components in the selection process, can be summarised clearly, and on the basis of which the selection committee can make their considered choice of the final candidate (see Appendix 1);
- To employ an **e-assessment** (online development assessment) in the final phase of the selection process. The final remaining candidate will fill this in online at the location of HR. Appendix 2 includes a description of the tool and the way it will be used. The selection committee is to use the assessment report and the advisory meeting with the assessment consultant – after the consultant has had a feedback session with the candidate – as additional information;
  - 1) on the basis of which additional questions may be asked during the last selection interview
  - 2) for the final deliberation on whether to accept or reject the candidate
  - 3) in case of a positive decision, as input for the PhD candidate's development trajectory that is to be designed
- The selection committee informs the head of HR and the directors of CAPHRI of the final decision. In case the decision is different from the advice of the assessment consultant, it should be backed up with arguments;
- Following appointment of the candidate, the various forms are added to the personnel file.

The figure on the next page shows the process stages in the recruitment and selection process that should ideally be followed once the above-mentioned measures have been adopted. In some cases, a **shortened procedure** (an 'escape route') can be followed in the process and some stages can be skipped, for instance:

- 1) if a person has obtained a personal grant for a PhD project. The assessment will still be carried out to obtain supplementary information with which to identify areas for development;
- 2) if a candidate has been recruited informally or if there is only one outstanding candidate; as a final check and deliberation on the part of both the candidate and the supervisors as to whether they are making the right decision and as input for the identification of areas for development to be recorded in the Training and Supervision Plan.

## 2.1 Stages in the recruitment and selection phase



## **2.2 Explanation of the process and the e-assessment**

The e-assessment is a new component to be piloted by FHML/CAPHRI and, in the longer run, evaluated by those involved. It has been decided to choose for an assessment organisation, eHRM B.V. They work with the Virtual Competence Manager (VCM) developed by eHRM (of which a number of staff members used to work at the Open University). Appendix 2 describes the VCM and the way in which it will be used at FHML/CAPHRI from September 2016 onwards. The assessment is to be used not just as a selection tool but also as an assessment for development, as candidates and supervisors will base themselves on the report and recommendation to formulate areas for development to be included in the Training and Supervision Plan.

The e-assessment (the VCM) is carried out in a room at HR to ensure that the candidate completes the test personally. The report and a record of the eHRM consultant's interview with the candidate are made available to the supervisors in the form of a summary recommendation (but only if the candidate consents to this, in accordance with the NIP code). The recruitment text on Academic Transfer will note clearly that the procedure will include an e-assessment.

The selection committee members are to record in the matrix (see Appendix 1) their impressions of the candidates who have attended a second interview, submitted a written assignment and held a presentation. The matrix will present an overall impression on the basis of the following aspects:

- 1) The submitted documents (cover letter, CV, Master's thesis, etc.);
- 2) The behaviours asked about during the selection interviews which are indicative of competences;
- 3) The impressions of the candidate's written and verbal skills.

On the basis of these various impressions, the candidate who seems the best match for the project and the supervision team is invited to an e-assessment by the selection committee. Only the last remaining candidate takes the e-assessment.

- 4) The selection committee includes the findings of the assessment (report and recommendation) in the matrix, then fills in the entire 'Form for recording impressions of the candidate' including the substantiated decision whether or not to accept the candidate, and sends it to the head of HR and the CAPHRI directors.

If the candidate is rejected, the selection committee can invite another promising candidate to an e-assessment out of the central budget (50/50 FHML/CAPHRI). If the committee decides up front to invite several candidates to the e-assessment, the committee itself carries financial responsibility.

If the report and the interview with the candidate result in a negative recommendation by the eHRM consultant while the selection committee does wish to appoint the candidate, a written motivation to the CAPHRI directors is required.

### 3.1 The FHML/CAPHRI PhD profile

A competence is a unique combination of knowledge, skills and attitude which expresses itself in visible behaviour and which causes the person to be successful in his or her job or career. Competences are *abilities that can be trained* and that allow people to deal with situations in adequate, deliberate, motivated, process- and results-orientated ways, i.e. to select and apply fitting procedures in order to achieve the right results. Competences are of a compound nature and refer to underlying skills.

