Integrative approach on mental health at VUB

VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL

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Thanks to: Prof. dr. Gerd Vandersteen & TOR Research Group

Overview

- Background
- VUB PhD Survey
- MICRO
  - Specific Training & events for PhD candidates
  - Primary Care & Counseling
- MESO
  - Advanced Supervision Training & other support from Doctoral Schools
  - Policymaking at faculty level
  - PhD survey
- MACRO
  - Working groups at Flemish level

Background

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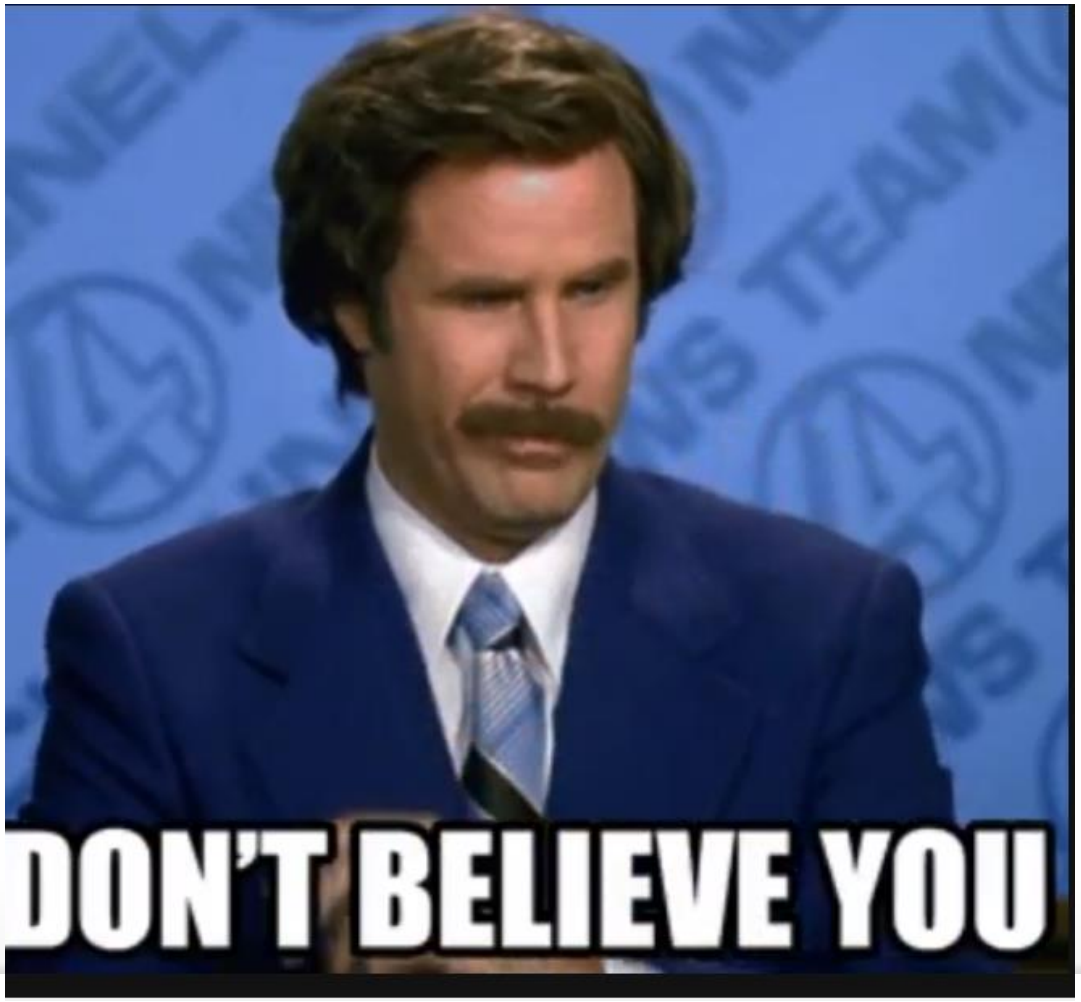
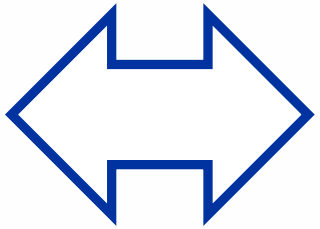
MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN FLANDERS

	SJR all	BHIS*
Felt constantly under strain	40,8	27,2
Feeling unhappy and depressed	30,3	13,7
Loss of sleep over worry	28,3	18,1
Not able to face problems	26,1	11,8
Not able to enjoy day-to-day activities	25,4	13,0
Losing confidence	24,4	8,1
Not playing a useful part	22,5	9,0
Not able to concentrate	21,7	10,7
Not feeling happy	21,2	11,3
Thinking of self as worthless	16,1	5,4
Not capable of making decisions	15,0	6,0
Couldn’t overcome difficulties	13,4	4,4
GHQ2+ risk of mental health problems	51,1	26,5
GHQ4+ risk of mental health disorder	31,8	14,0

BHIS: Belgian Health Interview Survey
ECOOM Survey data, see also Levecque et al. 2017

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AT VUB





VUB PhD Survey

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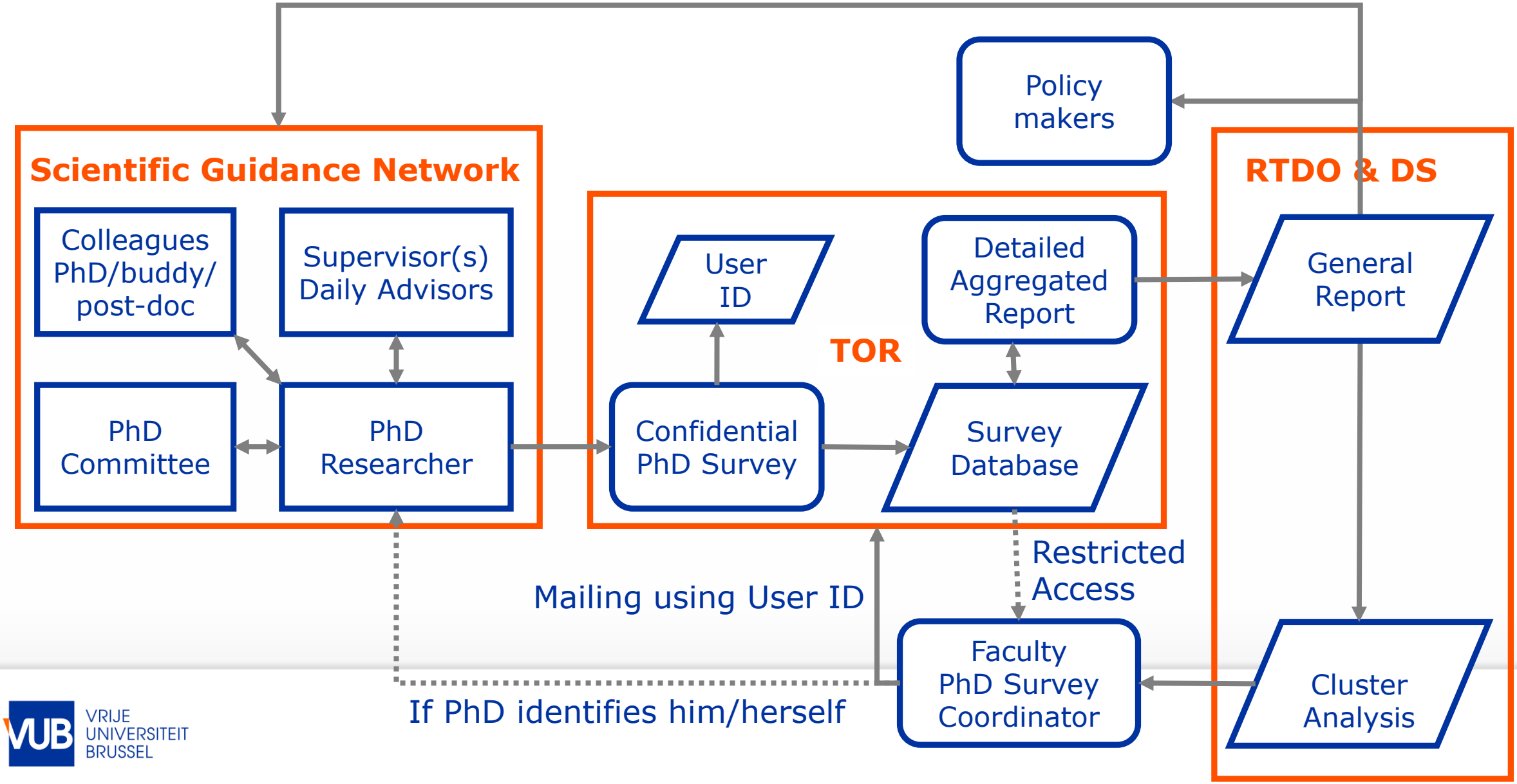
VUB PhD survey

