

N.W. POSTHUMUS INSTITUTE

PhD Training Programme



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*Front picture – Photo of bakers and bread roundsmen with their delivery bikes all belonging to the J. Moolenbeek bakery (Nieuwegracht 125) in Utrecht, c. 1935.
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Welcome

We are happy that you are considering the N.W. Posthumus PhD Training Programme for your PhD trajectory and hope to welcome you soon in our newest cohort!

In this brochure, you will find what our PhD Training Programme offers you, how to register for the programme and what conditions there are to be met. We will also tell you a bit about the history, the background, and the infrastructure of our institute.

We hope this brochure will offer you the info you are looking for. In case of any questions, do not hesitate to contact us, best by e-mail via posthumus@uu.nl.

Best regards,

Dr Jessica Dijkman
Scientific Director

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The N.W. Posthumus Institute and the ESTER Network

Throughout this brochure, you will frequently see the acronym ESTER pop up. ESTER stands for the European graduate School for Training in Economic and social historical Research. This Europe-wide network of leading scholars in the field of economic and social history was established in 1991 by the N.W. Posthumus Institute. The ESTER programme aims to improve and internationalise the training of a new generation of scholars in the field. To attain these goals, ESTER organises two annual events: the Datini-ESTER Advanced Seminar and the Research Design Course. The coordination of the ESTER network lies with the secretariat of the N.W. Posthumus Institute.

Find out more about ESTER via <https://posthumusinstitute.org/ester-about/>

Aims

The PhD training of the N.W. Posthumus Institute has three main goals:

Contributing to a successful completion of your dissertation project in the domain of economic and social history

The N.W. Posthumus Institute offers you a well-structured training programme focused entirely on your own research. This will help you to formulate research questions embedded in the academic debates on your topic, to select relevant sources, methods and theories for your research, and to keep your project manageable and on track. It also aims to enlarge and deepen your knowledge and enhance your skills as a future researcher in the field of economic and social history. In that way we expect you to develop into a researcher able to make increasingly valuable contributions to academic and non-academic debates.

Encouraging PhD candidates from the start to write and present their work

As a PhD candidate in the PhD Training Programme you will be expected to write a series of papers and to present these at various seminars. At these events, you will receive feedback from fellow PhD candidates as well as from renowned senior researchers in the field of economic and social history from all across Europe. In this way we seek to create an environment in which you can grow confident and find your own way as a young research in economic and social history.

Integrating PhD candidates into the community of Dutch and Flemish historians specialised in economic and social History

The PhD training programme allows you to establish a network with both peers and senior researchers in the domain of economic and social history, both within the Netherlands and Flanders and internationally. This is done by participating in activities such as the annual Posthumus conference, various workshops, the Research Design Course and the Advanced Seminars of ESTER, where it is easy to meet people and discuss joint academic interests in a stimulating atmosphere.

The Programme

The PhD Training Programme of the N.W. Posthumus Institute covers the entire period of your dissertation project. However, the programme's primary focus lies on the first three years.

The PhD Training Programme

The PhD Training Programme of each cohort starts in the fall of each year. This training consists of preparing for and participating in three seminars at varying locations. The training will be formally concluded with an Individual Assessment.

Seminar 1: 'My project in a Nutshell' (academic year 1, late November / early December)

In this first seminar you and your fellow PhD candidates of the new cohort get to know each other and each other's projects. The seminar provides a forum to present initial ideas and to get feedback from both other starting researchers as well as from a Posthumus fellow. Prior to the meeting, every participant writes a short research note in English about the historiographical background and the content of the project they are involved in: 'My project in a Nutshell'. The aim is to position the project within the academic debate. Participants will read and discuss each other's notes.

Seminar 2: 'Work in Progress' (academic year 1, April / May)

The paper for Seminar 2: 'Work in Progress' (the 'minor paper', 10-15 pages A4) should be written in English and provide a first substantial discussion of your PhD project. The objectives of this paper are to position your research project in the relevant academic debates, formulate the research questions and discuss the methodologies and techniques.

