PhD Recruitment & Selection Guide

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Process overview

Congratulations, you have sufficient funding and inspiration to start a new (sub)project. But how do you get the right candidate to apply for your vacancy? And how do you know who is the best candidate for this specific project? This guide clarifies the A-Z recruitment and selection process for PhD candidates. The aim is to make the process manageable and respectful to all people involved.

Current shortages in the labour market demand a sophisticated approach to attract qualified professionals. TU Delft offers a variety of experts, information and tools to support you throughout the recruitment process. Yet your commitment and spirit remain key ingredients for your success.

This guide focuses on PhD candidates that will be employed by TU Delft. Are you considering hiring PhD candidates that want to pursue a PhD project with a scholarship or via another way of self-funding? Specific conditions and circumstances may apply to the selection and admission process. Contact the Graduate School for more information.
An overview of the Graduate Schools can be found via this link.

This document aims to provide a complete and detailed step-by-step guide. If you have previous recruitment experience and/or prefer a brief overview you may want to check the PhD Recruitment Tips and use this guide as a reference document.

One final tip before you start: don't rush through the preparation stage. These initial steps determine the return on investment of all your subsequent efforts.

Figure 1: Overview of the recruitment & selection process

- Describe the project
- Define the candidate profile
- Test your proposition
- Design the selection process

- Preselect applicants
- CV selection
- Interviewing candidates
- Decision making

Preparation   **Recruitment**   **Selection**   **Conclusion**

- Publish the vacancy text
- Use your network
- Monitor the quality & quantity of applicants
- Use additional tools if required

- Make a job offer
- Reject candidates
- Initiate onboarding
- Close the process

1. Preparation

1.1 Description of the project

Describing the project serves three goals as it:
- Helps you define the profile and selection criteria of the desired candidate.
- Communicates the impact, the *why*, of the research project, to motivate applicants.
- Clarifies the *how* and *what* of a project, providing insight into the daily activities of the position.

To submit a vacancy for publication online you need to download and complete the vacancy form. For the most recent version check the related documents on the intranet page "How to post a vacancy". As the vacancy holder you complete the vacancy form and submit the vacancy for publication. The following section focuses on defining the fields "job title", "teaser" and "job description".

In the vacancy text library, you can find several examples of job descriptions for PhD vacancies. The library is currently in development and only available in Dutch. However, there are example vacancies in English. These examples are intended as inspiration. You will notice that the examples start with a "teaser" describing the challenge and/or change and impact of the position. This trio helps you to focus on the *why* of the project, the bigger picture and long-term goals. For example:

> *"Enable the improvement of existing solar cells and discover new ways to harvest the sun's energy (challenge & change). As a PhD student in Physics at TU Delft you will address global energy and sustainability challenges (impact).*

Next, describe the *how* of the project. Explain, for example, how your department's expertise, tools, research area and network will enable the candidate to make a personal contribution to the larger goal and realize a change. This is also the part where you explain your specific research project's strategy and (tangible shorter-term) goal or products. For example:

> *In our department, we combine magic angle spinning nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) with optical laser technology to study the initial charge separation steps occurring during photosynthesis. We have in-house expertise in in vivo selective isotope labelling and isolation of photosynthetic protein complexes. Your challenge will be to use these techniques to study the electron densities of individual atoms in intact plant systems.*

Finally, clarify the *what* of the project. What type of activities will the PhD candidate be doing on the job? Specify which equipment, computer programmes, materials, colleagues, teams or partners the future PhD candidate will work with.

> *We have successfully studied initial charge separation in bacteria and photosystem I. Your project will focus on Photosystem II of higher plants and cyanobacteria. Your challenge will be to adapt current procedures to these more advanced and sensitive systems. You will use protein purification and selective isotope labelling techniques combined with solid-state NMR measurements, optical equipment and data analysis tools.*

Finally, create a vacancy title. The ideal title is clear, intriguing and informative, balancing information on the impact with more specific content information. For example, *PhD Position*

Climate Impact of Disruptive Aircraft Engine Technology. A strong title contains the search terms that your target audience will use to ensure that your vacancy pops up in search results and triggers a click-through. Keep it short, using a maximum of 150 characters. For example:

Don't write: *Doctoral Candidate on a project "Self-assembled microgels as rheology modifiers for formulation technologies" as part of MultiSMART*

Do write: *PhD Position Advanced Soft Matter - Self-assembling microgels for drug formulation technologies*

1.2 Definition of the candidate profile (selection criteria)

The candidate profile will be used to draft a selection strategy and write the "requirements" section of the vacancy text. When recruiting a PhD candidate the selection criteria will consist of two parts:
• Standard selection criteria as defined by Dutch law and/or the TU Delft Faculty Graduate School (FGS).
• Project-specific required knowledge, skills and competencies as defined by you, as the "vacancy holder".

Standard selection criteria

Dutch Master's degree or equivalent: For a PhD candidate to be admitted to the TU Delft Graduate School, a Dutch Master's degree from an academic university ("WO") or university of applied sciences ("HBO") is required. An equivalent foreign degree will also suffice. When in doubt whether certain credentials are admissible, please contact the Graduate School Office (graduateschool@tudelft.nl).

All diplomas will be checked at the end of the hiring process, before admission of the PhD candidate to the TU Delft Graduate School. In some cases, it may be possible to admit a PhD candidate without a Master's degree. Please contact the Graduate School Office to initiate this procedure but do keep in mind that special permission from the Board for Doctorates will be required.

English language skills: Demonstrated command of the English language has been required for admission as a PhD student to the TU Delft since 2022. IELTS or TOEFL certificates are excellent tools for assessing English language proficiency levels. Candidates can book the tests online. A minimum TOEFL total score of 100 and at least 21 points for each section is required. Alternatively, an IELTS total score of 7.0 and at least 6.5 points for each section sub-skill applies to all candidates wanting to pursue a PhD or Engineering Doctorate (ND) programme at TU Delft. Naturally, native speakers will be exempted from the English test requirement, as well as, in principle, non-native applicants who have obtained an English-taught Master's degree. Applicants are asked to indicate if they are exempted during the online application process. If a certificate is required, applicants can choose to upload the certificate or indicate that they will be able to hand in their certificate on their first working day at TU Delft. The admission offer letter to PhD candidates states that a IELTS or TOEFL certificate is a prerequisite. For details on the requirements, procedures and exceptions visit the Graduate School admission page.

Project specific requirements

For an entry position such as a PhD candidate, the tendency is to conclude that "anybody with an MSc degree in field X" may be fit for the job. Or it is assumed that applicants understand which fields qualify. But let's take a closer look and try to prevent your inbox from flooding with 50+ applicants that all have to be rejected. Making the selection criteria as specific as possible makes it easier for suitable candidates to find your vacancy. This is because smart, motivated job seekers will use specific search terms to find fitting vacancies. The more a vacancy seems to be an exact fit, the more likely the right applicant will apply. Do keep in mind that you are describing the desired level at *the start* of the PhD project to enable a steep learning curve during the project. The following paragraph will help you to define the ideal candidate profile.