- Best practice from faculty of Engineering
- Annually – longitudinallly
- Pilot in 2017 in three faculties
- All faculties participated in 2018 – response rate 53%
- 3 main objectives

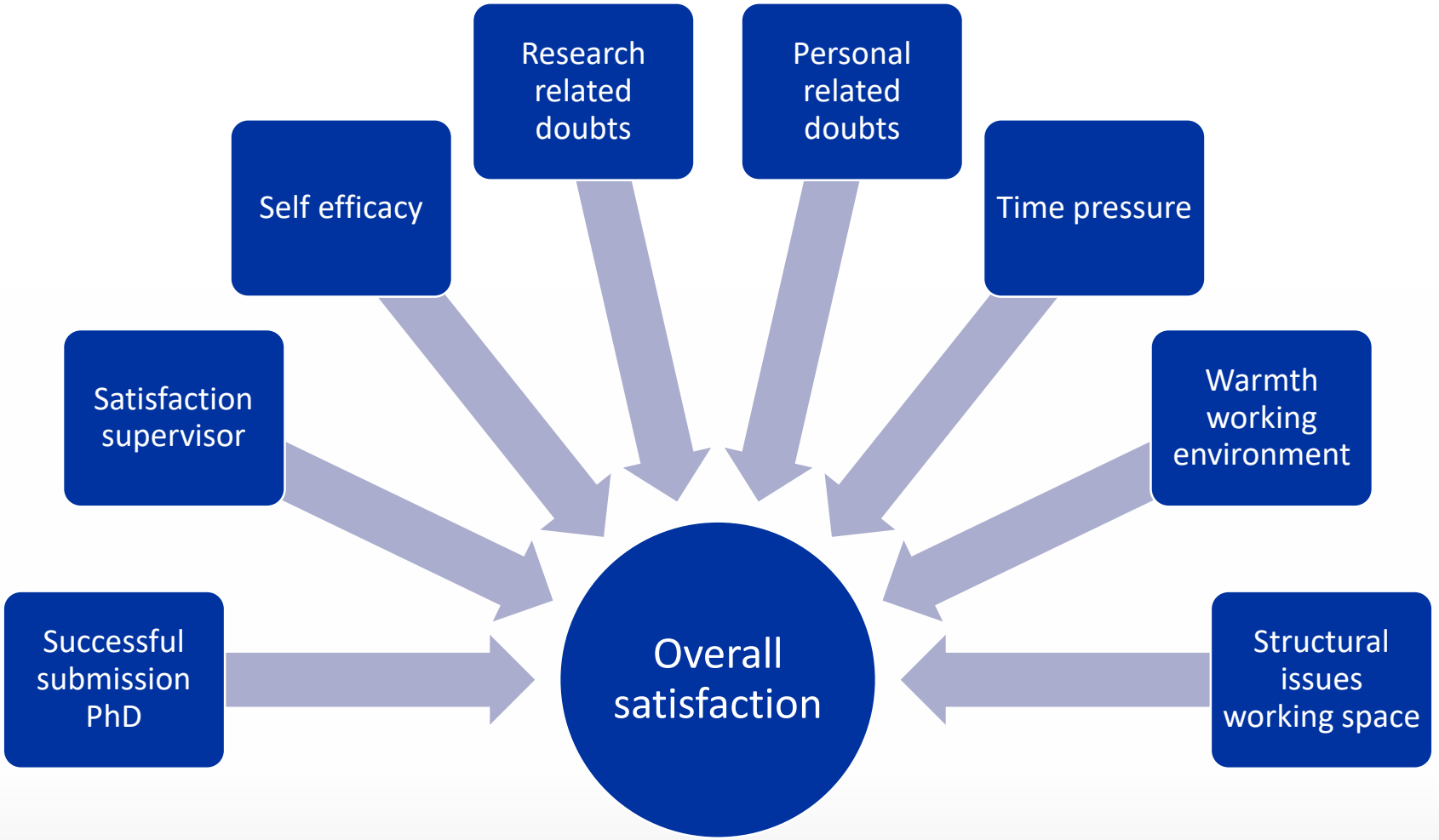
Self-evaluation by PhD researcher

Early problem detection by ombudsperson

Feedback to faculty and other relevant services


Policy makers
Scientific Guidance Network
Colleagues PhD/buddy/ post-doc
Supervisor(s) Daily Advisors
PhD Committee
PhD Researcher
User ID
TOR
Detailed Aggregated Report
Confidential PhD Survey
Survey Database
RTDO & DS
General Report
Restricted Access
Mailing using User ID
Faculty PhD Survey Coordinator
Cluster Analysis
If PhD identifies him/herself

Cluster analysis



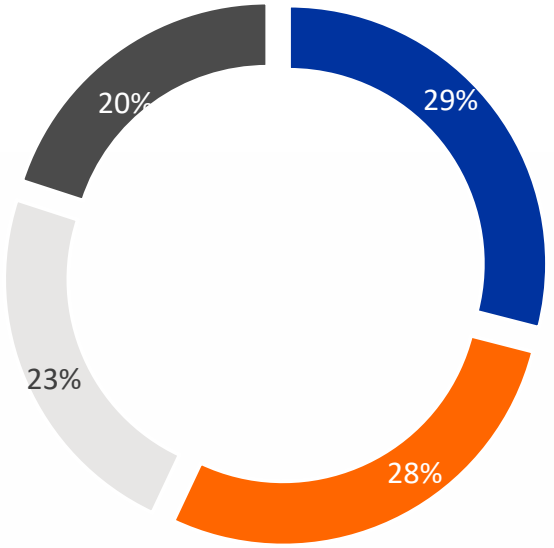
4 CLUSTERS

Lyrical

Everything is going great

Unsupported & Uncertain

Negative on most items



Healthy doubter

Personal doubts and high time pressure but positive concerning supervision & working conditions