The schedule composed by the Education Programme Director of the N.W. Posthumus Institute for this seminar will ensure that:

- each PhD candidate will present their own minor paper
- each PhD candidate will be a discussant of another PhD candidate's minor paper
- a senior researcher, usually one of the fellows of the N.W. Posthumus Institute, will also comment on this paper

Participants of Seminar 2 are expected to read the minor papers of the other PhDs in their group and actively take part in the general discussion.

Posthumus Conference – Poster Presentation (academic year 1, May)

The N.W. Posthumus Institute annually organises the Posthumus Conference at one of the affiliated institutions in the Netherlands or Flanders. In the first year of their PhD Training Programme, PhDs will be invited to present their research at this event via a poster presentation. Posters will be displayed at a central location and during an extended lunch break can be viewed and discussed by all conference participants.

Seminar 3: Research Design Course (RDC; academic year 2, September / October)

The Research Design Course (RDC) is an international seminar of three to five days, usually hosted abroad by one of the universities from the ESTER network.

At the RDC, you will present your major paper and receive feedback from fellow candidates as well as from international senior researchers. All participants are expected to read each other's work and to prepare for a discussion based upon what they have read. Furthermore, the Research Design Course invites you also to reflect upon issues discussed in academic literature, including scientific ambitions, the perspectives adopted and rejected, and problems with combining theory and empirical research.

In the end, your major paper should provide a well-founded overview of the research question and sub-questions, the expected answers, the methods to be used, the research steps to be taken, the timeline, the required information, and the (provisional) structure (chapters) of the thesis. As such, the major paper will therefore be like a draft version of the first chapter of your dissertation, including an extensive introduction as well as a dissertation plan.

Please note that the Research Design Course is also open to PhD candidates from the ESTER network outside the N.W. Posthumus Institute's PhD Training Programme.

If agreed upon by the Education Programme Director beforehand, participation in the Research Design Course may be substituted by participation in another activity, such as a Summer School.

Individual Assessment (academic year 2, January / February)

The Basic Training ends with an individual assessment. Two fellows of the N.W. Posthumus Institute will assess, together with the PhD and the PhD's supervisor(s), the progress during the first year of the PhD project and the expectations for the remainder of the project. The major aim is to assess whether the PhD is likely to complete the PhD project in time. Problems and possible solutions can also be discussed.

If the fellows conclude that the PhD candidate will very likely complete the PhD trajectory with a dissertation, and the PhD has successfully participated in the seminars mentioned, the candidate will qualify for the Posthumus Basic Training diploma.

Posthumus Conference – Peer reviewing (academic year 2, May)

The N.W. Posthumus Institute annually organises the Posthumus Conference at one of the affiliated institutions in the Netherlands or Flanders. In the second year of their PhD Training Programme, PhDs are expected to act as peer reviewer of paper(s) presented by PhDs from earlier cohorts.

Posthumus Conference – Paper presentation (academic year 3, May)

The N.W. Posthumus Institute annually organises the Posthumus Conference at one of the affiliated institutions in the Netherlands or Flanders. In the final year of their PhD Training Programme, PhDs should present a full paper at the conference. The presentation will be reviewed by a second-year PhD as well as one of the fellows of the N.W. Posthumus Institute.

The paper presentation at the Posthumus Conference also forms the actual conclusion of the PhD Programme; at the conference, the certificates for successfully completing the programme will be awarded to the PhDs involved.

Additional activities

Next to the PhD Training Programme, the N.W. Posthumus Institute also organises and/or supports a range of respective activities in order to promote knowledge exchange and collaboration. For an up-to-date overview of scheduled activities, we refer you to the Agenda part of our website (<https://posthumusinstitute.org/category/agenda/>)

Masterclasses (2 EC)

The N.W. Posthumus Institute welcomes initiatives of PhD candidates to organise masterclasses and will offer financial support.