On the basis of about thirty competences identified in eHRM's Virtual Competence Manager (VCM), the national UMC PhD competences model and the VSNU's UFO instrument<sup>1</sup>, FHML and CAPHRI have drawn up a **School-wide PhD profile** consisting of **six competences** they consider **essential** to complete a PhD trajectory successfully:

- Conceptual capacity
- Written and verbal communication
- Social effectiveness
- Planning and organising
- Perseverance and resilience
- Independence

The measure of importance depends on the type of project; conceptual capacity will have to be more highly developed for a theoretical investigation than for a practically-orientated project, for which the competences of planning and organising will be more decisive. The six FHML/CAPHRI PhD competences will be described below. It will be indicated per competence whether the presence and potential for development can be assessed on the basis of the CV, the selection interviews, an assignment or the e-assessment (VCM). As past behaviour is often a good predictor for future behaviour, it is important for the selection committee to ask for examples from the past life, the study period or working life of the candidate.

#### 1. Conceptual capacity

Can be assessed on the basis of assignments and the master's thesis, but is also measured in part by the VCM (not directly, but inferred from the other measured competences). It is hard to ask questions about these competences during the selection interviews.

This competence is a combination of conceptual and analytical capacity.

Description: Expresses ideas or concepts on the basis of complex information and develops conceptual frameworks and models. Can quickly identify the essence of a complex situation, recognises similarities between similar problems. Is able to make connections on an abstract level. Integrates ideas, subjects and observations into clear and useful insights. Analyses the components of a problem, situation or process and understands their origin and cohesion.

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<sup>1</sup> During the assessment interview, specific UFO competences applicable to the PhD candidate's profile have been preselected. However, other competences may also be added; this is in fact recommended.

Separates key issues from secondary details. Reaches conclusions and/or identifies solutions to (complex) problems on the basis of a systematic analysis.

## **2. Written and verbal communication**

These are best assessed on the basis of a paper the applicant is asked to write and a presentation he/she gives during the second interview. A number of aspects of this competence are also measured with the VCM (not directly, but inferred from the other measured competences). The selection interviews, cover letter and previous written work, such as the master's thesis, can also provide the committee with a good impression of the candidate's communication skills and powers of comprehension.

Description: Is able to express ideas and information clearly and put them into writing, keeping the target audience in mind and ensuring that the message is coming across and understood. Provides a to the point summary of complex information obtained from various sources. Uses understandable examples and illustrations to clarify a narrative. Is able to build a consistent argument. Presents his/her suggestions enthusiastically. Brings in relevant arguments at the right moment. Addresses a discussion partner's questions or doubts. Employs varied arguments and behavioural styles in order to convince others, taking their culture, position and background into account.

## **3. Social effectiveness**

To be measured with the VCM; the selection interviews can give an impression (see sample questions).

Two important aspects of this competence are Cooperation and Networking. Cooperation is essential within CAPHRI, in the sense of getting cooperation from others to carry out one's own research (for instance, convincing partners to collaborate on an investigation in order to gain access to respondents or data). In return, the candidate must be prepared to help others.

Networking involves the candidate making contact with others and expose their research to the outside world. To do so, the candidate has to approach others proactively and build and maintain sustainable contacts, which are important to their own research and which may enhance their career perspectives following completion of their degree. Networking is also important to gain access to test subjects or research data.

Persuasiveness is a further key component of this competence.

Description: Easily establishes contact with others, moves confidently between people and functions well in a group. Can cooperate with many different people. Has no problem approaching others. Makes his or her own research public. Is able to obtain other people's collaboration.

## **4. Planning and organising**

To be measured with the VCM, asked about in the selection interviews (see sample questions) and inferred indirectly from the course of the educational background and CV.

Planning and organising also includes setting priorities and monitoring them. An important component of this is determination.