Average

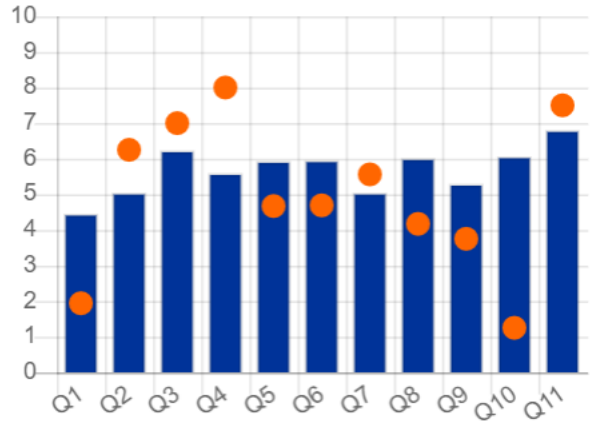
Average/Neutral on all items

SELF-REFLECTION TOOL www.vubphdsurvey.be

Compare yourself with:

Cluster 3: The unsupported and uncertain cluster

Question	You	Cluster 3
Q1. Satisfaction support supervisor (on 10)	1,94	4,46
Q2. No doubts concerning research (on 10)	6,25	5,05
Q3. Submitting PhD succesfully (on 10)	7,00	6,24



Initiatives on MICRO level

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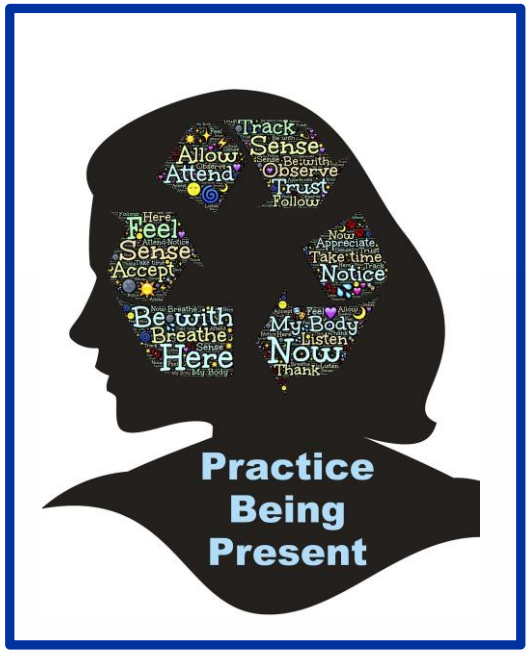
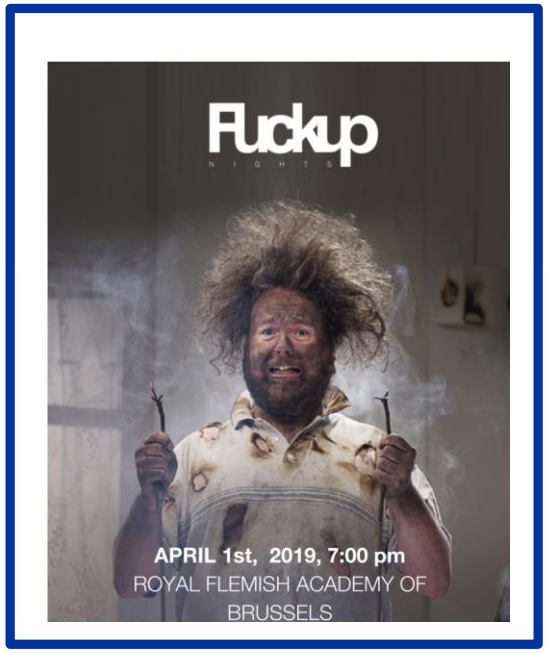
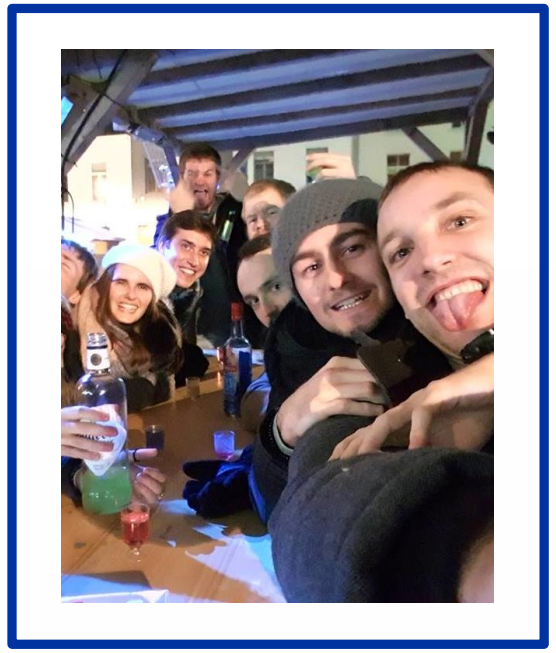
SPECIFIC WORKSHOPS AND EVENTS





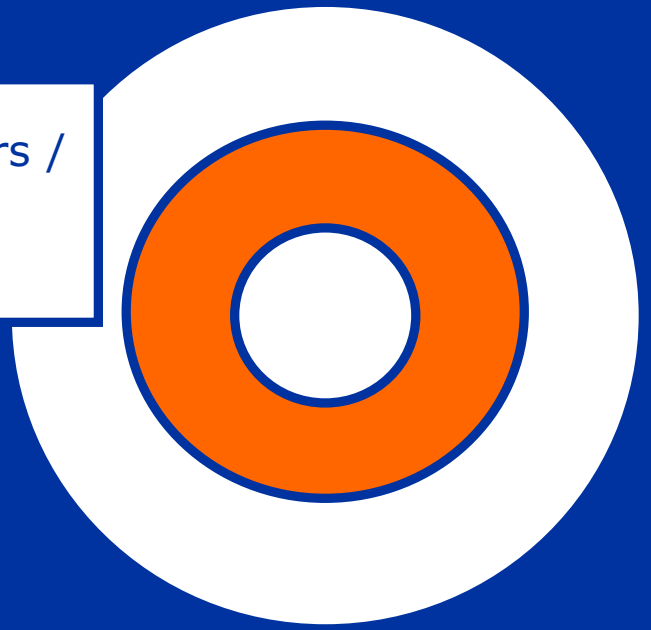


General offer to increase transferable skills and broaden career orientation

PRIMARY CARE AND COUNSELING

- Center for Wellbeing
  - Conflict handling
  - Primary psychological support
- BRUCC – Brussels University Counsultation Center
  - Individual & group therapy
  - Up to 250 eur refund from insurance as VUB Personnel
- Study Councelors
- Ombudspersons
  - Mainly conflicts with supervisors
  - Mediation
  - Often in severe stage

Doctoral Schools / Supervisors / Faculties & Close research environment



Initiatives on MESO level

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MESO LEVEL AT VUB

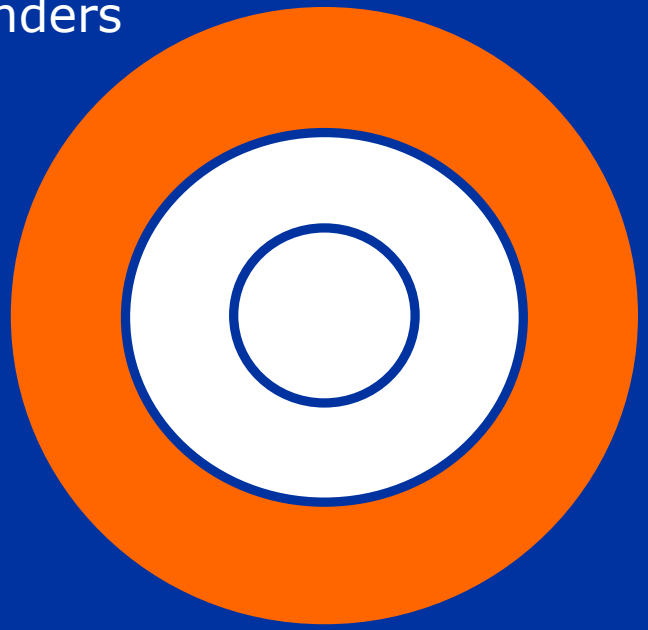
Advanced supervision training programme incl 2-day training, round table and intervision

