

Guidelines for  
Supervisors

# Shaping the Doctorate Together



## IMPRINT

1st edition 2010

2nd revised and expanded edition 2012

3rd edition 2014

4th edition 2018

5th revised and expanded edition 2026

### Publisher

QualitätsZirkel Promotion

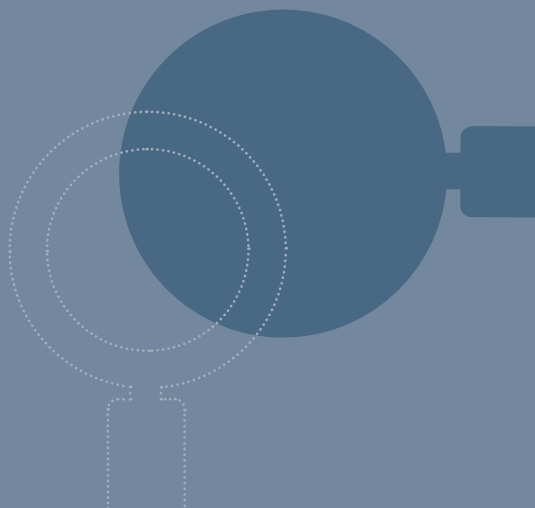
[www.qz-promotion.de](http://www.qz-promotion.de)

[info@qz-promotion.de](mailto:info@qz-promotion.de)

This booklet is also available online:

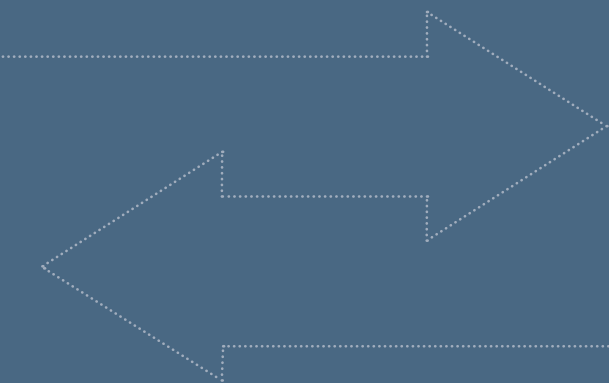
<https://www.qz-promotion.de/home/handbuecher/gemeinsam-die-promotion-gestalten/>

# Contents



|                                                                                           |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Preamble .....                                                                            | 4  |
| Beginning the Doctorate .....                                                             | 8  |
| Research Phase.....                                                                       | 16 |
| Completing the Doctorate .....                                                            | 22 |
| Conflict Situations and Finding Solutions .....                                           | 26 |
| Mutual Expectations in the Supervisory Relationship – Questionnaire for Supervisors ..... | 28 |
| Further Reading .....                                                                     | 30 |

# Preamble



## Shaping the Doctorate Together

### Guidelines for Supervisors and Doctoral Candidates

Thanks to the development of a wide range of support, funding and training measures within structured doctoral programmes or comprehensive graduate institutions, the conditions for pursuing a doctorate have improved significantly at many universities throughout Germany and Europe. This structural development aims to create an attractive research environment for early career researchers. It is accompanied by a change in academic culture and management practices at universities, shifting responsibility for doctoral support to multiple actors. Additional services have been created, and new actors are involved, such as the management and staff of graduate institutions, professional trainers and mentors. Early career researchers receive special support, particularly in the areas of management and transferable skills as well as career development, which also benefits concentrated research activities.

The focal point of the entire doctoral process remains the quality of research and the relationship between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor. The supportive measures provided by the graduate institutions relieve supervisors of some of their advisory tasks, allowing them to concentrate more intensively on their core tasks of supervising and promoting research and on the professional qualification of their doctoral candidates. The transparency of the supervisory relationship contributes significantly to the success of the doctorate by preventing difficulties and ensuring quality throughout the doctoral process.

These guidelines are intended to support a more efficient structure for the supervisory relationship by providing suggestions for the preparatory, research and completion stages of the doctorate in the form of a biographical overview, and by giving all those involved a better understanding of organisational issues, challenges, practical details and support measures for the individual stages.