Description: Approaches (his/her own) work in a structured way. Formulates clear, specific and challenging objectives and priorities. Plans and organises activities effectively and efficiently. Easily switches between tasks. Maintains a balance between effort and result. Establishes priorities by separating the essential from the peripheral. Thinks ahead carefully about how to approach a task in a methodical way. Formulates measurable objectives for himself/herself and for others. Creates the preconditions required to finish tasks in an orderly and efficient way. Anticipates the unexpected by adjusting the planning appropriately. Makes realistic estimates of time, people and resources needed to achieve a goal. Makes clear agreements with others. Monitors the progress of the planning. Achieves goals in accordance with the planning.

## **5. Perseverance and resilience**

To be measured with the VCM, asked about in the selection interviews (see sample questions) and inferred indirectly from the progress of the programme trajectory and CV.

This competence is related to the VSNU competence 'able to cope with stress' but has been formulated positively. Aspects of flexibility also form part of this competence.

Description: Embarks on activities with enthusiasm, energy and perseverance. Continues to perform effectively and maintains a positive outlook in the face of time pressure, setbacks, disappointments or resistance. Shows resilience after a setback or disappointment. Has an open mind to feedback and criticism. Adapts his/her behaviour to changing circumstances quickly and in a positive spirit. Accepts the fact that things change.

## **6. Independence**

To be measured with the VCM and asked about during the selection interviews (see sample questions).

Independence includes: a proactive attitude (taking initiative, independence), an ability to work autonomously and in a lenient/flexible way.

Description: Works independently within an agreed framework. Accepts authority, but becomes more independent over the years. Accepts being responsible for the end result. Initiates actions and activities, takes the lead, has a proactive attitude. Acts on own initiative before something is asked and before circumstances force him/her to act.

NB: the competence of independence in particular is given shape in the interaction with the supervision team and depends on the type of project, the phase of the trajectory which the PhD candidate is in, and the candidate's personality. At the initial stage, supervisors can provide more guidance, conferring more independence on the candidate in the course of the trajectory and letting him or her make decisions independently. A good balance needs to be struck between hesitance/dependence and autonomy/independence. The candidate must be allowed to grow in this role and to develop greater self-confidence. It is important for the candidate and supervisors to remain in regular touch about this process (at least once a year), discuss mutual expectations and agree on the best course of action.

## Having effective selection interviews, the STARR method

### A tool for members of the application committee

### The idea behind the STARR method

Recruiters want to have the most realistic image possible of an applicant, so they often ask follow-up questions using the STARR method.

**The core concept of the STARR method is that behaviour displayed in the recent past is the best predictor of future behaviour.**

It is the recruiter's task to put the right person in the right place. How better to predict a person's behaviour and performance than by looking at their past behaviour and performance?

As the applicant describes specific situations and indicates what his/her task and role were in these situations, a clear profile becomes outlined for the interviewer. This outline can be compared to the job profile to see whether the applicant and the job are a good match.