Regulations set out by Doctoral Schools, profiles on good conduct and good supervision

Faculty-specific regulations and support

Annual PhD survey

Flanders



Initiatives on MACRO level

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WORKING GROUPS AND COLLABORATION

- Working group on employment statute of PhD researchers
  - Regulations easen possibilities for internships/entrepreneurship
- Working group of Doctoral Schools
  - Cooperation in workshop offer benefitting mental health
  - Cooperation on career development and ties with non-academic labour market
- Upcoming plans at Flemish level to drive research excellence
  - Focus on publications remains
  - Rivalry is encouraged rather than cooperation
  - First steps to more qualitative measures of excellence

THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS?

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https://student.vub.be/en/phd/phd-survey#the-phd-survey

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Appendix

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CLASSIFICATION

DETERMINANTS OF WORK SATISFACTION

- Most important
  - Support supervisor
  - Doubts own research
  - Trust in successfully defending PhD
  - Doubts in personal competencies
  - Warmth work environment

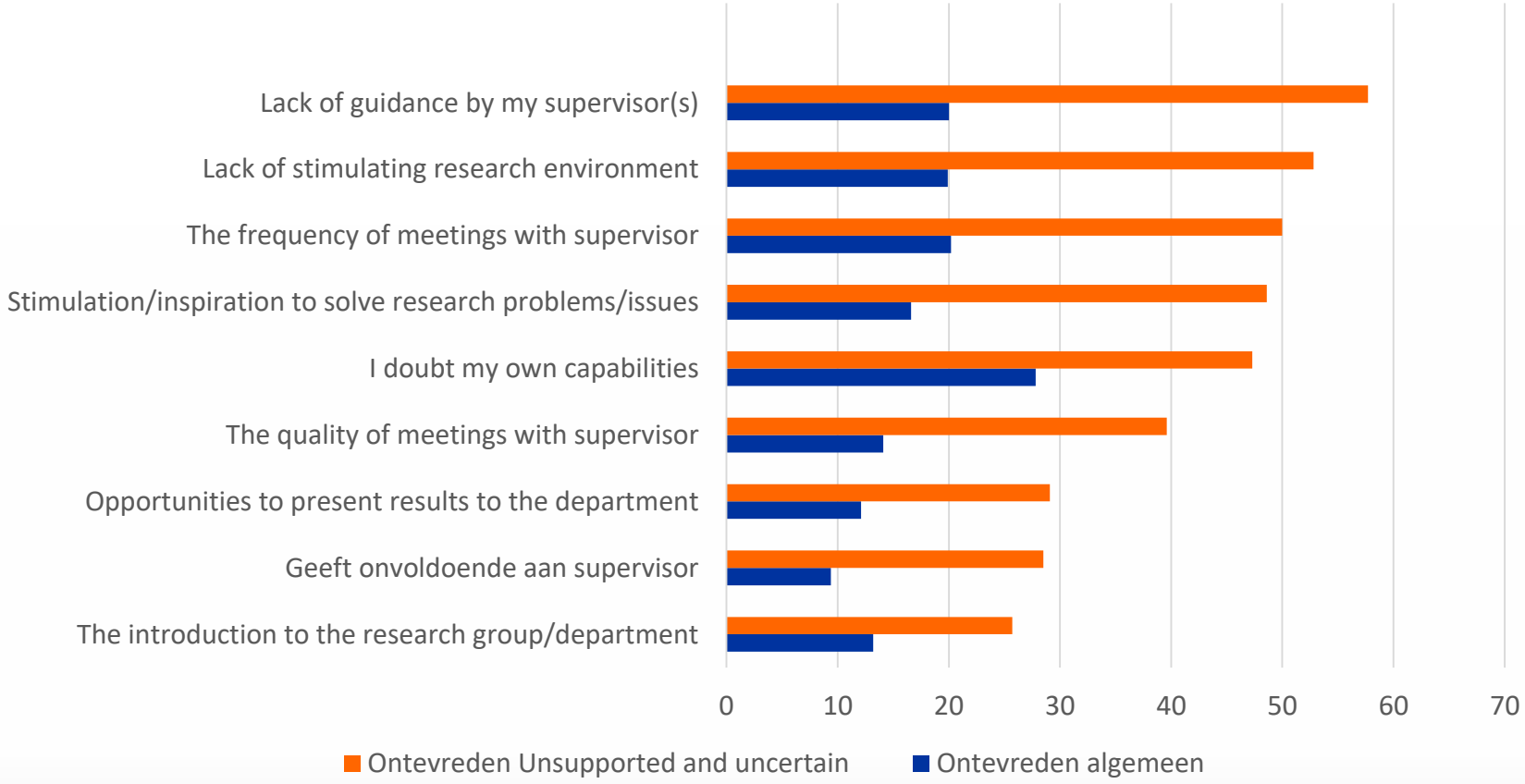
- Less Important
  - Labour conditions (salary, vacation,…)
  - Structural conditions workplace
  - Time pressure

Relation to other variables

- No relation to: author research proposal, phase of PhD, type of contract, financing body, second job, previous work experience, joint phd, number of supervisors
- Relation to unsupported and uncertain
  - More women
  - More Belgians
  - More without research plan (or only recently developed)
- Causality?
  - Less in line with original research proposal
  - Less expectations of academic career
  - Less passionate
  - Higher intention to quit
- More time investment not necessarily negative! Lyrical cluster works most irregularly