The aim of doctoral supervision is to provide researchers in the early stages of their careers with optimal support on their path to becoming highly qualified academics who are fully integrated into the scientific community. This is best achieved when the requirements of this process are equally transparent and understandable for both sides, and when they define, communicate and document their mutual expectations.

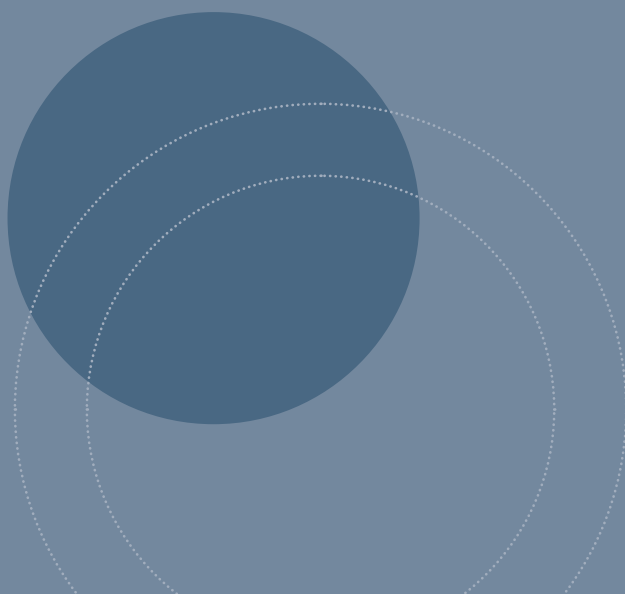
## QualitätsZirkel Promotion (Quality Circle for the Doctorate)

This booklet is the result of a joint project by the QualitätsZirkel Promotion, a cross-state network of graduate institutions from several universities and research institutes. The project is an initiative for the discussion and further development of recommendations for action and materials, and so ultimately aims to establish quality standards for doctoral supervision.

We are aware that our recommendations for action must be adapted to the respective research institutes and the current situation of the specifics of individual academic disciplines. They cannot therefore be a panacea but are intended to provide food for thought and suggestions and to serve as a basis for joint discussion and further development.

We are sharing our recommendations with the international community in both a German and in an English version. We would be pleased to see many of you using our guidelines to further improve the doctoral supervision process at your research institutes. We welcome your feedback, which we will then share further in national and international networks and use to revise our guidelines.

QualitätsZirkel Promotion  
[www.qz-promotion.de](http://www.qz-promotion.de)  
Contact: [info@qz-promotion.de](mailto:info@qz-promotion.de)



**This edition has been revised by the following current members  
of the QualitätsZirkel Promotion:**

Theo Jäger

CISPA Helmholtz Center for Information Security Saarbrücken | [www.cispa.de](http://www.cispa.de)

Sybille Küster

Goethe Research Academy for Early Career Researchers (GRADE) | Goethe University Frankfurt a. M. | [www.grade.uni-frankfurt.de](http://www.grade.uni-frankfurt.de)

Kerstin Lundström

Giessen Graduate Centre for Social Sciences, Business, Economics and Law (GGS) |  
Justus Liebig University Giessen | [www.uni-giessen.de/ggs](http://www.uni-giessen.de/ggs)

Kathrin Ruhl

Interdisciplinary Centre for Research, Graduate Support and Human Resource Development (IFGPZ) |  
University of Koblenz | [www.uni-ko.de/ifgpz](http://www.uni-ko.de/ifgpz)

Agnes Schindler

Graduate Centre of Trier University (GUT) | Trier University | [www.gut.uni-trier.de](http://www.gut.uni-trier.de)

Thomas Schmid

Graduate School of the Humanities | University of Würzburg |  
[www.graduateschools.uni-wuerzburg.de/humanities](http://www.graduateschools.uni-wuerzburg.de/humanities)

Bettina Wagner

Ingenium – Young Researchers at TU Darmstadt | TU Darmstadt | [www.tu-darmstadt.de/ingenium](http://www.tu-darmstadt.de/ingenium)