Figure 2
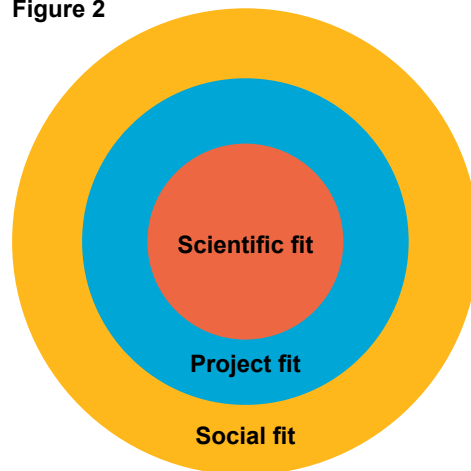
Defining the ideal candidate profile

The ideal candidate profile is three-tiered. At the core of the profile is the scientific fit (Figure 2). The second layer is the project fit and the outer layer is the social fit:

- **Scientific fit**: the academic **knowledge** and hard **skills** required.
- **Project fit:** the specific mix of **(soft) skills and competencies** needed to be successful in this project.
- **Social fit:** the **competencies**, values and personality traits required to fit within the department and team.

> **Box 1: Definitions of skill and competence**
>
> **Skill** = a proficiency developed through training or experience
>
> **Soft skill or transferable skill** = a skill that can be beneficial in any workplace and is less easy to assess via previous work experience and a written application.
>
> **Hard skill or technical skill** = a skill that is more job or task-specific and can assessed via earlier work experience, assignments and diploma's.
>
> **Competence** = a unique combination of knowledge, skills and attitude, which find their expression in outward behaviour and are key to a person's success in their job and career.

Scientific Fit: When constructing a profile, you work from the inside out. Start with the most straightforward category, which consists of knowledge and technical skills. Write down the educational background needed to comprehend the field of research and the scientific context of the project. If multiple educational directions fit, write for example:

> *"An MSc in a relevant subject, such as atmospheric sciences, (applied) physics, (applied) chemistry, aerospace engineering, or mathematics'*

The Bachelor's and Master's programmes offered by universities vary greatly around the world. Therefore, the level of independence and hands-on experience a graduate has gained is influenced by the university they attended. As a vacancy holder, you may not exclude graduates from certain universities in your vacancy text. However, you can include the required practical hands-on laboratory experience you desire as a must-have.

Also write down the general technical skills required. These are proficiencies developed through training or experience, such as software proficiency, languages and technical writing skills.

Project Fit: Add any technical skills required *at the start* of this PhD project. Examples include handling equipment X, engineering skills or data analysis. If applicable, specify the proficiency required such as: "user", "troubleshooter" or "technical expert".

Now list the less tangible, non-technical, soft skills required, starting with the most relevant ones for the project. Naturally, all projects benefit from good communication or project management skills but for some projects they are crucial for success. On the Working at TU Delft website, the required soft skills include teamwork, taking initiative and working in a results-oriented and systematic way. Examples of soft skills can be found in Box 2.

> **Box 2: examples of possible project specific soft skills**
>
> **Analytical thinking**
> The ability to separate a complex whole into its constituent parts in order to study these parts and their relations and come up with plans and solutions.
>
> **Conceptual thinking**
> The ability to identify patterns or connections between situations that are not obviously related, and to identify key or underlying issues in complex situations.
>
> **Creativity**
> The ability to come up with new/innovative ideas and concepts.
>
> **Project management**
> The ability to plan and organise the project as well as delegating and negotiating tasks among project members.
>
> **Presentation and communication**
> The ability to transfer an idea to others in an understandable and effective way.

Social Fit: Finally, ponder the most elusive category: the required competencies, values and personality type of the candidate? Competences are a unique combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, expressed in behaviours, which are key to a person's success in their job and career. Examples can be found in Box 3. The Competence Instrument for Dutch Universities is a handy tool to support you in determining the desired competencies. Check the behavioural indicators to make your competence tangible and combine this within a project-specific context. Ask, for example: "Which relationships will be characteristic for this PhD project?" Will the work include above-average teaching hours or supervising duties? Close collaboration within the group or interdisciplinary? Or will it be a highly autonomous, independent, stand-alone, project? Is the project strictly defined and straightforward or more vague? Another handy tool is the TU Delft leadership profile for personal leadership.

Box 3: examples of attitudes that will result in certain competences

Perseverance
The drive and determination to continue and finish a project.

Resilience
The ability to withstand adversity and bounce back from failure and difficult events.

Assertiveness
The ability to communicate effectively and stand up for one's point of view while respecting the rights and beliefs of others.

Autonomy/Independence
The ability and confidence to self-manage and execute tasks individually.

Working with others
The openness to feedback and input from others as well as the ability to collaborate, negotiate and influence others.

Supervising and coaching
The ability to transfer knowledge and inspire others.

Conclusion

You will now be able to construct a list of requirements. Restrict yourself to a maximum of 7 bullets of no more than 25 words each. The full list will include the must-haves, nice-to-haves and desired competencies.

Must-haves are essential to pass the first CV-selection round. Applicants that don't meet these requirements will be rejected. The must-haves also include the standard TU Delft selection criteria for PhD candidates discussed in paragraph 2.1.

Nice-to-haves are criteria that distinguish candidates. Refrain from listing too many, as this may put off suitable candidates. Clearly indicate must-haves and nice-to-haves in your text.

Social fit refers to a candidate's competencies and personal values. When describing soft skills or competencies, provide a context to make them meaningful. For example:

Don't write: *"You are collaborative and flexible and have good communication skills."*

Do write: *"You thrive in an interdisciplinary environment and can build and maintain relationships with medical professionals, technical experts and research staff."*

Finally, ask three control questions to check if your bullet list is complete and to the point:
- What are you looking for? How will you decide whether an applicant will be invited for an interview? Are these elements included as must-haves?
- Who is, or was, your most valued PhD candidate? Why? Would this person fit within your defined framework of soft skills, competencies and nice-to-haves?
- Check your profile with the other members of the selection committee. Do they think it is accurate and complete?

Congratulations, you have now completed the most important and challenging part of the recruitment process. Use your bullet list to complete the job requirements section of the vacancy format.

1.3 Test your proposition

Aspiring PhD candidates with a pro-active and self-confident attitude are active and selective job seekers. They won't merely look for a project that fits their scientific interests. They are looking for an attractive total package. This includes the research topic, ranking of the institute and department, salary & benefits, quality of living, training & development, workplace culture, etc. This type of candidate will make an active effort to find your vacancy text. However, to make your vacancy more attractive, you will need to leverage all you have to offer and communicate your unique selling points effectively.

When your recruitment assistant (RA) or management assistant (MA) submits the vacancy into the recruitment system using the correct template, most standard aspects of the salary and benefits will automatically be covered under the following fields: condition of employment, TU Delft or Faculty/University Corporate Office Department. But always check your vacancy after publication to ensure that you have included everything. Some things to consider are:
- TU Delft offers its PhD candidates a competitive salary and benefits - make sure you list it as a bullet in the vacancy text and in the designated right column on the TU Delft vacancies page.
- TU Delft is a strong brand, ranking varies across faculties yet is generally high.
- Quality of life in the Netherlands is excellent and the TU Delft Coming to Delft service team is highly appreciated for its support to new employees. With housing and practicalities, for example. While the services to early-career employees are more limited, the website does offer a lot of relevant information.
- The TU Delft Doctoral Education programme offers PhD candidates the opportunity to develop research skills, discipline-related skills and transferable skills.