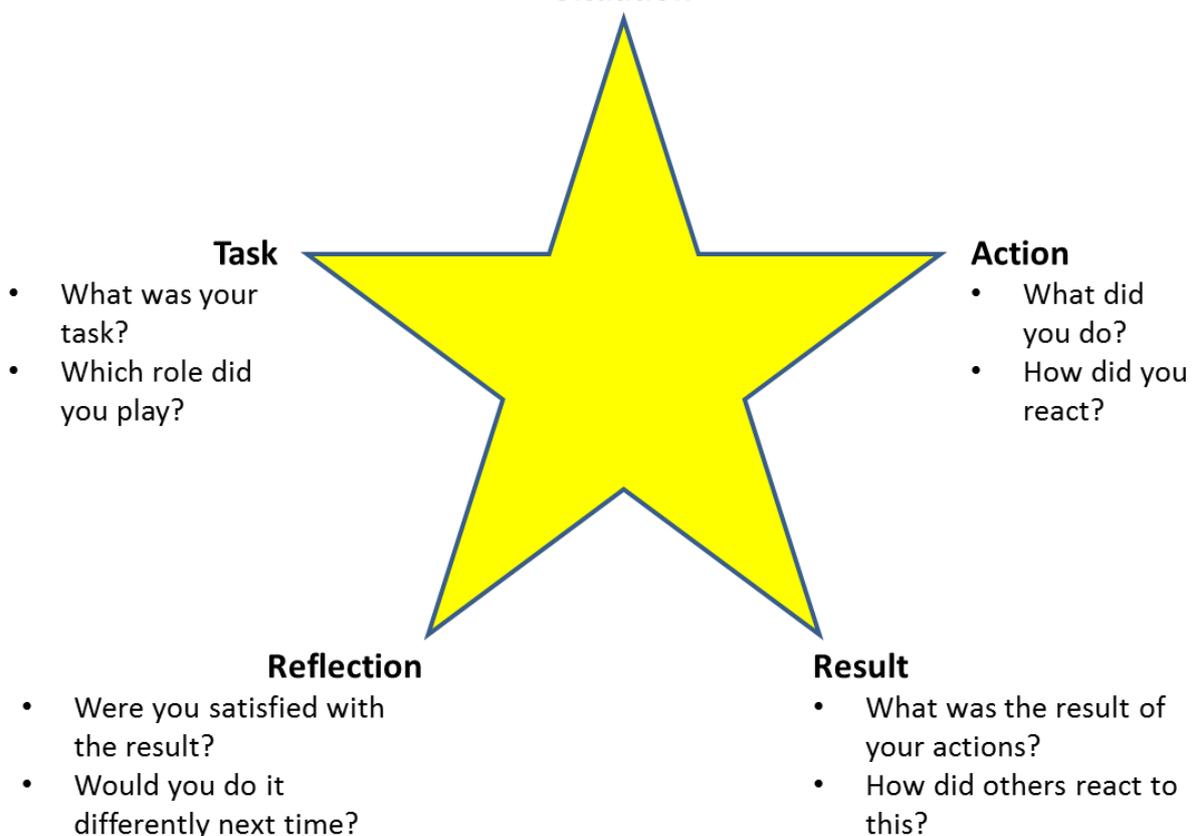
The basis of the method consists of only five letters: STARR. STARR stands for **Situation, Task, Action, Result and Reflection**.

STARR enables the interviewer to ask for clear and specific examples of the candidate's experience and knowledge.

<b>Situation</b>	What was the situation or context of the example?
<b>Task</b>	What was your task or what task did you take upon yourself?
<b>Action</b>	What precisely has been said and what action has been taken?
<b>Result/Reflection</b>	What was the reaction to this and what was the end result?

- What was the situation?
- Who were involved?
- Where did it take place?

**Situation**



## Let's get to work!

Sample questions for a 'STARR' selection interview. Try mainly to ask open-ended questions!

### Conceptual capacity

The candidate could be invited to summarise a (theoretical) article and formulate steps for further research.

Alternatively, the candidate could be asked to write a short paper on two or three articles related to the proposed PhD research.

### Written and verbal communication

Written and verbal communication are best assessed on the basis of one or more assignments the applicant is asked to do, e.g. giving a brief presentation on the master's thesis, summarising an article or writing a short paper on the proposed research and presenting it.

Sample questions:

What experience do you have writing articles?

What kinds of documents have you written, and for which audience?

Do other people ever draw your attention to spelling mistakes or sentences that are not formulated correctly?

Do you need to give instructions from time to time? How do you go about it?

Give an example which shows you are taking your discussion partner's (cultural) background into account.

How do you ensure your message is tailored to your discussion partner? How do you verify whether your message has been understood?

Do other people ever provide feedback as to whether they have understood you clearly?

### Social effectiveness

Have you ever functioned in a team or a group on a common assignment? What was your role in this assignment?

Can you think of a situation in which you disagreed with the team's working method? What did you do then?

If you work together with other people, do conflicts ever occur and how do you handle them?

What kinds of networks (formal and informal) do you belong to? Have you met new people recently? How have you gone about acquiring contacts?

In which ways do you occupy yourself with your network? Provide examples.

What do you do in a group of people where you do not know anybody?

Networking in an international environment entails different aspects. Do you have any experience with this and if so, can you give an example?

