



# Quick Starters Guide for PhD Students

Bert van Wee & Vincent Marchau

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*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 five Dutch universities: Erasmus University Rotterdam, Delft University of Technology, Eindhoven University of Technology, University of Twente, and Radboud University Nijmegen. Ten faculties and institutes form a strong concentration of scientific experts in the fields of Transport, Infrastructure, and Logistics (TIL), About 100 PhD students and 50 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 TIL-professionals;
  - supporting PhD-students in getting to know the Transport, Infrastructure and Logistics (TIL)-community (both scientific and societal);
  - organizing master classes, symposia, conferences (together with the PhD council) where PhDs 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](http://www.rstrail.nl/PhD) ([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](mailto:info@rstrail.nl)).

This form is an agreement between the PhD candidate, the thesis supervisor, and TRAIL Research School. By signing the application form, parties involved declare to have read this QSG. 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.

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

Most TRAIL-universities, that are responsible for granting PhD degrees, have strict education rules for PhD students within their local Graduate Schools. Please check out these rules! TRAIL is not a PhD-

granting institute and has no formal incentives for its PhD students (and supervisors) for a mandatory course program.

In general, local Graduate Schools provide generic PhD courses on research theory, methods, and skills. TRAIL provides specific courses relevant for the TIL-domain. TRAIL welcomes all PhD students for following TIL-courses.

Since 2014 we offer the opportunity to receive a TRAIL diploma. We think this increases the market value of TRAIL PhD students. PhD students who follow and pass (successful exam/assignment) a full education program of at least 15 ECTS (of 28 hours each) of TIL-courses receive a TRAIL diploma listing the courses. TRAIL is pleased if PhD students (and supervisors) decide to go for the TRAIL diploma. As far as TRAIL is concerned, PhD students can decide upon the choice for the diploma-option before starting to do research, but also in a later stage. Note that supervisors and local Graduate Schools can have related requirements.

*Main Rule: TRAIL PhD students who pass (= follow course + finish exam/assignment successfully) at least 15 ECTS of courses in the domain of Transport, Infrastructure and Logistics (i.e. TRAIL and other TRAIL approved TIL-courses) receive a TRAIL diploma.*

TRAIL PhD students who follow only one or more TIL-courses receive a certificate per course. If they successfully do an exam (often: an assignment), this will be made explicit on the certificate.

The TRAIL T&E program consists of three parts (see [www.rstrail.nl/phd](http://www.rstrail.nl/phd) for detailed course descriptions and subscription details):

- Basic TIL-courses (TRAIL PhD students opting for a TRAIL diploma should follow at least 4 ECTS: the TRAIL 'Fundamental Domain' Knowledge' course, and the TRAIL 'Theories and Methods' course);
- 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).

If PhD students already successfully participated in courses in the past (Masters, Bachelors) that are the equivalent of TRAIL basic courses, they do not have to follow those courses at TRAIL. In that case the minimum of 15 ECTS for the diploma still applies.

TRAIL encourages its PhD students to follow courses at other Research Schools and elsewhere. If students wish to do this, please contact the TRAIL-office for subscription details and, in case of opting for a TRAIL-diploma, to check if a course is considered to be a TIL-course.

Our experience is that Research Schools such as Beta, Disc, LNMB, Nethur, ERIM, and Tinbergen Institute provide valuable courses of high quality that can be relevant to individual TRAIL PhD students (please check their websites for latest course offers). 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, [www.gp-oml.nl](http://www.gp-oml.nl)). Courses at other institutes often require a registration fee. PhD students from other institutions than the participating universities in TRAIL are also welcome to attend our courses (for rules and regulations see TRAIL T&E Program and Rules, [www.rstrail.nl/phd](http://www.rstrail.nl/phd)).

#### **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.

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;
  - Next to organizing the TRAIL PhD-student Conference, 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>1</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. All TRAIL PhD students are requested to prepare a press release about their thesis results. This will be used to inform the public, including the TRAIL community about the PhD student's research findings;
  - disseminating dissertations. TRAIL buys a set of 35 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 35 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 pages, the total costs for publishing a dissertation will be about EUR 1250 – 1500 (2014 figures). Note that some of these costs are (up until now) 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 Nijmegen](#)
- [Eindhoven University of Technology](#)

### Questions?

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

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<sup>1</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 Dissemination. 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)