The workplace culture is an often forgotten yet important aspect of your offer. How does your group distinguish itself? What are their shared values? Add this information to the job description section of the vacancy form to include it in the vacancy text. Be specific and honest. Don't just say your team is "highly collaborative" or "caring" but explain how.

For example:

> *"We believe innovative science requires continuous development, a healthy work-life balance and a collaborative team spirit. You will enrol in the TU Delft Graduate School programme to develop research skills, discipline-related skills and transferable skills. Every quarter we organize our "stay connected" group activities to foster connection. In addition, we encourage our people to take time for family, sports, holidays and relaxation to support their creativity and wellbeing."*

We also advise you to visit the web pages of your faculty, department and board. Job seekers who go the extra mile will check these pages to get an impression of current projects, the team and the culture. Employee stories, videos, vision and mission statements or photos of team celebrations will have a positive effect on the quality of applications.

MSc interns and applicants with strong social skills will notice whether the working culture of your department is supportive and pleasant. Invest in your team with TU Delft's employee programmes and training. Check out the Learning HUB, the Leadership Guide or contact our Talent and Development department. The clearer you and your colleagues are about why you enjoy working for your research group, the more this feeling will emanate from the vacancy text and during interviews.

Next to the active job seekers, there are plenty of talented MSc graduates that are more introverted. These individuals may put little effort into going out there to look for job opportunities. Because of their diligence, they may easily find a PhD project within their existing network. However, these Master's graduates may respond well to personal invitations to apply to your vacancy. We will talk more about addressing this group of latent job seekers in the use your network section.

Due to the inequality of opportunities and large differences in living standards around the world, we sadly also see Master's graduates who apply for every PhD position published on our website - sometimes for years on end. Our structured selection process and the recruitment system's templates will support you in respectfully rejecting these candidates without losing too much time.

1.4 Design the selection process

The time window to recruit top talent is limited as these professionals often receive multiple job offers. In addition, many PhD positions may have 50+ applicants. This demanding a straightforward selection process, which is achieved by:
- Being clear about the application procedure.
- Proper usage of the recruitment system software.
- Agreement on the selection criteria, timing and means of assessment.

Specifying the application process
Before publishing your vacancy, specify which documents you wish to receive from applicants. In addition to a CV and cover letter you may ask for a Master's thesis abstract. To manage expectations, also include information on selection tools used in the interview stage. Describe the application process in the Application procedure section. Examples of selection tools include:
- Diplomas and certificates.

- Previous work (*e.g.,* CV, Master's thesis (abstract), publications, references).
- Interviews (pre-selection by phone or video call and face-to-face on-site).
- Assignments such as:
  - Trial presentation: a 10–15-minute presentation on previous work or a review of specific papers. This supports the analysis of communication skills, scientific understanding and analytical and conceptual thinking skills.
  - Trial exercises: *such as* complex calculations, writing exercises or exam questions to test scientific knowledge, technical writing skills, mastery of programme languages, software proficiency or understanding of specific scientific equipment. A guided tour of the laboratory can also clarify a candidate's knowledge and interest. Pay attention to the questions being asked.

The application package in the recruitment system will include all the information. Don't offer the possibility to send applications by email to your inbox. GDPR compliance needs to ensure that applicants use the designated apply button and online application form. This will also ensure that applicants won't be overlooked or forgotten.

The recruitment system

At TU Delft we use a recruitment system called Talent Link, which allows you to:
- Guarantee the privacy (GDPR) of applicants, while easily sharing data with internal and external evaluators.
- Ensure a fast, transparent, and streamlined selection process facilitating a good candidate experience and optimal chances of a high-quality hire.

If this is the first time you are hiring a new employee, you will receive access to the recruitment system after submitting the vacancy form. The system permission required will be assigned based on the data you include in the selection procedure information section.

As the vacancy holder, you are responsible for the outcome and management of the recruitment process. The recruitment support team will assist you. Depending on your faculty's work agreements, this team may include a (central) recruitment assistant (RA) and/or (decentral) department/management assistant (MA). The RA or MA manages the operational and administrative aspects of the recruitment process, such as submitting your vacancy into the system, rejecting candidates and guarding deadlines. The central TU Delft Recruitment Service Department is relatively young (2020) and still has frequent procedural updates. Consult your RA or MA for the latest work agreements for your department.

If your department already collaborates with a dedicated RA, he/she/they will schedule a process meeting to talk you through the operational and administrative aspects of the recruitment process. Quick reference cards, manuals and instruction videos on how to use the recruitment system are available on the intranet. If you run into any issues, please contact the Recruitment Service team via recruitmentservices@tudelft.nl

Timing and means of selection

Disagreement and ambiguity can get in the way of achieving a streamlined selection process. Always ensure optimal alignment within the selection committee and with your MA or RA. Use Table 1 for guidance.

During the pre-screening phase, the recruitment system will automatically generate a complete application package. As the vacancy holder, you can now check the CVs and letters of applicants and add your comments to the comment section. Obvious mismatches can then be identified and rejected later.

Multiple people are usually involved during the CV selection phase. Share the checklist and score chart to ensure alignment between the desired profile and the selection strategy. Your checklist will be based on the must-haves and tangible nice-to-haves of the candidate profile. This checklist will minimise the chance of unconscious bias or process delay due to CV reviewers. Find out more about how to prepare a scoring chart in paragraph 3.1.

Table 1: Ensuring a clear selection process

Process step	Criteria	Assessment/Selection Tool	Action holder
Pre-screening	Completeness of the required application documents (CV, letter, diploma, visa, working permit, X, X)	"Candidate pack" and submission details in the Recruitment system	Automated in Recruitment System
	Validity MSc diploma	CV + knowledge of the vacancy holder on suitable educational institutes. Before final admission the validity will be checked by the Graduate School	VH + Graduate School
	English language requirements when applicable (non-native speakers without an English-taught Master's degree)	Minimal TOEFL* score of 100 or IELTS of 7.0 per sub-skill. Before final admission the English language criteria will be checked by the Graduate School.	VH + Graduate School
	General match (outstanding, sufficient or no match)	CV and motivation letter	VH
CV selection	Must-haves scientific/project fit Nice-to-haves scientific/project fit	CV CV + Letter + Thesis abstract	VH + additional CV reviewer(s)
Interviews	Soft skills Competences Social & cultural fit	STAR(R) method Assignments	VH + selection committee members
Post-interviews	Accuracy of information shared in CV, letter and during interviews Doubts	Reference call	VH

2. Recruitment

2.1 Publish the vacancy text

The standard time for a vacancy posting to stay active is 5 weeks. You are expected to provide feedback to all applicants within two weeks after the closing date. All current procedures with applicants have to be closed before extending an application deadline. Therefore, avoid closing dates during the festive season or summer holidays. Even if you think you already have the best possible candidate for your position, you are still obliged to publish your vacancy online to allow others to apply. In such cases, you may shorten the publication time to 2 weeks, for instance.