**In addition, the following former members of the network contributed to earlier editions of this  
booklet. We would like to thank them for their contributions:**

Anke Barzantny

Helmut Brentel †

Nadine Chmura

Sigrid Jooß-Mayer †

Ute Kämper

Frank Meyer

Kai Sicks

# Orientation and Initial Phase



**„Doctorate – yes or no?“** The decision for or against a doctorate is not an easy one, because a doctorate has career implications and takes up a significant amount of time and resources. Doctoral candidates should therefore clarify their own expectations at the beginning of their doctorate and ask themselves some fundamental questions. But the decision to supervise a doctoral candidate is also complex for supervisors. Supervisors commit themselves to investing time and other resources in a doctoral candidate's research project over a long period of time. We therefore believe that it is the responsibility of both doctoral candidates and supervisors to address these questions. The list of questions that we have provided at the end of this document serves as a useful tool for consideration.

**Doctoral candidates** should question their motivation, as the decision to pursue a doctorate will have an impact on their professional and personal development and thus shape the next few years of their lives. If they want to pursue a doctorate, they are making a long-term commitment that may involve a significant change in their lifestyle. Writing a dissertation requires considerable dedication. Early consideration should also be given to possible career prospects after completing a doctorate.

**As a supervisor**, your experience gives you a better overview of the prospects and opportunities of an academic career. You should clarify with those interested in pursuing a doctorate why they want to do so; in some cases, it may be advisable not to accept a doctoral application.

The following guide is intended for supervisors. It also includes a checklist in the form of questions that can be used in the decision-making process and as a short „assessment“ of the potential doctoral relationship. The recommendations formulated below are in no way intended as an endorsement of previous or current framework conditions. Rather, they are intended to help you assess your own situation in the most self-reflective, realistic and concrete way possible given the specific circumstances of your case and thus serve as a guide for shaping doctoral supervision in the best possible way for both parties. The second part of the guide contains the version for doctoral candidates – the content is tailored to the respective target group and is transparent for all involved in a single edition, so as to support decision-making and prepare for discussions between doctoral candidates and supervisors.

As a rule, you should answer the following important questions during this phase:

## 1. Why does my prospective doctoral candidate want to pursue a doctorate?

To establish a common basis for discussion, we have defined possible motives for pursuing a doctorate. This classification should not be regarded as exhaustive or exclusive, but rather as an idealised approximation. Depending on the goals that are associated with a doctoral degree, different aspects should be considered.

Reasons for pursuing a doctorate may include:

- a. Intrinsic interest in research
  - b. Academic career
  - c. Non-academic career
  - d. Career in science and research management
  - e. Offer to pursue a doctorate
  - f. Unclear career plans/lack of direction
- 
- a. **Intrinsic interest in research: Is the prospective doctoral candidate passionate about the topic/subject and determined to work on it or conduct further research in this field?**
    - Can I provide an optimal research environment? Is this provided by the professorship, the working group, the research institute, etc.?
    - Is a graduate school, a research training group or a doctoral programme an option? Can I provide information about this?
    - Am I a specialist in the field of the proposed doctoral research? Does the proposed research contribute to the research focus of my professorship, working group or institute?
    - Are there suitable networks in which the prospective candidate can be integrated? Are there other sources of support, e.g. mentors, in my circle?
    - Am I prepared to devote a considerable amount of time to academic interaction with the prospective candidate, and to invest time in their personal development?
  - b. **Academic career: Is the prospective doctoral candidate aiming for a career in academia/a professorship?**
    - Can I provide an optimal research environment? Is this provided by the professorship, the working group, the research institute, etc.?
    - Is a graduate school, a research training group or a doctoral programme an option? Can I provide information about this?
    - Am I a specialist in the field of the proposed doctoral research? Does the proposed research contribute to the research focus of my professorship, working group or institute?
    - Does the proposed research indicate that high-quality publications can be expected?
    - Is there an opportunity for the prospective candidate to gain teaching experience and to take part in further training in university teaching methods?