A masterclass is staged around a well-known (usually foreign) expert who visits Belgium or the Netherlands. The expertise of the master defines the content of a masterclass. A small group of up to five or six PhD candidates and/or Research Master candidates will have the opportunity to interact intensively with the 'master'. The projects of the participants will be the point of departure for the masterclass. Participants therefore have to write a paper about their research and the problems they experience. The research of the master can be raised during the class. Please note that a lecture or a seminar where visitors only present their papers is not regarded a masterclass.

ESTER Advanced Seminars (4 EC)

The ESTER network occasionally organises Advanced Seminars around a particular domain of research, intended for advanced PhD candidates. During an Advanced Seminar, PhD candidates are brought together with a number of international experts and discuss the papers and presentations of the PhD candidates. One of these Advanced Seminars is the Datini-ESTER Advance Seminar, organised in Prato (Italy) each year by the Fondazione "F. Datini" in close cooperation with the N.W. Posthumus Institute (see https://www.istitutodatini.it/ester/home_e.htm).

Annual Posthumus Conference (2 EC)

The PhD representatives are closely involved in organising and composing the sessions of the annual N.W. Posthumus Conference, which is usually held in the spring of each year.

Career Event (2 EC)

By organising this biennial event, the Posthumus institute aims to support you in preparing for the labour market in and outside of academia. By providing the opportunity to network and ask questions to Posthumus alumni, we try to offer you more insight in how job applications are handled and how to present yourself in CVs and interviews. The Career Day is usually organized in close collaboration with other Research Schools.

Writing Retreat (2 EC)

During this one-week retreat a small group of 8-12 PhD candidates will be offered the opportunity to work on the dissertation, a paper, a chapter and so on in a quiet place away from all the hustle and bustle of everyday life. The Writing Retreat is primarily intended for PhDs in the last year of their trajectory. Candidates should formulate concrete goals in advance, e.g. completing a specific chapter of their dissertation.

Research network activities

Senior fellows of the N.W. Posthumus Institute are affiliated with one or more of the six research networks (see below). As a PhD candidate, at the end of your first year you are expected to join at least one of these networks, and you may add a second one if you wish.

The current networks are:

- Economy and Society of the Pre-industrial Low Countries in a Comparative Perspective
- Globalization, Inequality and Sustainability in Long-Term Perspective
- Inclusion, Exclusion and Mobility
- Life-Courses, Family and Labour
- Routes and Roots in Colonial and Global History
- Societies in Context: Interactions Between Humans and rural-urban environments

To find out more about the research networks and their respective directors, we refer you to the website (<https://posthumusinstitute.org/research-networks/>)

Participation in Research Master courses

The Research Master courses the N.W. Posthumus Institute offers may also be of interest to you as a PhD candidate. PhD candidates are therefore free to join these courses. Find more info and the registration procedure via <https://posthumusinstitute.org/rma-global-economic-social-history/>

External Activities

Our website (www.posthumusinstitute.org) is updated several times per week with information on forthcoming seminars, meetings, courses, and conferences, both from the Posthumus/ESTER network as well as from other relevant institutions.

Other sources for such events are:

- EH.net (<https://eh.net/>)
- FRESH-meetings (Frontier Research in Economic and Social History - <https://ehes.org/fresh-meetings>)
- LSE graduate seminars (<https://www.lse.ac.uk/Economic-History/Seminars/2022-23/Graduate-Economic-History-Seminars-2022-23>)
- Cambridge Economic and Social History Seminars (<https://www.econsoc.hist.cam.ac.uk/seminars.html>)
- Summer schools organised by the European Business History Association (www.ebha.org)
- Tensions of Europe group - technology and its societal embeddedness (www.tensionsofeurope.eu)
- Seminars at institutions participating in the N.W. Posthumus Institute; see for an overview <https://posthumusinstitute.org/agenda/seminars-series>

Most of the activities organised by the institutions mentioned above will be suitable for meeting the criteria of the PhD Training Programme. We do however strongly recommend to contact the Education Programme Director of the N.W. Posthumus Institute prior to the event, to avoid any disappointment.

