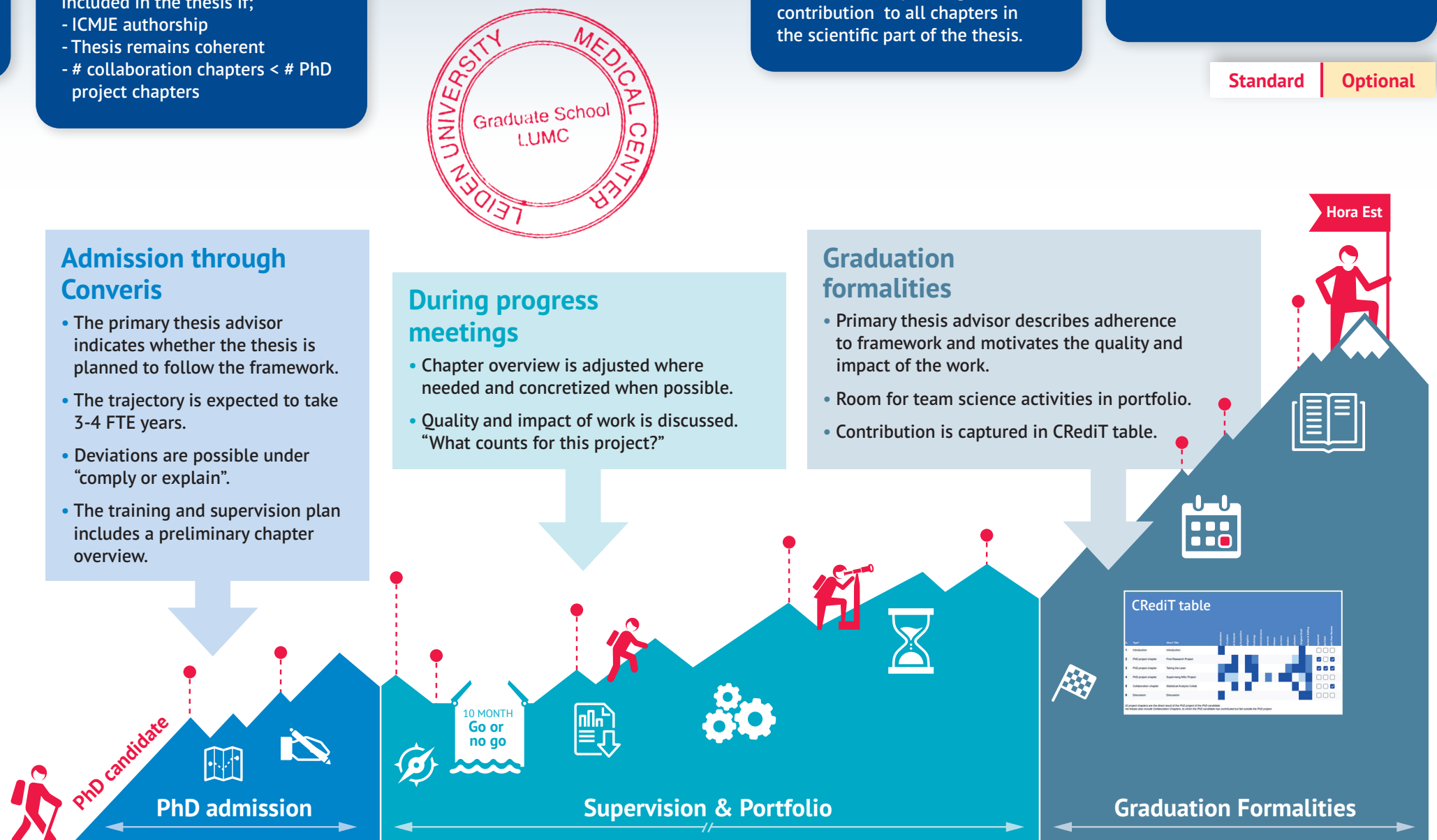
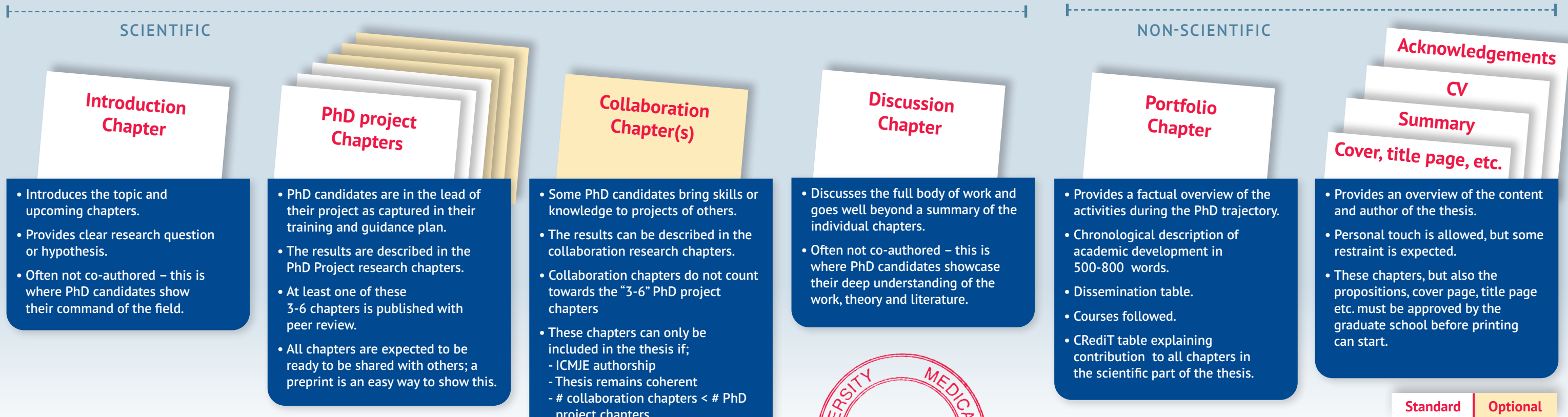




