

23rd General Assembly
by the HRK
on 14 November 2017
in Potsdam

**Key points on quality
assurance in doctoral
education with an
external employment
contract**

HRK German Rectors' Conference

The Voice of the Universities

Leipziger Platz 11 Tel.: +49 (0) 30 206292-0 post@hrk.de
10117 Berlin Fax: +49 (0) 30 206292-15 www.hrk.de

Ahrstraße 39 Tel.: +49 (0) 228 887-0 post@hrk.de
53175 Bonn Fax: +49 (0) 228 887-110 www.hrk.de

Transparent access

- Selection of topics and candidates

The requirements for the examination of the academic and personal aptitude needed by the doctoral candidate are laid out in the doctoral regulations. They are assessed first by the potential supervisor and then by the doctoral committee.

Topic selection and definition take place in dialogue between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor, generally before doctoral education commences. If there is interest on the part of non-university institutions, for example companies, in a particular research topic, they are at liberty to approach a university entitled to award doctoral degrees, or the relevant doctoral committee, with the corresponding proposal. Where employment with a non-university employer is tied to a doctoral project, consultation between all parties is imperative prior to employment in order to allow the university both to examine the academic quality of the topic and the suitability of the candidate and also to be in a position to make a decision with the requisite diligence, firstly on acceptance of the topic and secondly on acceptance of the candidate.

- Admission and initiation of procedure

Some doctoral regulations specify a minimum time that must elapse between acceptance of the doctoral student by the faculty and the submission of the doctoral thesis (initiation of doctoral procedure) in order to ensure the development of an appropriate supervisory relationship. This minimum period is specific to the discipline, but should not be less than one year in order to ensure supervision. No pressure must be placed on academic staff to accept, at short notice, candidates whose aptitude cannot be adequately assessed and research projects on which they have not been consulted, with reference being made to the candidates' doctorate-related employment. Both, the regulation of admission and the initiation of the procedure fall within the faculties' and departments' sphere of collective responsibility.

Supervision and academic environment

- Supervision agreement

It is highly advisable that doctoral candidate and supervisor enter into a supervision agreement, as is now stipulated in most doctoral regulations. For doctoral candidates with an external employment contract, it is suggested that a point of contact/mentor in the respective place of employment should be nominated for the university who is preferably academically qualified

- Supervision

Separate remuneration of the professor for supervision is not permitted. If the doctoral thesis is being completed within the framework of a wider research cooperation project, the latter must be regulated under a separate contract. It is imperative that authorisation and notification

requirements vis-à-vis the university leadership and the faculty are observed in this process.

- Integration into the academic environment and training both in the discipline and across disciplines

Contact and content-related exchange with the specialist academic community is a central element of the doctoral phase. In order to ensure this, external doctoral candidates should also be integrated into the academic environment provided by the department, faculty and university. As part of their specialised training, which is primarily delivered and organised by the supervisor and the faculty, doctoral candidates participate in research colloquia and (international) specialised conferences, for example. Interdisciplinary training often takes place through university-wide services provided by graduate schools and comparable institutions, or at the faculty level.

External partners who are involved in handling a doctoral project are encouraged to actively support this academic integration of doctoral candidates, e.g. by granting leave and covering travel costs. An agreement between the supervisor and external partner about attendance times at the university is useful. The provisions of the doctoral regulations in relation to participating in training activities are also binding on external doctoral candidates. Mutual recognition of training offered by the university and external institutions must be contractually agreed upon.

Assessment and publication

- Assessment

Doctoral theses that are written extra muros are subject to the same standards of quality as theses written by doctoral candidates with a direct connection to the university. Data and conclusions must stand up to scrutiny and be accessible and verifiable, in particular by the board of examiners.

- Publication

The publication of a doctoral thesis is a legal obligation. Wide-ranging confidentiality agreements that may seem appropriate from a company's perspective are therefore not compatible with a thesis for an academic qualification. Furthermore, the publication of (interim) results at conferences and specialised publications is of great importance in the academic community, of which discourse is a central feature. To the extent that the requirement for protection of results due to possible commercial utilisation or trade secrets is an issue, release for publication should occur within the framework of transparent rules and within short, previously determined deadlines.

For all publications, affiliation with the university entitled to award the doctoral degree must be declared. It must also be ensured that possible conflicts of interest are disclosed by the doctoral candidate in accordance with the rules of good scientific practice.

Copyright and rights of use

- Copyright in the doctoral thesis belongs to the doctoral candidate as the author of the work. The assignment of rights must be contractually agreed upon in a timely manner, if possible before the commencement of doctoral education.

Good scientific practice and conflict resolution

- All parties involved are under the obligation to observe the rules of good scientific practice. Proactive, institutionalised communication (e.g. as part of a regular meeting) contributes to the successful handling of doctoral education.
- Along with the appropriate ombudspersons of the universities, specific points of contact at the partner institutions should also be named who can act in a mediating capacity in the case of conflict.