

Joint position of BDA, BDI, HRK and Stifterverband on doctoral degrees offered in partnership between doctorate-conferring universities and companies (doctoral degree with external employment contract)

People who help create solutions to problems through their independent research are in demand in many areas of today's knowledge-based society. They find work not only in publicly funded research and corporate research institutions, but also in many leadership roles in industry and society. The successful completion of a doctoral degree at a university entitled to confer doctoral degrees constitutes proof of this ability. By submitting a scientific paper or thesis, doctoral graduates have made an independent contribution to research "that is capable of expanding the borders of knowledge and can stand up to national or international review by experts and specialists in the field". This criterion from the German Qualifications Framework for Higher Education Qualifications dated February 2017 underscores the fact that doctoral procedures can only be entrusted to the universities entitled to confer doctoral degrees.

Cooperation between universities and companies, which has proved its worth over decades, is very significant for Germany as a centre of innovation. In many instances, cooperation also takes place within the framework of doctoral degrees in which the doctorate-conferring university's scientific inquiry and a company's research interests are combined. Companies frequently participate in, say, the funding of doctoral research projects, for example by employing the doctoral candidate in the company for the duration of the doctoral education (doctoral education with an external employment contract).

The benefits of such doctoral education can be formulated as follows:

- Doctorate-conferring universities and the specialist scientific community gain access to research questions and infrastructure in companies, e.g. to highly specialised laboratories.
- Companies strengthen their capacity for innovation through the scientific expertise of doctorate-conferring universities and benefit from the university's infrastructure.
- Doctoral candidates who do research and work at the interface of academia and industry gain access to career paths both in academia and in industry that can often offer holders of doctorates attractive long-term employment.

These advantages come to fruition if there is a clear awareness on both sides of the differing roles that both partners play. This is the only way to guarantee both academic quality and practical relevance, which serve to advance science and assist the long-term survival of innovative companies in the marketplace.

The following principles define these roles and thus provide guidelines for successful cooperation:

- The right to confer a doctoral degree is the sole prerogative of universities defined as being entitled to confer doctoral degrees. This must be stated unequivocally in job advertisements and other company guidelines directed at potential doctoral candidates. Rights and obligations in doctoral procedures are laid down as part of the doctoral regulations of the doctorate-conferring university or faculty/department in question.
- The acceptance or rejection of a research topic and/or of a doctoral candidate is the sole prerogative of the doctorate-conferring university and hence, as a rule, of the doctoral committees and relevant professors.
- The option of alerting a professor to a suitable research topic or suitable doctoral candidate is open to all companies.
- Companies should consult the university in advance regarding their decision to appoint an employee who is to undertake doctoral education at that doctorate-conferring university. The employment contract to be entered into between the doctoral candidate and the company for the duration of the doctoral education should generally only come into effect formally after prior agreement with the doctorate-conferring university and joint determination of the exact dissertation topic and following submission of an agreement to supervise from a member of the university's faculty.
- The supervision of doctoral candidates is part of the duties of a professor. For this reason, separate remuneration for supervisory activities by faculty members is not permitted.
- Successful doctoral education depends on integration in both the academic and the corporate environment. Both partners can support this in various ways.
- All dissertations must be published. Only through publication can the knowledge gained be made accessible to the scientific community and contribute to scientific advances. In addition, the examination commission must be provided with unrestricted access to the contents of the dissertation. Where, during the process of drafting the dissertation, it is necessary to exchange confidential data, a confidentiality agreement to this effect can be agreed in writing. Companies must grant approval for publication according to transparent rules, and the granting of approval must be possible within an appropriate period.
- Copyright in the dissertation belongs to the doctoral candidate as the author of the work. The assignment of rights must be contractually agreed upon in a timely manner.

Furthermore, close and continuous consultation between the doctorate-conferring university, company and doctoral candidates significantly helps to avoid conflicts and safeguard the academic quality of company-related doctoral degrees.

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