CLASSIFICATION

UNSUPPORTED AND UNCERTAIN VS GENERAL DISSATISFACTION



1. Personal characteristics

Gender 52,5% 47,5%

Affiliation with VUB

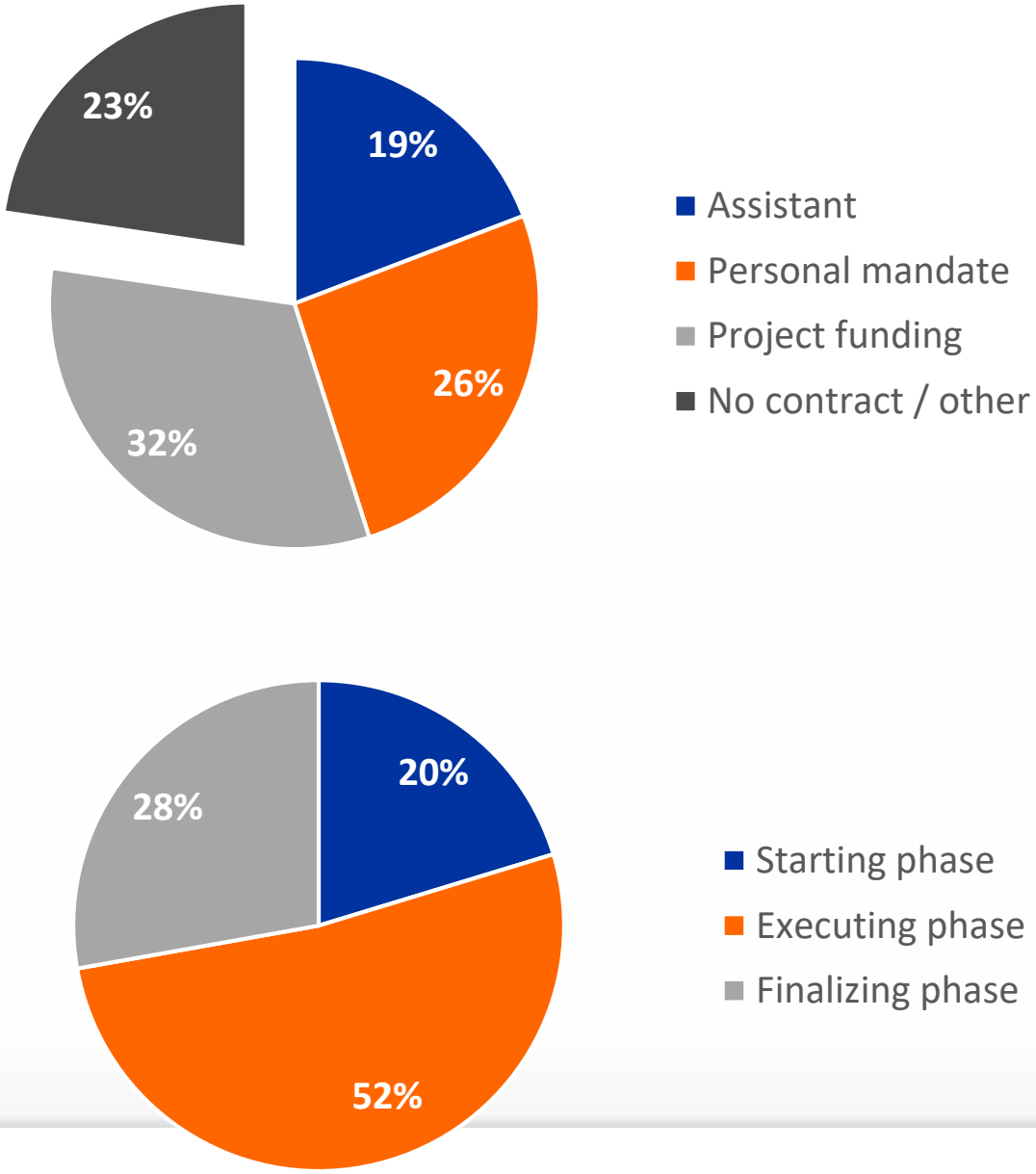
- Joint PhDs
- Type of employment/contract

PhD phase

- Starting / Executing / Finalizing

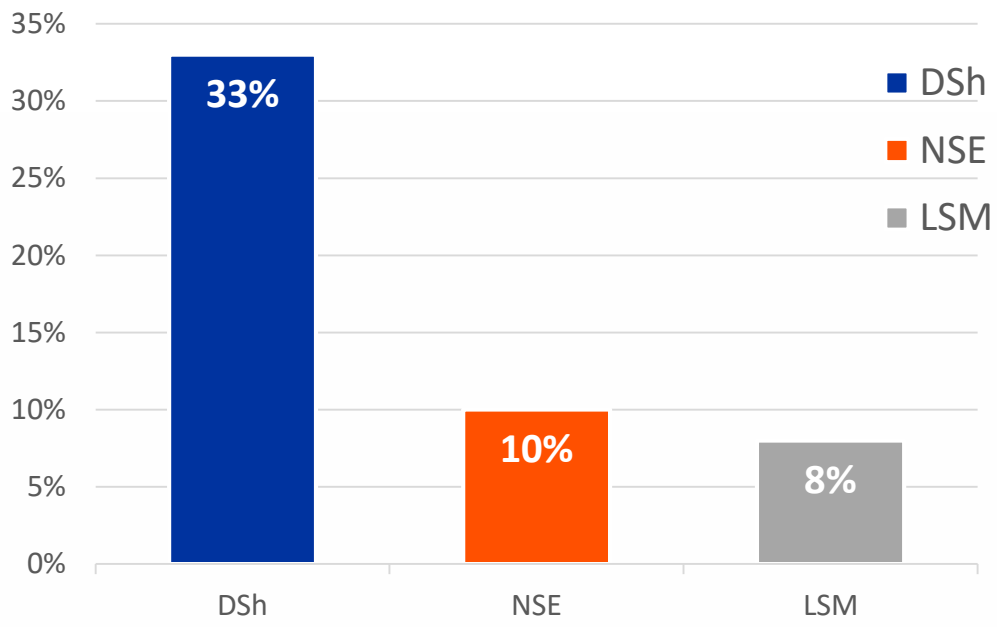
Skills and motivation

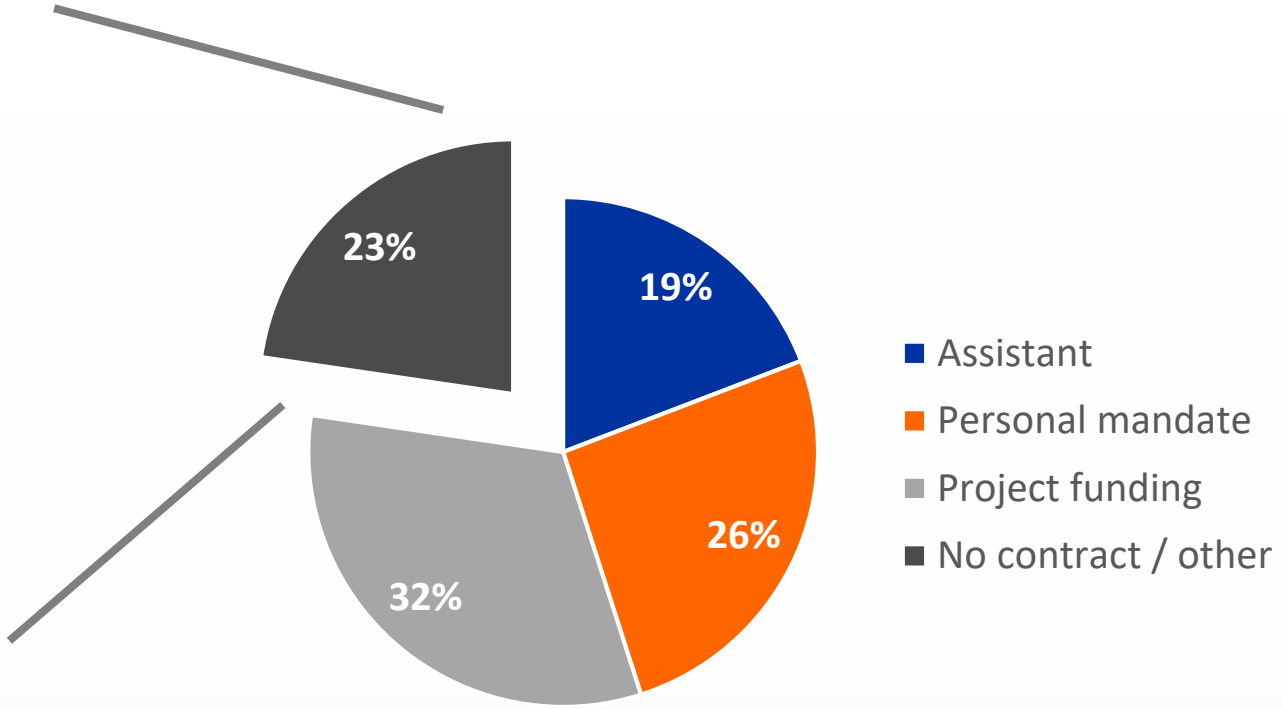
- Passion for own research
- Self-efficacy