Have you required the cooperation of certain institutions (or other departments) to carry out an assignment adequately? How have you gone about this?

Can you give a specific example of how your network has recently benefited you?

#### Planning and organising

What were your objectives in the past year as an employee or as a candidate? Have you met these objectives?

In the past year, how did you decide which tasks were a priority? Provide a few examples.

Are you ever asked to organise something? Provide an example.

Describe an example of a situation in which you had to adjust your initial planning. Which resistance did you meet? How did you respond to it?

How do you organise your daily work?

Give an example in which you indicated not having time for an extra assignment.

How do you plan your tasks and ensure you meet your deadlines?

#### Perseverance and resilience

Can you describe a situation in which it was hard to reach a goal but in which you persevered nonetheless? What were your motives? Which requirements did you set for yourself?

Describe a situation in which you found it hard to persevere. Why was this hard?

What has been your biggest setback in your studies or career? How did you make sure you remained motivated?

Have you ever had negative reactions to an idea or a plan of yours while you thought it was a good one? What did you do then?

Which factors get in the way of you carrying out your tasks? Can you give an example and indicate how you handled the situation?

In order to perform tasks well, have you ever had to go around obstacles? How did you manage?

We all get frustrated or impatient sometimes. When did this last happen to you? What happened?

### Independence

Do you ever do work while it is not completely clear what needs to happen? What do you do then?

Give an example of a situation in which you took the lead without first seeking explicit permission. How did your manager respond to this?

What have you done to change things you did not like in your work?

Do you work on your personal development? If so, what do you do?

Give an example of a situation in which you considered seeking other people's help or advice. Why did or did you not do this?

**Appendix 1: Form for recording the impressions of the candidate, including matrix**

PhD project \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of candidate \_\_\_\_\_  
Filled in by \_\_\_\_\_  
Educational background \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Expectations candidate**

**Conceptual capacity**

Inadequate  Adequate  Fair  Good  Excellent

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Written and verbal communication**

Inadequate  Adequate  Fair  Good  Excellent

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Social effectiveness**

Inadequate  Adequate  Fair  Good  Excellent

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Planning and organising**

Inadequate  Adequate  Fair  Good  Excellent

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Perseverance and resilience**

Inadequate  Adequate  Fair  Good  Excellent

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**Independence**

Inadequate  Adequate  Fair  Good  Excellent

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**Matrix: summary of impression of candidate<sup>2</sup>**

<b>Previous education and PhD competences</b>	<b>CV</b>	<b>Interview(s)</b>	<b>Presentation / assignment</b>	<b>E-assessment<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Overall impression</b>
<b>Education and experience</b> o (Research) master's / other o Extent of match between background and vacancy o Research experience, including any experience abroad o Work experience, if any o Other relevant activities or publications					
<b>Expectations / motivation</b>					
<b>Conceptual capacity</b>					
<b>Written and verbal communication</b>					
<b>Social effectiveness</b>					
<b>Planning and organising</b>					
<b>Perseverance and resilience</b>					
<b>Independence</b>					

<sup>2</sup> To be filled out according to own view by the selection committee (++ or text) of the candidates that remain after the first round. The e-assessment is only taken by the last remaining candidate.

<sup>3</sup> Report of the candidate, advice of the eHRM advisor and own impression on the basis of both

**Overall opinion on the candidate**

On the basis of this, it has been decided to accept\* / not to accept the candidate.

\* If the decision is to accept the candidate in spite of an unfavourable recommendation on the basis of the e-assessment as to the candidate's suitability for this doctoral position, please provide reasons for this decision to the directors of CAPHRI.

Date:

Signature:

## **Appendix 2: Proposal for the use of online assessment through the Virtual Competence Manager for the selection and development of PhD candidates**

Jolanda Roemen, Tilly Houtmans, eHRM B.V.

### **Background**

An internal analysis has shown that the trajectory for recruiting and selecting internal PhD candidates needs to be improved in order to address the premature dropout rate. A PhD candidate is a (junior) researcher who develops into an independent scientist with a doctoral degree under the supervision of a professor and a supervision team.