Application, admission, and payment

PhD candidates affiliated with one of the participating institutions (see back cover) who are interested in joining the N.W. Posthumus Institute can fill out the online application form (<https://posthumusinstitute.org/application-posthumus-phd-training-programme>). The annual deadline for each cohort is 15 October. Please contact us in case you cannot meet that deadline. In some cases a deadline extension or other solution can be found.

Minimum requirements

- a relevant Master's (or equivalent) degree (e.g. History, Economics); in case of doubt, the Examination Committee will decide whether the degree suffices.
- candidates should be formally assigned to a PhD project. Scholarship PhD candidates ('*bursalen*') or external PhD candidates ('*buitenpromovendi*') also qualify as such. In case your formal procedure of selection has not been completed yet, make sure to include a written statement from your supervisors confirming your eligibility.
- PhD candidates of participating institutes in the N.W. Posthumus Institute are expected to complete the full Training Programme, unless agreed otherwise. External PhD candidates can compose their own programme in consultation with the Education Programme Director.

Admission

- Admission is possible after a positive evaluation of your application dossier by the Education Programme Director, if needed after consulting the Education Committee and/or your supervisor(s).

Payment

- The payment for your participation in the PhD Training Programme will in most cases be paid via the institution you are affiliated with out of the funding available for training purposes.
- Please make sure to request the payment information from the administration of your institution which we need to create an invoice (address details, payment reference, contact person).
- Payments are in accordance with the General Agreements and Collaboration Agreements as stipulated by the Council of Dutch Research Schools in the Humanities. You can find the most recent versions on the Council's website: <https://logosgw.nl/documents/>

External candidates

If you are not affiliated with one of the participating institutions, please contact us beforehand for a specific assessment of your situation and your options.

History

The N.W. Posthumus Institute is *the* Research School for economic and social history in the Netherlands and Flanders, including research focusing on non-Western history, world history, and social-cultural history.

The Institute, founded in 1988, is named after Professor Nicolaas Wilhelmus Posthumus (1880-1960), the first professor to hold a chair in Economic History in the Netherlands. He was the initiator of an impressive number of institutions which today still figure prominently in historical research, such as the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam.

In 1994, the N.W. Posthumus Institute, until then an interuniversity training programme for Dutch PhD candidates, was turned into an Interuniversity Research Institute. In the same year, the Institute was formally accredited as a Research School by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). A number of Flemish universities joined the N.W. Posthumus Institute in 2002 and 2011. At this moment, over 325 PhD candidates have completed the Basic Training of the N.W. Posthumus Institute.

The N.W. Posthumus Institute is hosted by the participating institutions in a 5-year rotation. Currently (2021-2026), the N.W. Posthumus Institute is hosted by the Department of History & Art History of Utrecht University.



Prof. N.W. Posthumus (1880-1960)

Source Image : IISH

Structure

The N.W. Posthumus Institute is a collaborative research school, supported by fifteen universities and research institutes in the Netherlands and Belgium. Participating institutions pay an annual contribution in order to finance the PhD training programme and other research activities.

The day-to-day management of the N.W. Posthumus Institute lies with the staff, currently hosted at Utrecht University (as of July 2026 at Leiden University) and existing of the Scientific Director, the Education Programme Director, and the Office Manager. The Education Programme Director oversees the PhD training programme and provides candidates with advice and counsel in matters related to schooling and their career start as researcher, during the Basic Training as well as afterwards.

The PhD candidates enrolled with the N.W. Posthumus Institute are represented through PhD representatives. The overall governance lies with the General Board, which convenes usually twice a year and is supported by an Academic Advisory Board. You will find an overview of the persons involved on our website (<https://posthumusinstitute.org/who-is-who/>).

