



# Quick Starters Guide for PhD Students

Bert van Wee & Vincent Marchau

version August 2017

*TRAIL is the Research School on Transport, Infrastructure and Logistics. TRAIL trains PhD students and TRAIL researchers to perform scientific and applied scientific research in the fields of Transport, Infrastructure, and Logistics (TIL). TRAIL is a collaborative initiative of six Dutch universities: Erasmus University Rotterdam, Delft University of Technology, Eindhoven University of Technology, University of Twente, Radboud University, and the University of Groningen. Ten faculties and institutes form a strong concentration of scientific experts in the fields of Transport, Infrastructure, and Logistics (TIL). About 120 PhD students and 60 staff members are active in TRAIL.*

## Introduction

This document provides a Quick Starters Guide (QSG) for TRAIL PhD students in terms of:

1. What does TRAIL offer PhD students?
2. How to register as a TRAIL PhD student?
3. The TRAIL Training and Education (T&E) program.
4. How will the PhD student be informed about TRAIL activities?
5. TRAIL support during the PhD research process.

## 1. What does TRAIL offer PhD students?

TRAIL assists its PhD students by:

- providing a unique and challenging course program to enable them to become Transport, Infrastructure and Logistics (TIL)-professionals;
- supporting PhD-students in getting to know the Dutch Transport, Infrastructure and Logistics (TIL)-community (both scientific and in practice );
- organizing master classes, symposia, conferences (together with the PhD council<sup>1</sup>) where PhD students can meet and discuss their research progress;
- supporting PhD-students in all kinds of practical matters for writing and publishing their PhD thesis;
- having 2 to 3 individual meetings with the (Vice-) Scientific Director of TRAIL; one introductory meeting at the beginning of his/her PhD research, one exit meeting at the end of his/her PhD research, and (optional) one progress meeting in the middle;
- supporting the PhD council in organizing social events for PhD students.

## 2. How to register as a TRAIL PhD student?

Becoming a TRAIL PhD student requires that the TRAIL Application Form ([www.rstrail.nl/PhD](http://www.rstrail.nl/PhD)) is filled in, signed by the thesis supervisor and submitted to the TRAIL Bureau (info@rstrail.nl).

This form is an agreement between the PhD candidate, the thesis supervisor, and TRAIL Research School. After receiving the application form, the TRAIL office will contact the PhD student to make an appointment for an introductory talk with the (Vice-) Scientific Director of TRAIL.

---

<sup>1</sup> The PhD council is an independent body of 6 to 7 PhD students (at least 1 from each university), representing the TRAIL PhD students. They advise and support the TRAIL management on PhD education, the annual PhD conference, PhD thesis production process, social events for PhD students, etc.

### 3. TRAIL Training and Education (T&E) program

TRAIL is not a PhD-granting institute and has as such no formal incentives for PhD students (and supervisors) for a mandatory course program. However, most TRAIL-universities, that are responsible for granting PhD degrees, have strict education rules for PhD students within their local Graduate Schools. These requirements often include that part of the PhD student education should be on the domain of the PhD student, in our case the domain of Transport, Infrastructure and Logistics (TIL).

**TRAIL applies the following principles/rules:**

- **TRAIL welcomes all PhD students (TRAIL and non-TRAIL<sup>2</sup> PhD students) for following courses.**
- **At a minimum, PhD students who follow only one or more TIL-courses receive a certificate per course. If they, in addition, successfully pass for the course (e.g. by an assignment), this will be made explicit on the certificate.**

Since 2014, TRAIL offers the option to go for a TRAIL diploma (15 ECTS). Please visit the TRAIL website for all details [www.rstrail.nl/courses](http://www.rstrail.nl/courses). The main rule for the diploma is:

TRAIL PhD students who follow an education program of at least 15 ECTS of TIL-courses and pass the assignments receive a TRAIL diploma, if this program includes:

- 2 mandatory courses: TRAIL Fundamentals and TRAIL Theories & Methods (7 ECTS),
- at least 8 ECTS of other PhD TIL-courses.