Increasingly, dropout occurs early on in the trajectory (in the course of the first year). Following a consultation of stakeholders, one of the measures decided on is to include a selection assessment as part of the selection procedure.

The results of the assessment are also meant to be used as input for the further development of the selected candidate in the course of his or her PhD trajectory.

### **Objectives of the assessment**

- To map a PhD candidate's competences with regard to the job profile
- To aid decision-making on the part of the candidate and the supervisor with regard to the PhD trajectory
- To identify areas for improvement for the benefit of further supervision during the PhD trajectory

### **What is the Virtual Competence Manager © (VCM)?**

The VCM is an internet application that provides insight into knowledge, skills, motivation, interest and prospects by means of advanced and interactive measurements taken at home or at the workplace. The VCM consists of a number of questionnaires which shed light on the candidate's personality and motivation, behaviour displayed in a professional context, emotional intelligence and learning styles.

For instance, the VCM includes a personality test consisting of 50 questions such as 'Having many people I do not know around me makes me nervous' or 'I find it hard to reach compromises', to which candidates can respond on a scale of 1 to 5 (from very true to very untrue). The answers provide a behavioural description on the following 4 scales: trust (in other people), adaptability, social skill and ability to cope with stress. The VCM further includes questionnaires based on the Big Five theory as well as incorporating Kolb's learning styles and Schein's career anchors.<sup>4</sup>

Conclusions about competences can be derived from the questionnaire results: the measurements are used to review which personality traits, motivations, working styles etc. can be predictive of the expected behaviour as defined in the competence description. To this effect, the scores of several questionnaires are combined to provide an insight into each competence the candidate should possess. The use of several questionnaires that examine a person's behaviour on the basis of various theories and perspectives gives stronger predictive power about expected behaviours.

In principle, the results of these measurements can be related to 32 competences from which a selection can be made on the basis of the candidate's job and competence profile. Following mutual consultation, eHRM and FHML/CAPHRI have selected six competences for PhD jobs. The importance

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<sup>4</sup> FHML/CAPHRI has decided not to add a capacity test, since in principle the master's degree certificate sufficiently attests to the candidate's abilities; moreover, such a test would add little information as it only reflects the IQ score.

of each competence depends on the type of PhD trajectory, the specific supervision team and the candidate's potential for developing specific competences. These six competences are:

- Conceptual capacity
- Written and verbal communication
- Social effectiveness
- Planning and organising
- Perseverance and resilience
- Independence

These competences can for the most part be measured with the VCM. However, the competence Written and verbal communication (and part of the competence Conceptual capacity) is best measured by having the candidate do an assignment.

### **Reporting**

The results of the measurements are reflected in detail in a clear report. This report gives an overview of the results, grouped under a number of subjects: personality profile, learning style, career anchors and behaviour in the work environment. The results are then linked to the competences identified for the job for which the candidate has been tested. On the basis of the VCM's results, a follow-up interview with the candidate takes place (in accordance with the NIP code). The results of the VCM are explained in this interview. On the basis of the report and the follow-up interview, the candidate will have an idea of his or her strengths and areas for improvement (both generally and with regard to competences), on the basis of which a POP can be written.

The VCM's added value is that the report's feedback relates to the competences the candidate must possess, rather than to the individual questionnaires. Instead of a list with scores on the various questionnaires, an impression is given of each of the required competences on the basis of the combined scores of the questionnaires. This makes it possible to identify the candidate's strengths and weaknesses for each competence.

As the tests are administered via the internet, a PC with an internet connection is all that is needed. Each candidate will receive a personal login and password coupled to an email address providing access to a secure environment. A help desk is available in case the candidate encounters technical problems while taking the tests. The VCM is available in Dutch, English and German.

### **Plan of approach**

In order to make the right connection between the above test and the supervisors, we suggest the following plan of approach:

1. Administer the VCM to each candidate at a Randwyck location;
2. Draw up a report and convert the test results to a UFO profile (1 hour);
3. Discuss the results with the candidate (1 hour);
4. Extensive feedback on the report, which includes discussing the summary with the supervisors (1 hour) or, if desired, written feedback.