In addition, the staff is supported by several committees:

Examination Committee

The Examination Committee consists of the chair of the General Board, the Scientific Director and the Education Programme Director. The committee supervises the PhD training programme and also evaluates and decides on cases where PhD candidates do not fully meet the criteria for a certificate of the N.W. Posthumus diploma.

Education Committee

The Education Committee presides over the way in which the PhD training programme functions, in collaboration with the Education Programme Director. Together, they evaluate and re-evaluate, and discuss any necessary alterations eventually needed to keep the programme aligned with the needs of the candidates. The committee also advises the General Board of the N.W. Posthumus Institute on changes in the curriculum and recommends new initiatives. The committee consists of fellows of the N.W. Posthumus Institute and the PhD representatives.

Safeness and Confidential Advisors

STATEMENT

We want our students, staff, and any other person or party involved with the N.W. Posthumus Institute to feel at ease, mutually respected, and included. In case you may be approached in a manner that you consider undesirable, e.g. harassment or sexual harassment, discrimination, aggression, violence or bullying, do not hesitate to contact one of our Confidential Advisors or one of our staff members to talk in confidence about the matter and the steps to be taken to help you feel safe again. You can do this even as a witness: social safety is something we are all responsible for. We understand that stepping forward takes courage; keep in mind that your signals may not only help to solve your own situation, but may also prevent others from future harm.

In case you should experience any inappropriate behaviour or sense any feeling of unsafeness in the context of Posthumus training activities, do not hesitate to contact us. You can do this via one of the staff members, but you can also consult one of our appointed two confidential advisors (*vertrouwenspersonen*). They may be contacted by any Posthumus PhD candidate or (R)MA student who has concerns or complaints about inappropriate behaviour within the context of Posthumus teaching activities.

The confidential advisors will explore possible solutions together with you, and will point out appropriate institutional support if necessary. The advisors will also register complaints and report to the Executive Committee and the Scientific Director, so appropriate action can be taken. It goes without saying that every step in this process will occur in consultation with you and is based on anonymity.

You can find the names and contact details of our current Confidential Advisors on the contact page of our website, <https://posthumusinstitute.org/contact/>

TIMELINE COHORT

For the exact dates, check our website <https://posthumusinstitute.org>

Training academic year 1

End of Nov./early Dec.	Seminar I - <i>'My Project in a Nutshell'</i>
End of April / early May	Seminar II - <i>'Work in Progress'</i>
May / June	Posthumus Conference (poster presentation)

Training academic year 2

September / October	Research Design Course
March	Individual Assessments
May / June	Posthumus Conference (peer reviewing)

Training academic year 3

September – May	Activities of your choice to meet end criteria
May / June	Posthumus Conference (paper presentation)

Other events

May	Datini-ESTER Advanced Seminar
June / July	Writing Retreat
November	Career Day (each odd year)



Header of a billing by J.C. Duursma, watchmaker, watches, clocks, pendulums, alarm clocks etc., repair workshop, Oudegracht near the Weesbrug [Tz.] 86 in Utrecht, for Miss Rahr, January 1905.
Source: Beeldbank Het Utrechts Archief (Public Domain license)

CURRENT PARTICIPANTS N.W. POSTHUMUS INSTITUTE

At this moment, fifteen institutions are participating in the N.W. Posthumus Institute. Do you want to know who is the contact person at your institution? Check the website (<https://posthumusinstitute.org/who-is-who/>) or send an e-mail to posthumus@uu.nl

NL

University of Groningen (Fac. of Arts and Fac. of Business and Economics)

Fryske Akademy (Leeuwarden)

Wageningen University & Research

VU Amsterdam

University of Amsterdam

International Institute for Social History (Amsterdam)

Utrecht University

Leiden University

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Radboud University Nijmegen

Eindhoven University of Technology

Maastricht University

BE

University of Antwerp

Ghent University

Vrije Universiteit Brussel