After submitting and authorizing your vacancy, it will appear on:
• TU Delft's internal (intranet) vacancy page
• TU Delft's external vacancy page
• Academic Transfer
• TU Delft's LinkedIn job page

Your vacancy can now be found by job seekers who are actively looking for vacancies and using search terms matching your vacancy text on the specific platforms mentioned above. This still excludes candidates such as:
• MSc graduates not actively looking for a job outside of their existing network.
• Job seekers who don't have TU Delft on their radar.
• Job seekers who don't use LinkedIn or Academic Transfer.

The so-called "post and pray" strategy is not always sufficient to attract the best candidate. We highly recommend that you always use your network to attract suitable candidates.

2.2 Use your network

There are some relatively easy things you can do to boost the exposure and appeal of your vacancy. Invite suitable candidates you know through internships, classes or collaborations to apply. Share the vacancy in your department newsletter or weekly stand-up and ask people for names of potential candidates. Take the lead in inviting these people to apply. You can use both LinkedIn and the TU Delft intranet to find ways to contact these people. Candidates who are notified of a vacancy via their network often turn out to be the best employees.

Ask your faculty's communication officer if any additional communication channels are available, such as monitors or bulletin boards in the hallways of relevant faculties.

Spread the word about your PhD position when you visit (job) fairs and conferences or give presentations, share research posters or speak to people in your research area during (conference) lunches. Ask your direct colleagues to support you by providing a ready-made slide that they can include in their PowerPoint presentations or an informative banner to include in research posters. You can also ask the management assistant or department secretary of research groups you collaborate(d) with to share the vacancy in their newsletter. Specify that you would appreciate people sharing the vacancy with possible candidates or send you the names of qualifying Master's graduates.

How to use LinkedIn to share your vacancy

LinkedIn is an effective social media platform to use for recruitment purposes. If you don't have a LinkedIn profile, we recommend you create one when you start recruiting. Including a profile picture, sharing your position and field of expertise and selecting TU Delft as your current employer will make you more successful as a recruiter on LinkedIn.

Start inviting current and previous colleagues to activate your network of first-degree connections. Invite some of TU Delft's talent acquisition specialists, as they have large and relevant networks. The magic of social media is that your reach will swiftly increase via your second-degree connections (the connections of your connections).

All vacancies submitted for publication online are automatically posted on the TU Delft LinkedIn page. Boost the number of people who read your vacancy by sharing it as a post on your LinkedIn page. Your vacancy will then appear in the timeline, or the homepage, of everyone in your network. Subsequently, it will find its way to your 2nd-degree connections and beyond. Below, we provide a step-by-guide that will take no more than 15 minutes. Where you are asked to add a personal note, please write 3 to 6 lines about:
1. The challenge and impact of the position.
2. The team or culture.
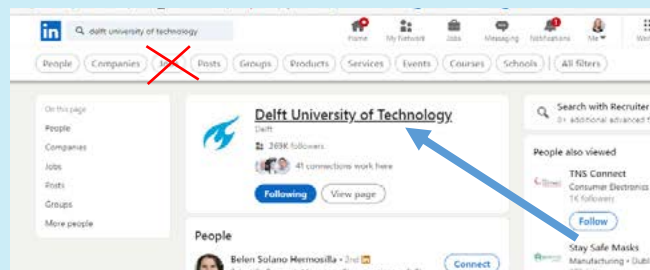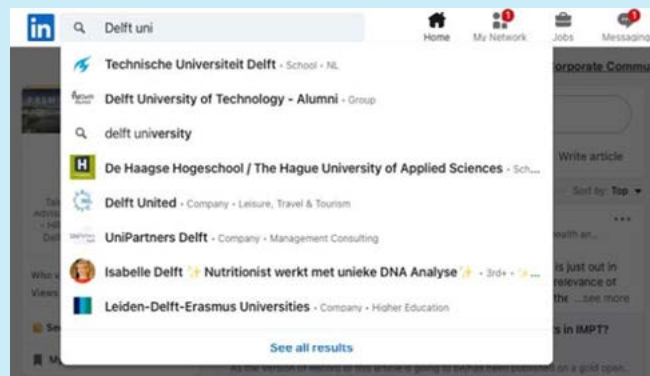3. And add a call to action such as: "Apply now or DM me for more information."

Don't forget to respond to reactions.

Step 1.
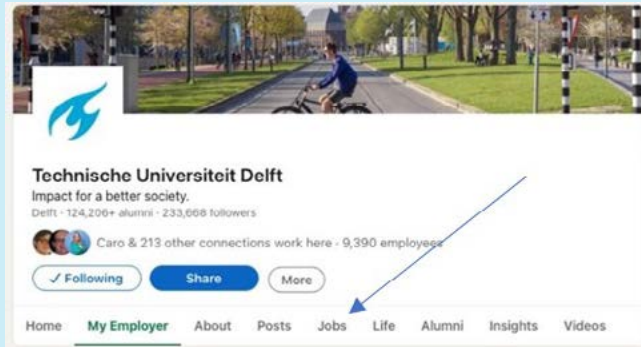
Go to LinkedIn.com and log in to your profile.

Search for Delft University of Technology in the top search box and click on our company page.

Make sure you click on the TU Delft page before going to jobs (do not click the general jobs button).
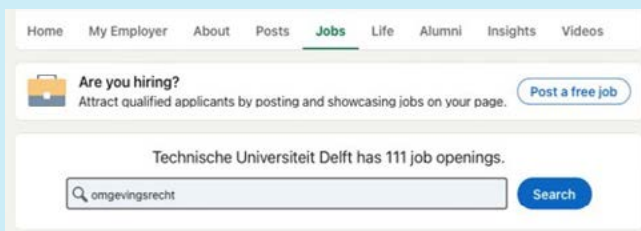
Step 2.

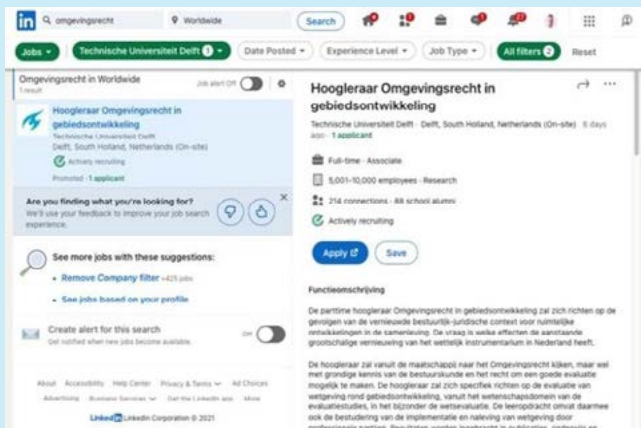Click on the 'Jobs' tab to go to our Jobs page.

Step 3.

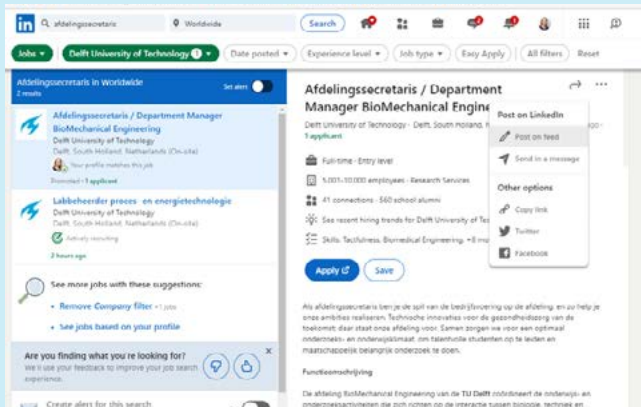Enter the vacancy title in the search box and hit search.