FAQ

How does the new framework differ from the previous thesis requirements?

Before this framework was formalized, the LUMC worked with the rule of thumb set by the LUMC dean in 2008 that “3/5 chapters in a thesis need to be published” before a thesis can be sent out to the thesis committee. Historically, ~11% of the theses did not fully comply with this rule of thumb. Over time, this rule of thumb developed into the practice where theses that had less than 3 published first-author papers required additional motivation by the PTA on why the content of the thesis would be sufficient for the next step in the graduation formalities. The new framework lowers the publication requirements but is still based on the idea that each PhD project leads to a minimum of 3 research chapters in a thesis. These chapters are referred to as the PhD project chapters. The new framework also allows the addition of research chapters outside of the PhD project of the candidate in some circumstances. The new framework does not lower the learned skills and acquired knowledge of a PhD candidate. In the meantime, the new framework provides more room to let the thesis reflect the actual activities of the PhD candidate during the PhD trajectory.

Is the new thesis framework for all PhD trajectories, including those already started?

Yes, there are several reasons why this is justified. First, the framework allows for variation under comply or explain. Deviations that follow from previously made agreements are valid reasons to differ from this framework. Second, we note that regarding the content the framework does not lower the rule of thumb on the minimal number of chapters included in a thesis (see above) Third, the quality assessment in the new framework is not too different from the existing PhD evaluation procedure: the four domains have been constructed from the Leiden University PhD regulations. We supplemented this with the three goals of the Academia in Motion framework (“innovation, sharing, and collaboration”). So, the aspects on which LUMC theses will be evaluated do not change substantially. The procedure is changed and the discussion on what counts as quality is brought forward in the PhD trajectory. Thesis advisors and PhD candidates now discuss these four domains throughout the trajectory, by making the discussion part of the progress report meetings. Furthermore, we also expect the PTA to explain why and how the thesis fulfills minimal quality expectations in their field. This will help the Graduate School put the assessment of the thesis committee in the right perspective.

Does the change in publication requirement lead to loss of quality of our research?

That is not to be expected. Peer review does provide a quality impulse to the reporting of the research, but it is not the only gatekeeping process for scientific quality in the scientific enterprise. In fact, we might have leaned a bit too strongly on the publication requirement as a proxy quality criterion in the past. In any case, the new framework implies that members of the thesis committee must be more engaged with quality evaluation.