The TRAIL T&E program consists of three parts (visit the TRAIL website for detailed course descriptions and subscription details):

- Basic TIL-courses: support PhD students to become TRAIL scholars
- General TIL courses: i.e. follow-up courses on some basic courses and/or independent of the specialization (T, I, or L) of the student;
- TIL Specialization courses: electives dependent of the PhD student's specialization (T, I, or L).

TRAIL encourages its PhD students to follow courses in the TIL domain at other Research Schools and elsewhere. Our experience is that Research Schools such as Beta, Disc, LNMB, Nethur, ERIM, and Tinbergen Institute provide valuable PhD courses of high quality that can be relevant to individual TRAIL PhD students. And some well-respected universities worldwide also provide excellent courses. Currently, TRAIL PhD students can follow courses for free at Beta, Disc and STREAM, and at GP-OML (Graduate Program Operations Management and Logistics, in which TRAIL participates). Please note that courses at other institutes often require a registration fee. In addition, Research Masters and Master courses can be followed, but these courses have specific rules with respect to the awarded credits<sup>3</sup>.

### 4. How will the PhD student be informed about TRAIL activities?

After registration, the PhD-student automatically receives the monthly electronic newsletter of TRAIL (E-Link) with announcements of courses, seminars and master classes, conferences etc., as well as how to register for these events. In addition, this information is also available at the TRAIL website ([www.rstrail.nl](http://www.rstrail.nl)).

### 5. TRAIL support during the PhD research process

Thesis supervisors decide on the structure and content of the research process of their PhD-student.

A commonly applied process is:

- (a) writing the research proposal;
- (b) performing the proposed research plan;
- (c) writing and publishing the PhD thesis.

---

<sup>2</sup> For non-TRAIL PhD students a fee applies, unless there is an agreement between TRAIL and the PhD student's institute. See 'TRAIL Training & Education Program' (page 4); [www.rstrail.nl/T&E Program](http://www.rstrail.nl/T&E Program)

<sup>3</sup> TRAIL allows its PhD students to follow Master courses in the TIL domain at TRAIL- and non-TRAIL universities. The number of ECTS of PhD or Research Master courses count fully for the TRAIL program if additional to the TRAIL curriculum; for regular Master courses only 70% of the number of ECTS is included.

TRAIL supports the PhD-student in each of these phases in the following way:

- a) Ad writing the research proposal:
  - offering (basic and generic) TRAIL-courses (including a course on doing literature research);
  - organizing a TRAIL PhD-conference allowing you to present your draft research proposal;
  - and getting to know/interact with your colleagues and peers within (and outside) TRAIL.
- b) Ad performing the proposed research:
  - offering (TRAIL) specialization courses and providing a course on writing and publishing a scientific article;
  - organizing the TRAIL PhD-student Conference, and also co-organizing additional conferences, master classes, and symposia on specific topics, allowing you to discuss your research progress.
- c) Ad writing, and publishing the PhD thesis:
  - publishing the dissertation in the TRAIL Thesis Series<sup>4</sup>, i.e.: (i) providing a standard TRAIL lay-out of the manuscript and cover (see 'Authors Instructions' at [www.rstrail.nl](http://www.rstrail.nl)), (ii) providing good contacts for English language checking, (iii) maintain contact with the publisher, and (optional) (iv) support to publish a commercial edition too;
  - disseminating the scientific relevance of the thesis results. TRAIL can, in co-operation with the PhD student, organize a master class directly before/after the defense about the PhD research topic (typically, this class includes presentations by the PhD student and/or some PhD committee members on the PhD research topic);
  - disseminating the societal relevance of the thesis results. TRAIL PhD students can prepare a press release about their thesis results. This in general is an activity at university level (not TRAIL) but TRAIL can provide feedback if appreciated. A press release and next media attention informs the public, including the TRAIL community, about the PhD student's research findings;
  - some PhD theses are explicitly presented for employees of the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, as part of the collaboration between the Ministry and TRAIL.
  - disseminating dissertations. TRAIL buys a set of 25 dissertations (see below) for distribution among important libraries, the members of various TRAIL boards, and other parties that closely co-operate with TRAIL (see 'Authors' Instructions' for the latest distribution list);
  - co-funding the publication costs of thesis. The PhD student is primarily responsible for the costs of publishing the dissertation. TRAIL contributes 500 euros to the publication costs of the thesis and receives in exchange 25 dissertations for the dissemination. Note that the funding research program, the student's faculty or section, or other parties may also fund (part of) these publication costs. The PhD student will determine the number of dissertations to be printed. Normally, this will be between 100 and 200 copies. Given a size of about 200 black-and-white pages, the total costs for publishing a dissertation will be about EUR 750 – 1250 (2016 figures). Note that some of these costs might be tax deductible.