Step 4.

If you see multiple vacancies, choose the correct one from the list on the left and click the arrow at the top right to share the vacancy.

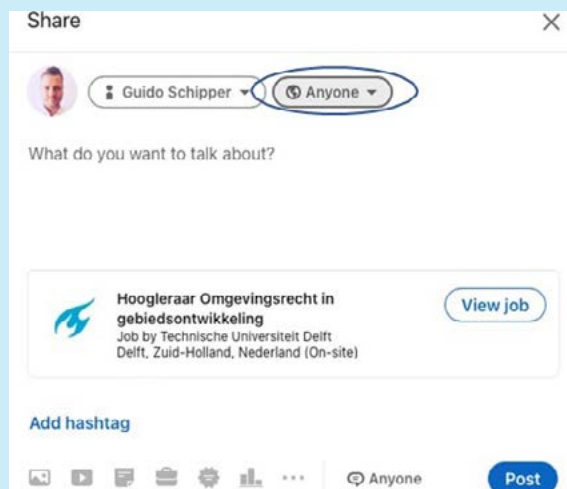## Step 5.

Click 'Post on feed'

Step 6.

Add a personal note in the "What do you want to talk about" field. For maximum effect, include: 1) the challenge & impact, 2) something personal about the team and 3) a call to action.

Optional: to give an impression of the team, tag colleagues by using @[their name] to create hyperlinks to their profiles.

Add relevant hashtags (#) to increase visibility. Use your list of must-haves/field of research for inspiration.
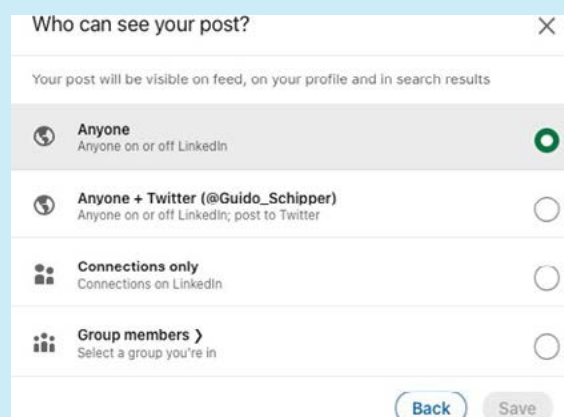
Click 'Anyone' if you wish to change posting settings.

Step 7.

When you click 'Anyone' you can decide who sees your post. For maximum reach, choose 'Anyone'. There is also an option to pot Twitter if you are active on Twitter.
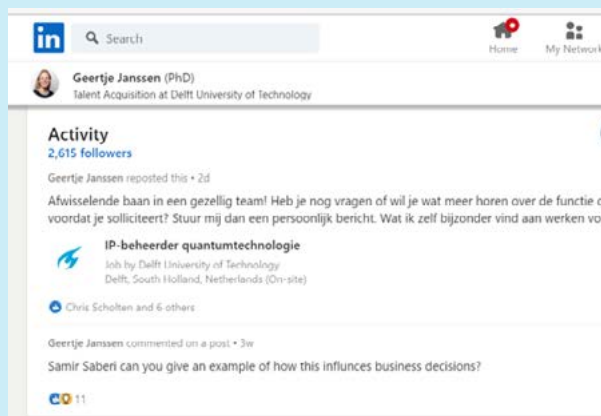
Once your settings and message are correct: hit 'Back' and press 'Post'.

Step 8.

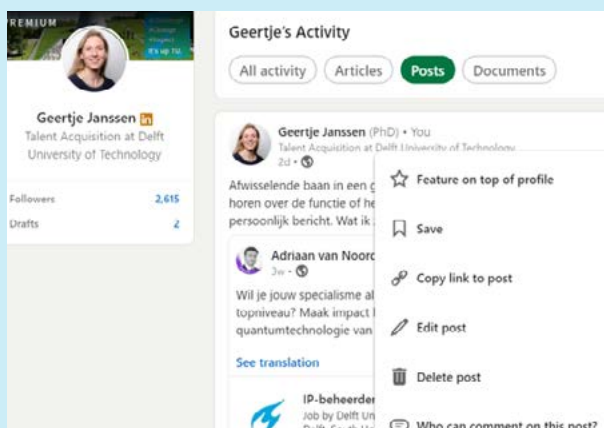Click the 'Home' button and subsequently click on your picture to return to your page.

Scroll down and press 'Show all activity'.

Step 9.

Your latest post will appear at the top. Navigate to the dots (top right) and choose 'Copy link to post'

Share the link with your colleagues and ask them to like or share your post.

Example of how your post may look like if you have followed the steps correctly:

✓ Profile picture included
✓ Informative headline with your title, field of expertise and current employer
✓ Personal note including the three suggested building blocks
✓ Relevant hashtags #
✓ Link to the vacancy including the title of the vacancy and the TU Delft logo

2.3 Monitor the quality & quantity of applicants

Once your vacancy has been published, frequently monitor the quality and quantity of applications in Talent Link, our recruitment system. This will prevent you from losing outstanding candidates or having to hastily review the bulk of the candidates after the closing date. If you have trouble with the system interface, use the reference cards and instruction video library or contact the Recruitment Service team at recruitmentservices@tudelft.nl. You will receive a notification by email when candidates apply. As the vacancy holder, you can do a pre-selection before initiating the CV review with multiple reviewers. Check the CV and cover letter and decide if:

1. The candidate should be rejected based on your list of must-haves. Briefly explain the reason in the comments field. Your MA or RA will reject the candidate later.
2. The candidate meets the minimum requirements. Write your notes in the comments field based on your score chart. Wait until the final application date and feedback from the other CV reviewers before taking further action.
3. The candidate seems to be an exceptional fit based on your must-haves and nice-to-haves. Align with the other CV reviewers, if required, and invite the candidate to participate in the next step of your selection process (*such as a* phone call/video call/interview/assignment). Depending on your faculty's work agreement, your RA or MA will schedule the appointments. You are not allowed to make a job offer before the final application date but you can start the interviews.

If you haven't received any promising applications by the closing date, ask for assistance. Depending on your faculty's work agreement, you can contact the talent acquisition specialist (TAS) either directly or through the HR advisor. The TAS will support you with additional recruitment tools. For an overview of talent acquisition specialists, visit the Posting a vacancy page on our intranet.

2.4 Use additional tools when required

If your efforts haven't resulted in quality applications and your vacancy posting window has expired, it's time to get additional support. Together with the TAS, you will analyse the performance of your job posting. Furthermore, you can benefit from our in-house experience and access to recruitment data to determine the recruitment feasibility and optimal strategy for your position. Based on the results, next steps may include:

- Re-writing the vacancy text, possibly with the support of a professional writer and software tools for gender-inclusive texts.
- Using job marketing (sponsored promotion) on multiple platforms.
- Pro-active searches on platforms such as LinkedIn or Research Gate.
- Launching a job marketing campaign when you are recruiting multiple PhDs.