Why not remove the publication criterion?

The goal of a Dutch PhD thesis is to provide a “proeve van bekwaamheid”, i.e., the PhD trajectory should lead to becoming an independent member of the scientific community with the required skills. The LUMC Graduate School believes that for this to be true, all PhD graduates should undergo the scientific cycle at least once. The publication requirement in the new framework is a direct consequence of this concept and is not a proxy for quality assurance.

Why the 3-4 year FTE?

The PhD thesis should reflect the PhD trajectory based on a scientific project in which the PhD candidate took the lead. For a well-rounded thesis, this also means that there should be enough time for a PhD candidate to develop themselves academically, including the required 280 hours of training. PhD trajectories combined with other activities (teaching, clinical duties) must still be possible, but we want to ensure that PhD candidates have a full learning trajectory. This does not only take 3-4 years FTE “person time” but also at least 3-4 years “calendar time”. This implies that structurally working “on your own time” on your research is discouraged and that a PhD trajectory should not be squeezed in 2 years or less. A combination of tasks or experience in a different field can provide some level of efficiency in a learning trajectory. However, over-enthusiastic planning that results in the PhD candidate structurally working most nights and weekends to obtain a PhD is discouraged.

Does 3-4 FTE mean that all PhD candidates have a right to work on their PhD through a contract of four years?

No, many of our PhD candidates are not on a PhD contract but are funded through scholarships or combine their PhD trajectory with other work in- and outside of the LUMC.

What does the new framework say about shared authorship?

In short, nothing. The traditional concept of “first”, “second”, “senior” or “shared” authorship is an ill-defined concept, subject to deflation, not suitable to capture the true contribution to a scientific project. Instead, this framework makes use of the CRediT taxonomy, which is specifically designed to capture the contribution of an individual.

Can multi-author research chapters appear in multiple thesis?

In short, yes. However, four items that follow directly from the stipulations in the framework are highlighted. First, the PhD project chapters follow from the project that the PhD candidate is working on. Unless PhD projects work jointly with the same intensity and contribution on the same project from the start, it is not often that two or more PhD candidates include the same work as PhD project chapters. Second, collaboration chapters are, by definition, likely to be included as PhD project chapters in the thesis of a fellow PhD candidate. Due to the nature of the contribution that is expected from a PhD candidate to a collaboration chapter, the inclusion of a chapter in three (or even more) more theses as a collaboration becomes increasingly less likely to be defensible. Third, the contribution of the PhD candidate to each chapter will always become clear from the CRediT table. The concept of “shared authorship” is ill-defined and, for that reason, has no relevant role in this framework, and we discourage its use during the graduation formalities. Fourth, the chronological order of graduation of the PhD candidates who appear as co-authors in each other’s theses is not relevant.

Must the “full scientific cycle” be captured in one single research chapter?

No, this is not needed. And to be honest, this is often not even possible in team science. Trajectories where the PhD candidate takes full ownership of their projects is preferred, but we recognize that some aspects of the full scientific cycle can be captured by the work presented in the various research chapters.

Can you obtain a PhD based on a single published paper that is very extensive and complex?

Yes, given that the new framework is based on the “comply or explain” principle, this is possible. However, it is a very risky approach for the PhD candidate and the supervisor to work four years with a “high impact journal in mind”. This practice is strongly discouraged, as the success of this approach is not in one’s own hands, and therefore the successful and timely completion of the PhD trajectory is highly doubtful. Also, the introduction and discussion chapters are less useful and take away an opportunity for the PhD candidate. The guidance committee helps the PTA and the PhD candidate to weigh the pros and cons before they embark on such a risky trajectory. It is important to note that team science chapters are not a stand in for PhD project papers.

The gap in knowledge was defined in the grant proposal written by my supervisor before I started – how can I comply with the new framework?

The research cycle requirement must be evident from the thesis but does not have to be research chapters. PhD candidates working on projects where the knowledge gap has been fully described in grants should use the discussion to reflect on what remaining gaps in knowledge still exist now that their work is completed.

I only use data collected by others – how can I comply with the new framework?