Type of employment/contract: No contract / other

Prob[No contract or other | DS]

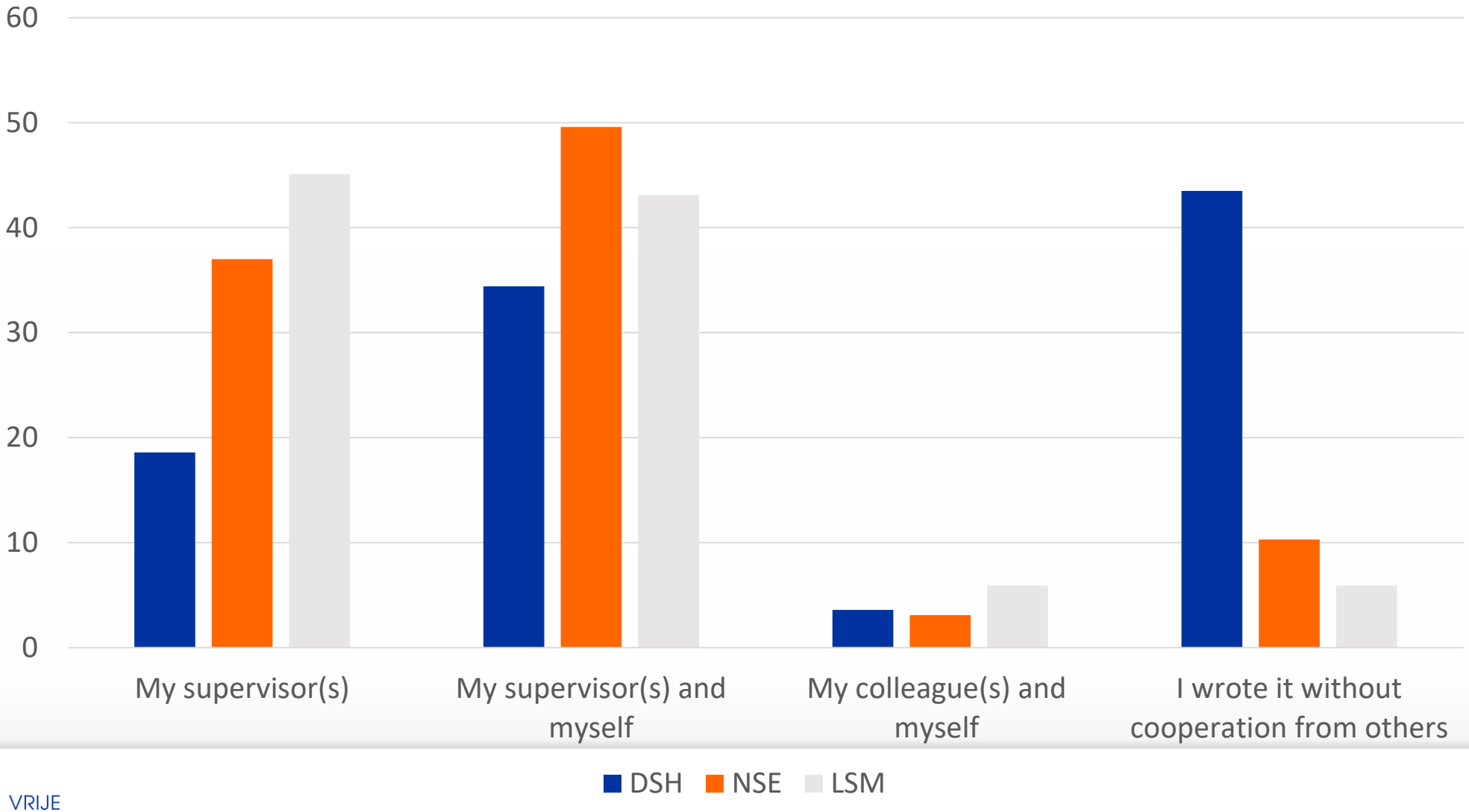




2. Entering the PhD process

- Employment prior to enrolment
- PhD project development
  - Freedom to develop own PhD proposal
  - Authors of the PhD proposal

Authors in writing PhD proposal (%)

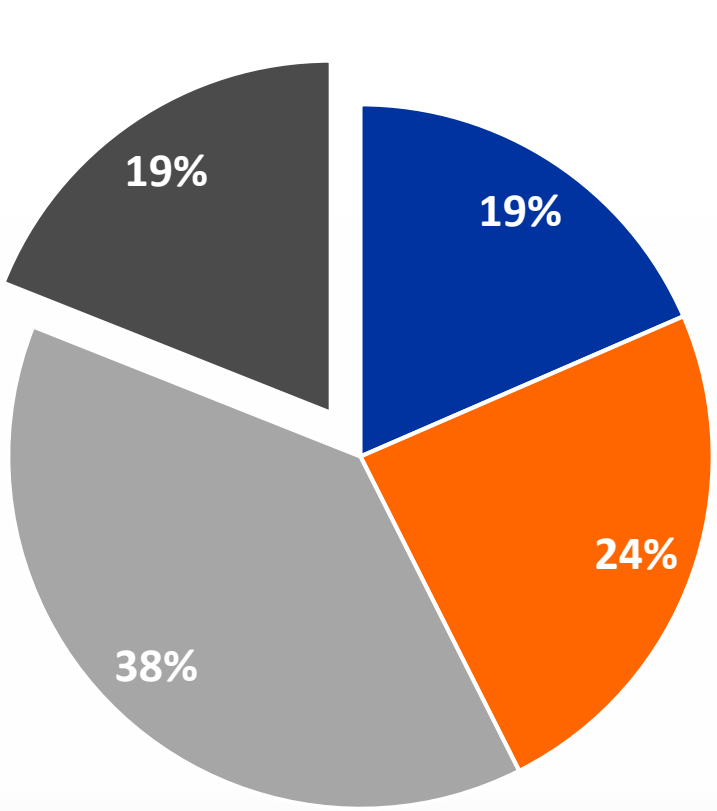


3. The PhD project

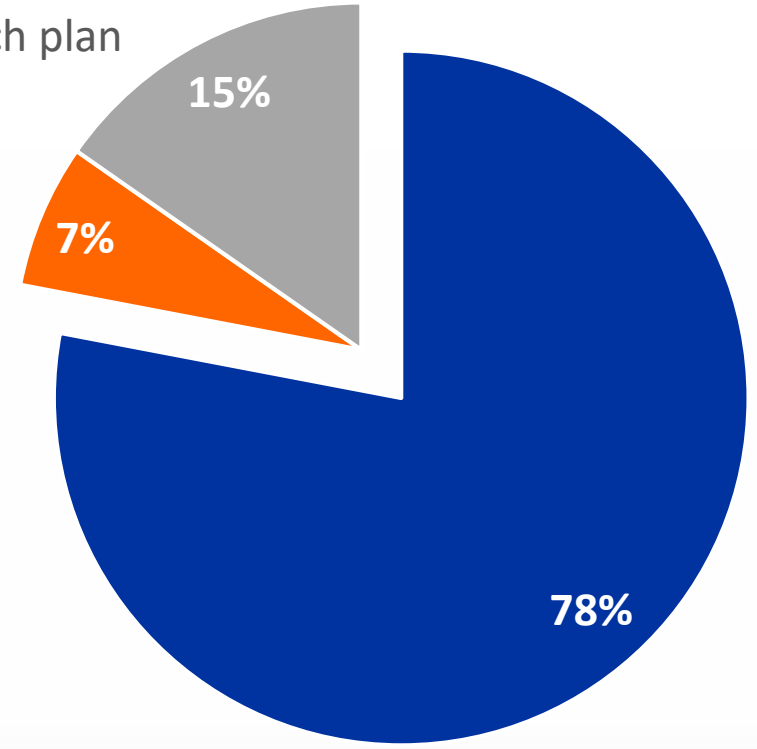
- Research plan
  - Existence / definition / follow-up?
- Timing of the PhD project
  - Being on the right track
  - Doubts to finalize the PhD
- Workload / working hours
- Research Output
- PhD progression and finalization