We won't go into more detail, as your TAS will walk you through various strategies. Ask for assistance before republishing your vacancy to allow for adjustments in the vacancy text.

3. Selection

In this section, we will guide you through:
- CV review
- Screening by phone or video call
- Full selection interviews
- Post interview selection
- Making a decision

3.1 CV review

The goal of the CV review stage is to select candidates that match the desired profile *on paper*. It is important to align with your RA or MA about when to review candidates. You will receive a notification the moment a new application is submitted. However, you will only be able to use the systems review options such as the REJECT and PROCEED buttons after the MA/RA has moved the candidate to the CV review stage. Multiple people can be included in a CV review. As the vacancy holder, you can add notes in the comments section of the candidate file before the CV review.

It is important to work with a checklist and predefined scoring strategy during the CV review stage (the assessment of a candidate based on the entire application package). This may include a Master's thesis abstract, a list of publications and a cover letter. If there are a large number of applicants, you will want to make a first selection based on a single, must-have criterion. Next, you can use your full scoring chart. Your checklist and scoring strategy for the CV review stage may look like the example in Table 2.

Table 2: Example of checklist and scoring strategy

Requirement	Importance	Means of assessment	Scoring strategy
MSc in relevant engineering subject such as: - (applied) physics, - biophysics - mechanical engineering	Must	Diploma Master Thesis subject	Yes = GO No = NO-GO
Experience with cell culturing	Must	Practical lab courses Practical internships	High = 5 Low = 1 Absent = NO-GO
Expertise in integrated photonic microchips, advanced materials and cell mechanobiology	Nice-to-have	Practical lab courses Practical internships Theoretical courses MSc/BSc thesis	High = 3 Low = 1 Not clear = ? Absent = 0
Experience/knowledge of cell mechanics and bioprinting	Nice-to-have	Practical lab courses Practical internships Theoretical courses MSc/BSc thesis	High = 3 Low = 1 Not clear = ? Absent = 0
Python programming skills	Nice-to-have	Enlisted as skill on CV MSc/BSc thesis Internships	High = 3 Low = 1 Not clear = ? Absent = 0
Demonstrated interest in design and modelling, fabrication and experimenting	Must	Cover letter Subjects internship/thesis Practical courses	High = 3 Low = 1 Absent = 0 double-check in later stage

In this example, the profiles that pass the CV review stage will have scores ranging between 1 and 17. If you have multiple questions about a specific candidate, you can either ask them for clarification or put the candidate on hold to focus on other profiles first. Minimize the candidates you put on hold. Stick to the checklist and be aware of biased conclusions. For example, CV gaps are often not explained by applicants. The tendency might be to assume the negative and reject these candidates. However, there are many good reasons for CV gaps.

If you end up with too many similar scores you can schedule 10-minute phone calls with these candidates to get a better impression. Be aware that *any unstructured conversation with a candidate has a negligible predictive value of their future success*. Always prepare your question(s) before any interview and stick to the questions to maximize the predictive value and lower the risk of biased decisions.

Candidates that won't be interviewed must be rejected within 2 weeks after the application deadline. Email templates are available in the recruitment system and can be sent by the RA or MA. After candidates have been interviewed, it's best for the vacancy holder to send rejections by email or phone. Find guidelines and tips in paragraph 4.2.

3.2 Screening interviews by phone

Before scheduling on-site interviews, you may choose to do a 15-20 minute screening by phone or video call. You will be surprised by some candidates and disappointed by others. These short calls are ideal to:
- Double check the practical requirements, such as a candidate's willingness and possibility to relocate to the Netherlands, as well as their salary expectations and availability (*e.g.,* Are you in an interview round already for other applications?).
- Test a key skill or understanding by asking a technical question such as: "Could you elaborate on your experience with cell culture?" "Which steps did you follow, and what techniques did you apply?" "How many cycles did you do or how many batches did you produce?" "On what scale did you work?" "What was your main challenge?" "How did you resolve it?" "What is the key learning of your experience with X?"
- Get a better impression of a candidate's motivation and provide more information to level expectations. Simply ask "What made you apply for this project at TU Delft?" "Why not a similar project at XXX?" "What other jobs have you applied to?" "What would your definition of success be if you would do this project at TU Delft?"

3.3 Full interviews on-site or via video call

The goal of a full interview is to predict if a candidate will be successful at TU Delft in this project and within the current team by gaining an understanding of the candidate's:
- Scientific & project fit: the candidate's technical skills and in-depth knowledge via assignments and technical interview questions.
- Social Fit: observing the candidate's interaction with the team and environment. Asking for feedback using competency-based interview techniques.

A selection interview is imperative to assess a candidate's competencies and their cultural & social match, even if there is only one candidate. We strongly advise having potential PhD candidates come to the Netherlands at least once before making your final decision. Discuss

when to invite the candidates with your RA/MA. Include a phone number in the invitation that candidates can call in case of unexpected delays. Include detailed parking and directions to the faculty and interview room. Ensure sufficient space between interviews to avoid applicants running into their competitors. Assign the selection committee and prepare the interview agenda and interview questions before the interview.

The selection committee

The selection committee should consist of at least two people, to avoid biased decisions and blind spots. If possible, try to include a senior staff member and someone neutral, who doesn't have a vested interest in the hire. For example, include your department head and the promoter of the future PhD candidate. Make sure the committee includes people of different genders to facilitate equal opportunities for all candidates. Diversity and inclusion is important to us at TU Delft. Find out how inclusive you are by completing this test. There are guidelines for creating the ideal the selection committee in some groups or departments. Check this with your deputy head of department or your HR advisor.

Appoint a committee chairman who leads the interviews and is responsible for the final decision. Usually, this will be the vacancy holder. You may also decide to divide the assessment of the project, scientific and social fit. You could, for instance, ask your HR advisor, department manager or TAS to assess the social fit (competencies, values etc.).

Ensure all committee members agree on the list of must-haves and nice-to-haves that you created in the preparation phase. Be clear about the interview agenda, the selection strategy and the interview questions.

Interview agenda

Here is an example of an interview agenda:

1. Preparation (before the arrival of the candidate)
• Ask the interviewers to be present 10 minutes before the start of the interview.
• Briefly discuss the candidate's application package and CV review score.
• Briefly address the desired profile.
• Clarify the roles and focus of each interviewer. Decide who will be the chair and who will keep an eye on the time.

2. Introduction
• Welcome the candidate.
• Break the ice by asking about their travels, etc.
• Provide them with something to drink, and seat them away from the glare of direct light.
• Introduce the selection committee members.

3. Outline
• Explain the goal, duration, structure/agenda of the meeting
• Explain the next steps in the selection process.

4. Introduction TU Delft, department & project
• Explain the PhD trajectory (Go/No-Go, Graduate School).
• Describe the department and its organisational chart.
• Talk about the background, goal and nature of the project.

5. Introduction & motivation candidate
- Questions could include:
- Can you tell us something about yourself?
- What made you apply for this job?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What are you looking forward to about working on this project?
- What has been the best moment in your educational career so far?

6. Content & Competence related questions
- Ask technical and competency questions and make notes on the scoring chart.
- Discuss outcomes and reflection of assignments and tests with the candidate.