All formal rules and regulations for being admitted to the public defense and conferral of the doctorate are included in the 'Doctorate Regulations' of your university. You can find the latest edition of these rules and regulations on the Website of the relevant university:

- [Delft University of Technology](#)
- [Erasmus University Rotterdam EUR](#)
- [University of Twente](#)
- [Radboud University](#)
- [Eindhoven University of Technology](#)
- [University of Groningen](#)

## Questions?

If you have any questions about this document or TRAIL in general, please contact us at [info@rstrail.nl](mailto:info@rstrail.nl).

---

<sup>4</sup> If another program or institute involved in the PhD research project has a similar requirement, TRAIL is open to the publication of the thesis in another series as well (i.e. a double-edition).

## Appendix: Relevant TRAIL actors

A PhD project is mainly the project of a PhD student. However, multiple actors (might) play a role in successfully finishing a PhD thesis in TRAIL Research School, of which the thesis supervisor is most important. In addition, the following actors either help or facilitate the research process, or are involved in the quality assurance and monitoring progress:

- The Thesis Research Funder, who provides the funding for the PhD Project. This funding can originate from e.g. the university or faculty, an independent scientific institute (e.g. NWO, STW, TNO), a public body (ministry/municipality, European Commission), a private party.
- The TRAIL T&E Coordinator, who facilitates the course program and supports the PhD student in a multitude of (formal) procedures related to the PhD Research, especially in the first and last phases. The TRAIL T&E Coordinator is the first TRAIL contact person for PhD students (see [www.rstrail.nl](http://www.rstrail.nl) for contact details).
- The TRAIL PhD Council, which represents the PhD students that are members of the research school and advises the TRAIL management about decisions concerning TRAIL PhD students. The council has six members, all of which are PhD students at different TRAIL-faculties/universities, and acts as an intermediary for the PhD students. (see [www.rstrail.nl](http://www.rstrail.nl) for the members of the TRAIL PhD Council)
- The TRAIL (associate) staff members who lecture in TRAIL courses, are thesis supervisor(s) of the PhD Student. Staff members are appointed on, amongst others, an assessment of their performance with respect to the supervision of PhD students.
- The TRAIL Management (Scientific and Vice-Scientific Director), who are ultimately responsible for all scientific issues regarding the Research School. They are responsible for the Training and Education (course) program, the TRAIL R&D Program, and the Knowledge Transfer activities. They can, on request of the PhD Student, function as an ombudsperson (counselor). (see [www.rstrail.nl](http://www.rstrail.nl) for contact details)
- The TRAIL Program Board, which advises the TRAIL Management on all issues that relate to the TRAIL R&D Program. The TRAIL Program Board consists of TRAIL R&D Program Leaders and a member from the TRAIL PhD council. (see [www.rstrail.nl](http://www.rstrail.nl) for the members of this Board)
- The TRAIL Supervisory Board, which monitors TRAIL Research School as a whole and advises the TRAIL management on strategic issues with respect to Training and Education, Research and Development and Knowledge Dissimination. The Board has an independent chair and up to six other members (each representing a university in TRAIL). (see [www.rstrail.nl](http://www.rstrail.nl) for the members of the TRAIL PhD Council)