Research plan

81% have research plan / followed by 78% of the PhD



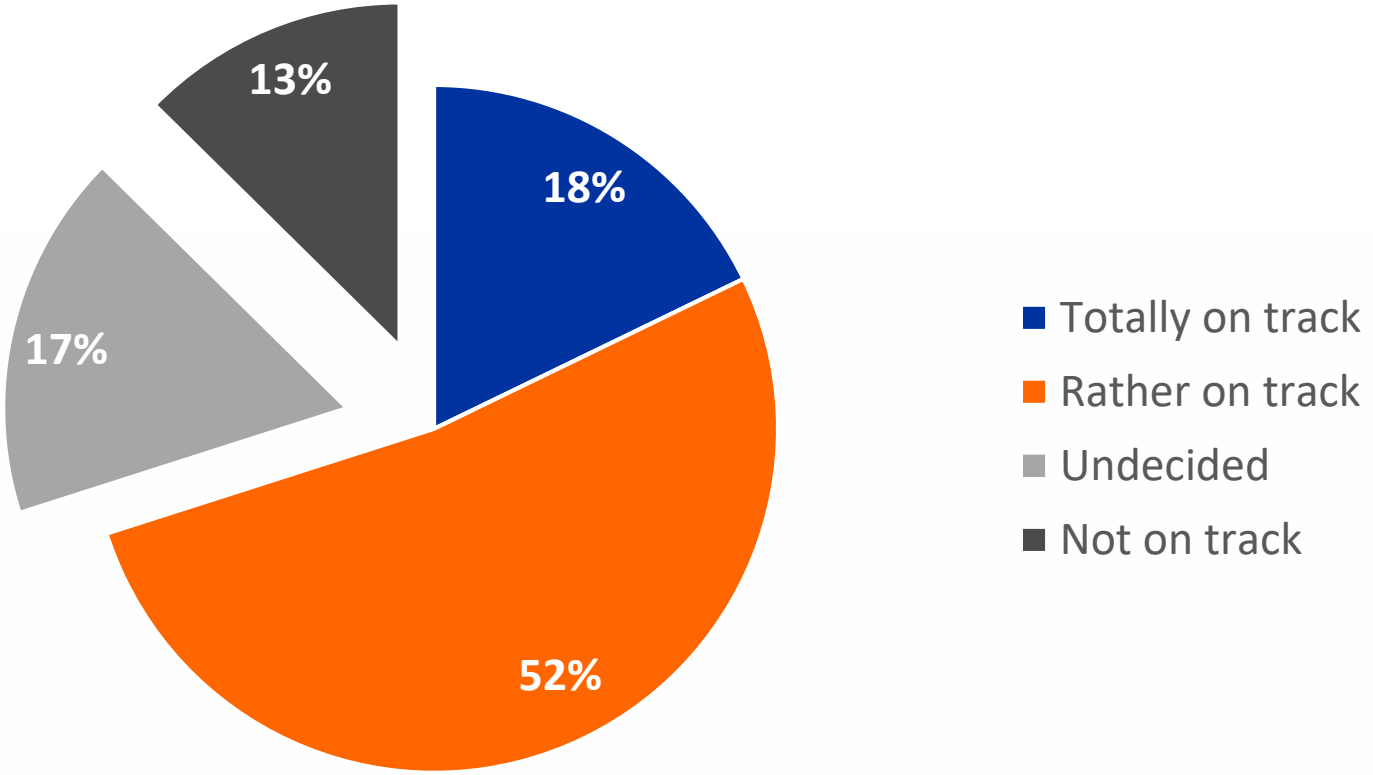
- Short term milestones
- Long term milestones
- Short+longterm milestones
- No research plan



- Following the research plan
- Not following the research plan
- Undecided

Being on the right track

70% of the PhD feel they are on track



Doubts to finalize the PhD

Main reason for doubts (>20%)