7. Practical expectations
Questions could include:
- How do you feel about working in the Netherlands?
- Describe your family situation?
- Are there any conditions or obstacles for you to move here and start working?
- Do you have an impression of the cost of living in the Netherlands?
- Did you visit the Coming to Delft website?
- Do you want to have a career in academia?
- What do you look for in an employer and job?
- Are you currently in the interview stage with other applications?
- Do you expect or have you received other job offers? When do you have to decide?
- When can you start?

8. Questions from the candidate
- Make sure to reserve 10 minutes for questions from the candidate.

9. Next steps
- Explain terms and conditions that have not been addressed.
- Explain the next steps and when you will be in touch again.
- Thank the candidate.

10. Evaluation
- *Before sharing their impressions* of the candidate, selection committee members must finalise their scoring charts and notes.
- Discuss whether the candidate matches the project and social fit.

**Table 3: Translating abstract criteria into observed behaviour and tangible results**

Requirement	Measurable criteria (observed behaviour, skills or tangible output)
MSc in relevant subject such as (applied) physics, biophysics or mechanical engineering	• MSc Diploma in a specific relevant area.
Sufficient English language skills	• Specific IELTS or TOEFL results in case of an application for a PhD candidate position. In case of e.g. a Management Assistant position for example a writing assignment in English with a maximum of X errors.
Sufficient comprehension of the field of _e.g._ biophysics	• For PhD candidates for example: Ability to understand and use scientific papers in discussion, experimental design and research strategy. For technician for example: Ability to level with researchers about the goal of a their measurement.
Mastery of a technical skill _e.g._:	
Experience with cell culturing	• Ability to quickly gain required skills to independently prepare and perform experiments on scale X and prepare type Y samples. Demonstrated for example by: 1. The ability to explain the steps required to prepare or execute an experiment. 2. Provide examples of typical challenges and lessons learned when using this specific technique. 3. Interpret data output 4. Ask relevant questions during a lab tour 5. Being able to name key parts of equipment and their function during a visit to the lab. 6. Ability to provide details of previous experience for example in terms of number of batches produced, scale, temperature etc.
Proficient in Microsoft Office and Excel	• Ability to produce and revise documents in Word and Excel. Demonstrated for example by: 1. Editing a given text within a given timeframe. 2. Executing a relevant assignment succesfully using Excel.
Soft skill _e.g._:	
good presentation skills;	• Ability to present a presentation in fluent English and answer questions adequately.
ability to set priorities	• When given a list of multiple tasks and limited resources for completion the candidate is able to identify and prioritize the most important task.
Competence, _e.g._ Self-reflection	• Shows understanding of own strengths and weaknesses. • Regularly evaluates the own approach and considers ways of improving or modifying it. • Tries to improve weaknesses by modifying own behaviour, position or methods. • Shows an understanding of their own cultural background, standards and values and the effect these have on others.
General Motivation	• Asks follow up questions and actively looks to expand his/her understanding. • Eyes light up when speaking about the topic or tone of voice becomes animated. • Made an effort prior to the job interview to find available information on internet or via current network.
Social and cultural fit	• Seems at ease after settling in the conversation and responds natural and adequately in interaction with others.

Selection strategy

To formulate the right questions and obtain more objective assessments, translate your previously defined list of requirements into observed behaviour and tangible output. For example, it is easier to decide whether a candidate is able to convey the core message and structure of a story than assessing their presentation skills. More examples of these translations can be found in Table 3 (above).

Now find a structured way to rank candidates. For example, ask each selection committee member to assign scores to tangible selection criteria ranging from low to high or 1 to 5. Systematically ranking multiple candidates on the same criteria provides more insight into how candidates compare to each other so you can reach an objective decision. Ask all candidates the same questions in the same order to minimise biased decisions. Immediately score the answers during the interview. Wait to share your thoughts about candidates until every selection committee member has finalised their scoring chart. When comparing candidates, score relative to the performance of the candidates you have assessed earlier (see Figure 3 below). An example of a scoring chart can be found in Table 4. Finally, when comparing candidates, it is best to discuss their performance per criteria as opposed to judging per candidate.

Figure 3: Scoring fictional candidates David, Kavita and Amal relative to each other to minimise bias.
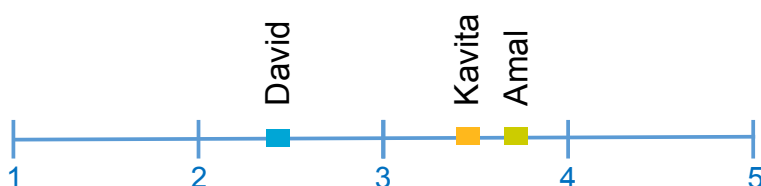
Table 4: Example of a scoring chart

Date:
Name candidate:
Name interviewer:

Criteria	Observations/Notes	Score
Understands the reading material and is able to contribute to a scientific discussion on the subject.		1 2 3 4 5
Able to prepare a professional presentation, convey the core message and structure the story.		1 2 3 4 5
Can explain the subsequent steps in performing technical procedure X or using program Y for a purpose Z.		1 2 3 4 5
Shows real understanding of own strengths and weaknesses.		1 2 3 4 5
Shows enthusiasm about the topic e.g. by asking follow up questions / sparkling eyes / animated speech.		1 2 3 4 5
After settling into the conversation candidate appears at ease and interacts natural and adequately with interviewer.		1 2 3 4 5

Interview questions

To assess the skills and competencies of a candidate, you can use a well-recognised way of interviewing, called the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result & Reflection) method. It is based on the idea that previous behaviour is a better indication of future behaviour than hypothetical situations. The STAR method gives insight into future behaviour by asking about:

- A **situation** from the recent past
- A defined role or **task**
- The actual behaviour, or **action**
- A proven and clear **result & reflection**

It works best if the candidate provides plenty of details so that you can envision their example. Make sure they refer to a specific example by zooming in on one single point in time and space. Hence prevent "every time I" or "always when". Ask questions about the different stages such as:

Situation
- Can you explain the situation?
- Who was involved?

Task
- What was your specific task or role?
- What was the (formal) goal?
- What did you want to achieve?

Action
- What did you say?
- What did you do?
- What was your contribution?
- What was your role in the team and who else was on the team?

Result and reflect
- What was the result?
- What effect did you have?
- What would you change in the future?
- What did you learn?

Example

The competence you want to test: perseverance

S: can you give an example of a situation during your studies or in your private life where you wanted to give up, but persevered?

T: Can you explain what you wanted to achieve?

A: What did you do to achieve your goal?

R: Did it work? Would you do the same in the future? What did you learn from this?

You can also reverse the question: Can you give an example of a situation in which you did not persevere, why not, etc?

Cultural & Social Match

Surveys show that of the newly hired employees that leave within the first year of employment, more than half of these departures are caused by a lack of cultural and social compatibility, or social fit. These employees don't feel a sense of belonging within their new work environment. Therefore, even if a candidate fits all the technical requirements and competencies but there are concerns about their social fit, you might want to reconsider hiring this candidate. Unfortunately, the social fit is difficult to assess during the selection process and is susceptible to bias. Optimise the process by:

- Booking a hotel in the city centre for foreign candidates and asking one of their potential future colleagues to meet them at the hotel and walk with them to the TU Delft. This creates an opportunity for an informal chat and lets the candidate experience their potential new environment.
- Observe how the candidate interacts with everyone at TU Delft during their visit. Collect input from everyone who met the candidate during their visit.
- Ask the candidate about their impression of the country, culture and working environment at the end of the visit and one or two days later. Don't hesitate to voice your observations to break the ice and set the tone for an honest discussion.
- Ask what are the expectations about working in the Netherlands and to indicate possible obstacles to relocate to the Netherlands.

