

Recommendation by the
18th General Meeting of the
German Rectors' Conference
on 12 May 2015
in Kaiserslautern

**Managing Cooperative
Doctoral Degree
Programmes**

HRK German Rectors' Conference

The Voice of the Universities

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I. Preamble

One of the key issues in the relationship between the two biggest Member Groups – Universities and Equivalent Higher Education Institutions – is the ability to confer doctoral degrees as a unique selling point.

II. Initial situation

The task assigned to the universities and universities of applied sciences in federal state legislation is the starting point for discussing the entitlement to confer doctoral degrees and the inclusion of universities of applied sciences. This task has changed as the university landscape has started to differentiate. Universities have been given the task of cultivating and developing the sciences using a combination of research, teaching, study and further education. Universities of applied sciences are tasked with cultivating and developing the application of science and with using applied sciences to adopt a practical approach to teaching. Their remit includes research and development tasks.

Various models can be implemented as a response to the efforts made to reinforce the role of universities of applied sciences in conferring doctoral degrees.

In its Recommendations for the Role of Universities of Applied Sciences in the Higher Education System, the German Council of Science and Humanities pointed out that universities have an obligation to cooperate with universities of applied sciences when it comes to conferring doctoral degrees¹.

III. Recommendations for the cooperation model

In 2007, the Senate of the HRK required universities and higher education institutions with the authority to confer doctoral degrees to create opportunities for cooperative doctoral degree programmes with universities of applied sciences. This included professors working at universities of applied sciences being able to act as supervisors, reviewers and examiners for doctoral degree programmes. The aim was to also develop these research and teaching relationships in regional groups of universities and universities of applied sciences².

¹ "Recommendations for the Role of Universities of Applied Sciences in the Higher Education System" (available only in German), German Council of Science and Humanities, 02 July 2010.

² "Recommendation for Doctoral Degrees for Graduates of Universities of Applied Sciences" (available only in German), resolution by the Senate of the HRK on 13 February 2007.

Future development

- 1.** In order to create more transparency in the cooperative doctoral degree system, universities in the HRK are committed to systematically institutionalising collaboration with universities of applied sciences when cooperating to confer doctoral degrees. They are also committed to including this cooperation in university and doctoral regulations.

- 2.** University management boards are working towards clear, anti-discriminatory regulations being incorporated into framework doctoral regulations and/or doctoral regulations. These regulations include stipulations on conferring doctoral degrees for graduates of universities of applied sciences as well as professors working at universities of applied sciences being entitled to supervise in these doctoral degree programmes.

- 3.** Cooperative doctoral degree programmes may also be seen in the form of professors working at universities of applied sciences becoming board members at universities³ and/or a PhD board deciding to accept a researcher working at a university of applied sciences as a doctoral candidate and/or a PhD board being designed to include representatives from universities of applied sciences. The creation of joint graduate schools specialising in certain subjects could enable professors working at universities of applied sciences who have a strong research background to become more heavily involved in conferring doctoral degrees and make it easier for doctoral candidates to accept offers made during their doctoral studies.

- 4.** For these cooperation models, multidisciplinary degree standards must be developed for quality assurance purposes.

IV. The future

The HRK is monitoring this process. The implementation of this recommendation is expected to be evaluated by the end of 2018.

V. Assessing other models

No joint stance has been adopted by the Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences Member Groups in the HRK regarding models that go beyond agreements for cooperative doctoral degree programmes between institutions (see III. above) and describe the various forms of independent practice of conferring doctoral degrees at universities of applied sciences.

³ Cf. the Recommendation by the Conference of Hessian University Presidents on Cooperative Doctoral Degree Programmes (available only in German), 30 July 2014.