Failed experiments / Lack of Results

27,9%

Unbalanced work / family

25,5%

Own capabilities

27,7%

Lack of stimulating research environment/guidance supervisor

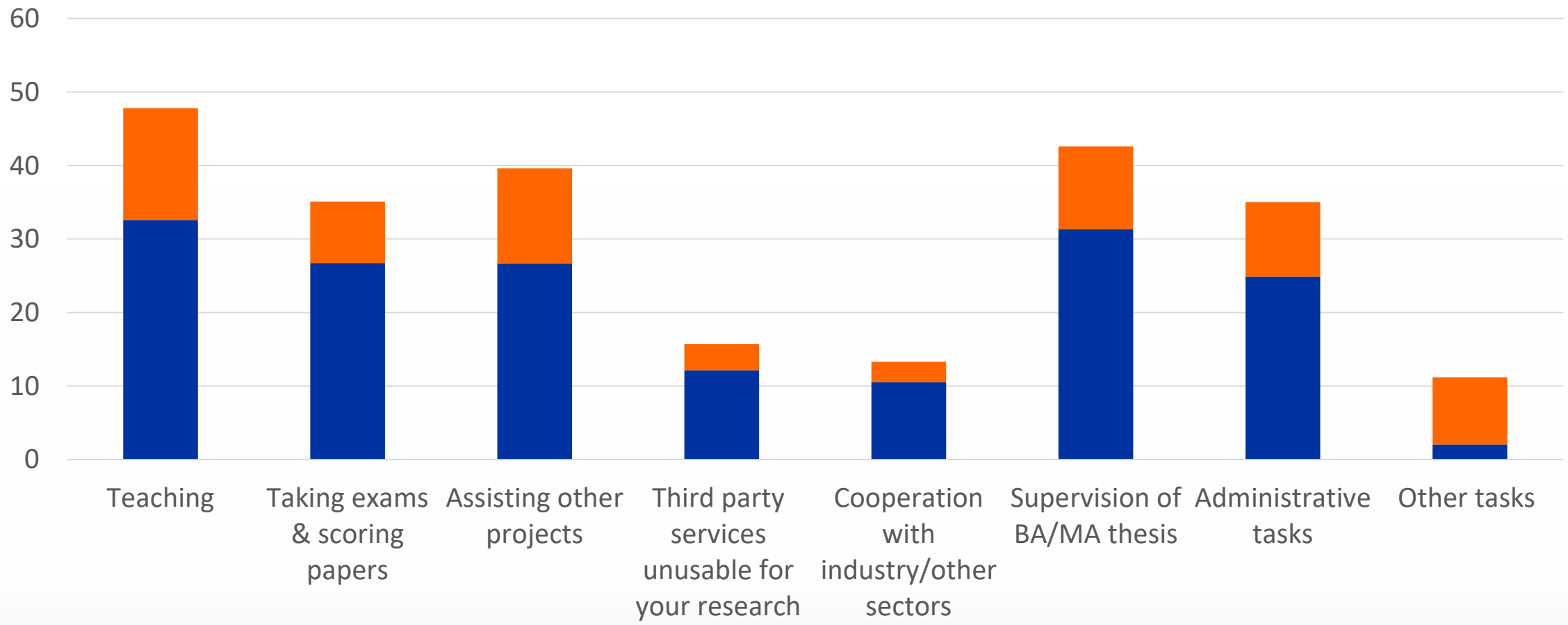
20%

No reason for doubts

Topic not that interesting after all

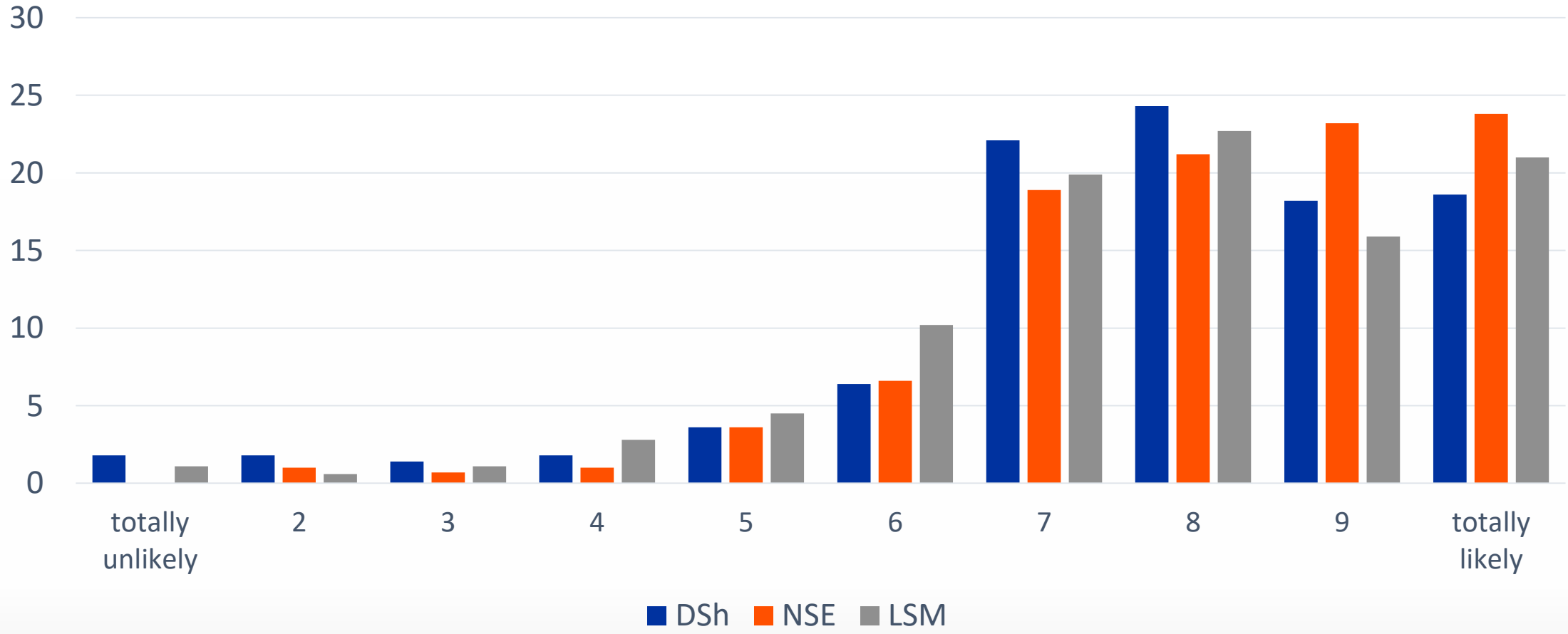
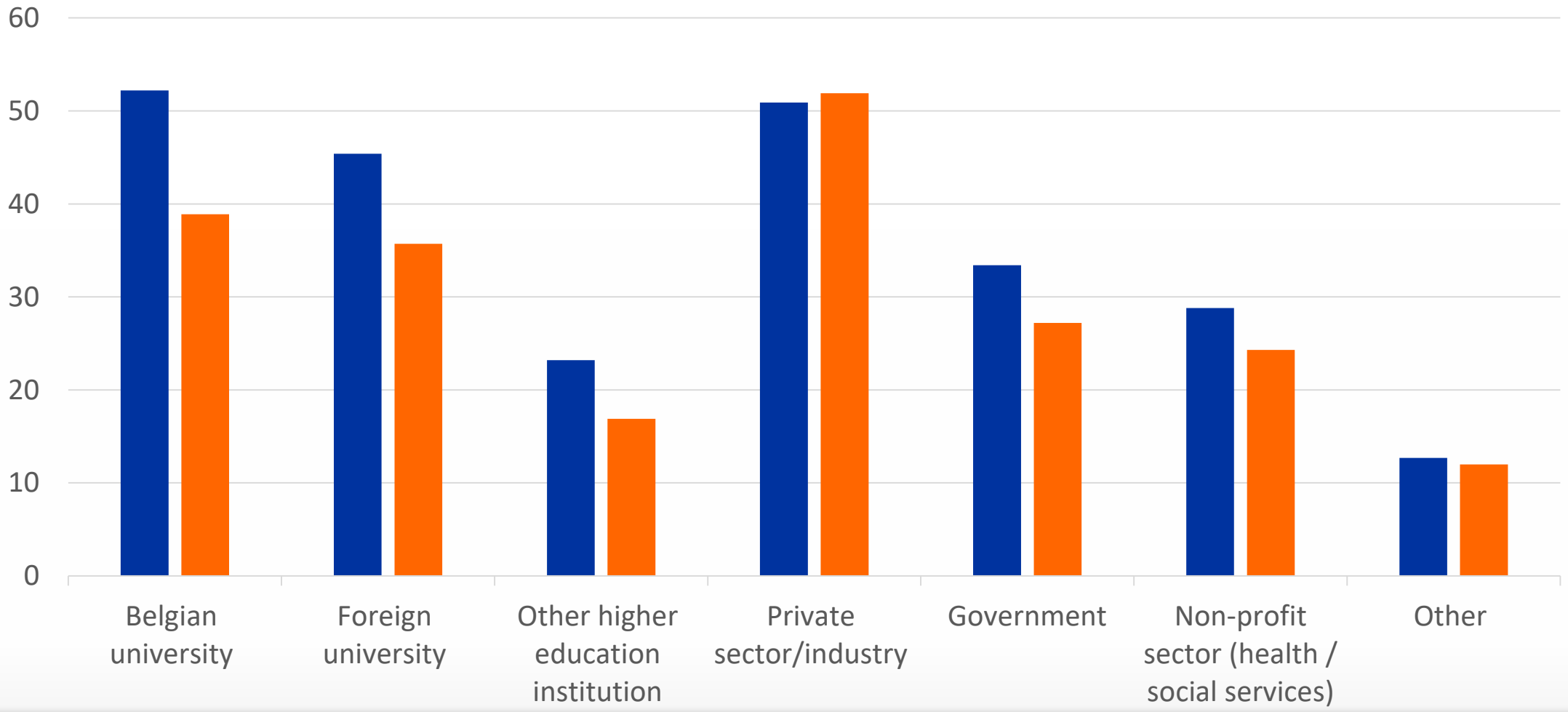
Had no ambition to do a PhD in the first place

WORKLOAD


60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teaching
Taking exams & scoring papers
Assisting other projects
Third party services unusable for your research
Cooperation with industry/other sectors
Supervision of BA/MA thesis
Administrative tasks
Other tasks
Alright
Too much

PhD progression and finalization

>80% is positive about obtaining a PhD



After finishing PhD