3.4 Post Interview

Reference calling

Ask your future PhD candidate for one or more references from their Master's thesis supervisor, for instance. Contacting these references can give you insight into a candidate's experience, organisational skills and the quality of their work. Be aware that in some cultures it's considered inappropriate to give negative feedback. To circumvent this, ask about their experience with the candidate instead of asking what they think of the candidate.

Basic guidelines for a valuable reference call:
- Start by introducing yourself and state the purpose of your call.
- Confirm whether it's a convenient time to talk.
- Briefly describe the position (field of expertise, core goals, most important techniques).
- Confirm the relationship between the referent and the candidate.
- Verify basic duties such as internship topics, products, duties and dates of assignments/ internships.
- Ask your project-specific questions about knowledge, skills and competencies (e.g., time management, technical experience, and content of theoretical or practical courses).
- Ask for examples when the reference offers an opinion.
- Be consistent. Ask the same questions about all final candidates and weigh the information equally; what disqualifies one should be the basis for disqualifying others.

Questions could include:
- What was the nature and length of your relationship with the candidate?
- Which duties and responsibilities were assigned to the candidate?
- Did they complete them satisfactorily?
- Did they go above and beyond what was required without being asked?
- What were the candidate's strengths as an employee/intern/student?
- What would you consider as the ideal next step for this candidate? Why?
- Would you hire or want to work with the candidate again? Why?
- Why did they leave the position? (if applicable).
- Is there anything else I should take into consideration before I hire this candidate?

Trial period

Closely observe your new hire during the first few weeks on the job. Poor social fit will usually become apparent during their daily interpersonal interactions, working on the job and will be reflected in the general well-being of your new colleague. Don't hesitate to voice your concerns as this is in the best interest of both the employee and employer. Ask your HR advisor for assistance. PhD candidates start on an 18 months contract. A GO/NO-GO evaluation will be scheduled after 12 months.

3.5 Making a decision

A PhD project is a big commitment from both you and the PhD candidate. Making the wrong decision in the selection phase can cost you a lot of time and money and impact your job satisfaction. Therefore, it may be smart to repeat the recruitment or selection process if you end up with a candidate who doesn't seem to fit with the competence, project or social level. The more structured you question and score candidates, the easier it will be to make a final decision. Yet, no matter how much experience you gain, it will remain a very difficult task. TU Delft offers extensive courses on candidate selection and decision-making. Visit the Learning HUB and consult your HR advisor if you need advice on which training would suit you best.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Making a job offer

At the end of the selection procedure, you will either want to make a job offer or reject a candidate. Before rejecting your second-best candidate, wait to see if your preferred candidate accepts your offer. You will prepare an offer with your HR advisor. Don't make promises to a candidate beforehand. The workflow of making an offer differs per faculty. Check your faculty's work agreements on https://intranet.tudelft.nl/-/recruitment-system.

When you have the offer ready, collect the following details before calling the candidate:
- Details about the contract, such as duration, starting date, salary, working hours and contact details for follow-up questions.
- An indication of when the candidate will receive the contract and additional files, if applicable.
- If you are hiring an international candidate, provide the URL of the website of the Coming to Delft department and a brief introduction of their services.
- Stipulate when the candidate will receive information about the onboarding process.
- A brief introduction to the Graduate School and the mentor programme.
- Ask your department's management assistant to send the job offer by email and ask for a written reply from the candidate. You will find job offer email templates in the recruitment system. Next, the contract will be drafted and sent to the candidate via MyHR.

4.2 Rejecting candidates

Once your preferred candidate has accepted the job offer, it's time to reject your 2nd best or silver candidate(s). Rejecting candidates after the interview stage is preferably done by phone or face-to-face. This is the responsibility of the vacancy holder and not an easy task. These candidates have invested time and energy in the application process and have to be treated with respect and care. Furthermore, keep in mind that every interaction with a candidate can either harm or improve TU Delft's employer brand and that of your research department.

When delivering bad news, please ensure you:
- Do not postpone it. Get it done before the weekend whenever possible. The candidate will be expecting a follow-up and will feel disappointed if they haven't heard from you. These candidates will share a bad experience with their peers. This could harm your reputation as an employer within the highly specific network you both operate in.
- Be as clear as possible. A clear selection strategy will help you to explain why the candidate was not selected for the position. Vague and general feedback like "the other candidate performed better in the interview" or "the other candidate has more relevant experience" can stir strong negative emotions.
- Stick to sharing actual observations and refrain from definitive conclusions about a candidate's abilities. You don't know a candidate's true potential. Nevertheless, you do have to make a decision based on the impressions collected during the selection process. Don't say "Your presentation skills are insufficient". Do say: "During your presentation to the group we saw you struggling to answer questions. In addition, 4 out of the 5 people in the audience, couldn't reproduce the core of your message."

More guidelines on delivering bad news in a positive way:

1. Start with the announcement: "Hello Tristan, I am calling about your application to the position of PhD candidate. Is this a good time to talk?"
2. Share the message. Be clear, factual and concise. This will reduce the likelihood of a candidate experiencing anger. For example: "Unfortunately, I have bad news. We have decided not to make you an offer for this position. The main reason is….."
3. Pause and listen. You may also ask the candidate "How does this makes you feel?" Don't guess how the candidate feels. When an emotion is shared or visible, acknowledge it. "I can hear that you are disappointed/upset and I understand".
4. If a candidate feels sad or disappointed, this is a healthy part of the process of letting expectations go. Allow space for the candidate to regain their balance. Don't disempower the candidate by feeling sorry for them.
5. If a candidate feels angry, don't take anything personally. Stay calm. Anger can be beneficial for the candidate, too. Don't try to explain your reasoning during the peak of an emotion. Let the candidate know that you understand their reaction and allow them time to process. If a candidate is very upset, guard your boundaries. In this case, you can kindly end the conversation by stating that you will be in touch again the next day to answer any remaining questions. Always follow-up on your promise.
6. Once the peak of the emotion has passed, again offer your fact-based explanation and answer any questions. Don't alter your initial explanation. Acknowledge any emotions. Sometimes, you will have to repeat your answer several times.

4.3 On-boarding

When you have hired a PhD candidate, celebrate your success. The on-boarding phase starts the moment a candidate accepts the offer. Check in with your new colleague during the period between accepting the offer and their first day of work. Make sure you offer a pleasant experience to your new hire, making them feel welcome and appreciated. Involve your team in the on-boarding process.

4.4 Closing the vacancy

To ensure compliance with GDPR, remove all candidate data from your laptop and personal files. Finally, ensure that your MA or RA closes the vacancy in the recruitment system. This is done by changing the job status from open to closed/filled and adjusting the applicant status from your new hire to 'offer accepted' and that of the other applicants to 'rejected'. This is important to ensure an up-to-date overview of current vacancies and collect valuable recruitment data from your faculty.