The research cycle requirement does not imply that you must collect data yourself. Obtaining access to data also often requires an internal or external evaluation process (biobank permission, access to CTQ or CBS data, etc.). These processes help fulfill the “scientific cycle requirement”. The use of open data is explicitly encouraged. In such cases the PhD candidate can highlight that process in the portfolio chapter. Does the new framework allow a research chapter to be included in multiple theses? Yes, it does. After all, we allow collaboration chapters to be added next to PhD project chapters. What matters for the PhD project chapters is that the contribution of the PhD candidate was substantial, essential and independent. For the collaboration chapters, the contribution of the PhD candidate might be smaller in size, but can still be seen as substantial for a specific role. The contribution is often easier demarcated (“PhD candidate led the in vivo experiments”), but should be essential and independent for that chapter. Typically, this distinction is easily captured in CRediT taxonomy: where a PhD candidate is likely to fulfill numerous roles either in various intensities for PhD project chapters, the contribution to a collaborator chapter is more focused on one, two or on occasions three specific roles where there was a substantial contribution (lead or equal contribution). So it is not just any contribution that counts for a collaboration chapter. Based on the concept of team science, it is typically expected that the PhD project chapters of one PhD candidate will be included as team science papers in the thesis of another PhD candidate. In fact, we believe that it is unlikely that more than one, and on rare occasions two, contributors have done enough to include the work as a collaboration chapter in their theses.

Who decides whether my thesis is in line with the new framework?

Thesis Advisors and the PhD candidate set the goals of the PhD project at the start, which include a rough outline of the work in the various chapters. This is discussed with the guidance committee throughout the trajectory during the various progress meetings. When the thesis is handed in, the Graduate School Office requires a description of the thesis content through Converis, written by the PTA. All deviations are subject to approval through Converis.

This approval is given by the Head of the graduate school / Dean. In major deviations, this decision is taken after advice from the GS office and / or the GS Board based on historic precedent.

Will my PhD become less valuable with the new framework?

No, the Dutch PhD degree in general, and the LUMC degree in particular, have high esteem in the world. This is predominantly due to the MSc requirement for enrollment, and the long period of dedicated research time which results in high-quality research. With this new framework, the the publication requirements are redefined, but also the publication of a manuscript in and of itself has only a limited impact on the quality of the work. Demanding more chapters to be published will mostly lead to an increase in calendar time for each PhD trajectory, whilst few new skills will be learned. This new framework provides more room to showcase team science activities, which makes the thesis a better reflection of the actual PhD trajectory. This makes the LUMC thesis just as, if not more, valuable as a PhD thesis only based on “published first author papers”.

Can you obtain a PhD based on papers published prior to the start of the PhD project?

Yes, this is possible, but it is not as easy as one might think. The new framework implies that the three PhD project chapters come from work that is planned with the specific goal of obtaining the degree. The PhD thesis reflects a planned learning trajectory of the PhD candidate, not just a combination of co-authored papers. Earlier work can be the impetus of a new PhD trajectory, but the value of this earlier work for a PhD trajectory diminishes overtime. The inclusion of work published before the initiation of the trajectory is a deviation from the framework that is possible and is subject to approval by the Head of the Graduate School / Dean during the admission phase.

Who has the final say when it comes to deviations from the described expectations?

The framework is set up so that multiple people give direction to the content of a thesis. It starts with a conversation between PhD candidate and supervisors with some input from the guidance committee. Ultimately, at the end of the PhD trajectory, it is the primary thesis advisor who has to justify these choices when request for the start of the graduation formalities is filed. This information will not be made available to the PhD candidate but is shared with the Graduate School as a guardian of the graduation formalities. The head of the Graduate School is mandated by the Dean to decide whether the thesis fulfils the general expectations of PhD thesis at the LUMC as stipulated in this framework. Explanations and motivation for deviations will be taken into account in this decision. If the thesis does not fulfill this requirement initially, a simple repair action might be needed before the next step in the procedure can be taken. Decisions on strong deviations will also be taken by the head of the Graduate School, but only after input from other members of the Graduate School office and Graduate School Board. Decisions on earlier similar cases will lead the decision-making process. In exceptional cases, issues can be escalated to the dean. Further steps are described in chapter 9 of the Leiden University PhD regulations.

How do I create such a CRediT table?

We made a CRediT table generator for you. You can find it on our OSF page here or download directly.