- Are there suitable networks in which the prospective candidate can be integrated? Are there other sources of support, e.g. mentors, in my circle?
- Does the prospective candidate have the necessary personal qualities?
- Is the prospective candidate willing to engage with the scientific community (the social norms and culture of open debate)?
- Am I prepared to devote a considerable amount of time to academic interaction with the prospective candidate, and to invest time in their personal development?
- Does my university offer opportunities for doctoral candidates to take on tasks in scientific self-administration/committee work during the doctoral process to gain insight into university policy and organisational structures?
- What are the career prospects in an academic context after completing the doctorate?

c. **Non-academic career: Does the prospective doctoral candidate want to use their academic qualifications to be successful outside academia, e.g. in business?**

- Am I prepared to accept the career aspirations of the prospective candidate?
- In terms of time and resources, the prospective candidate could take a pragmatic approach to the doctorate compared to work designed for a career in academia. Would this be compatible with my standards for the quality of academic work?
- Is the proposed research compatible with my research focus, despite its possible practical application?
- Can I support the doctoral candidate in targeted professional development during the doctoral process?

d. **Career in science and research management: Is the prospective doctoral candidate seeking a career connected to science and research?**

- Am I prepared to accept the career aspirations of the prospective candidate?
- In terms of time and resources, the prospective candidate could take a pragmatic approach to the doctorate compared to work designed for a career in academia. Would this be compatible with my standards for the quality of academic work?
- Is the proposed research compatible with my research focus, despite its possible practical application?
- Can I support the doctoral candidate in targeted professional development during the doctoral process?
- Does my university offer opportunities for doctoral candidates to take on coordination tasks during the doctoral process to gain insight into university policy and organisational structures, and to collect experience in committee work?

e. Offer to pursue a doctorate: Am I considering encouraging a student to take up a doctorate with me as their supervisor because of their outstanding achievements?

- Does the offer (e.g. programme, position, subject) align with the career goals of the prospective candidate?
- Is the prospective candidate interested in the subject area of the professorship?
- Would the prospective candidate fit well to the environment at the professorship, in the working group, and at the research institute?
- Would you expect the prospective candidate to take on additional tasks at the professorship (e.g. teaching, administration) in addition to writing a dissertation? Does the prospective candidate have the necessary skills to perform such tasks?
- Is the prospective candidate willing to engage with the scientific community (the social norms and culture of open debate)?

f. Unclear career plans/lack of direction: Is the prospective doctoral candidate still unsure about their career goals and therefore wants to remain at university?

- Am I interested in supervising the doctoral research under these given circumstances?
- Am I prepared to conduct a reassessment of the situation with the prospective candidate and discuss (professional) alternatives and career prospects after completing the doctorate?
- Could it be beneficial to recommend career counselling to the prospective candidate?
- Do I consider their motivation for a doctorate, which requires years of commitment, to be sufficient under the circumstances?
- Could postponing a career choice prove to be disadvantageous?

Reflecting on motivation is linked to other areas and questions (see below). This applies to doctoral candidates, but also to supervisors, because the reasons for deciding to pursue a doctorate (or accepting a doctoral candidate) have an impact on the supervisory relationship.

Depending on the motivation, as a supervisor, you may decide to manage your own resources differently and so allow doctoral candidates to use them.

This may apply to the following:

- Financial resources
- Time for supervision
- Non-financial support/career advancement
- Scope and focus of the topic
- Contacts/networks

Based on these points and in interaction with them, we recommend that you consider the following:

## **2. Does the prospective doctoral candidate meet the formal requirements for pursuing a doctorate in the chosen field at my university?**

- Are the formal requirements specified in the doctoral regulations met?
- Is the prospective candidate permitted to pursue a doctorate in the chosen field based on their previous degree(s)?
- Is the prospective candidate required to matriculate or is it advisable?
- If available, has the prospective candidate looked at the advice and/or checklists from departments/faculties or graduate institutions?

## **3. How will the doctorate be financed?**

- Position as a research assistant financed by university funds
- Position as a research assistant financed by third-party funds
- Position in science and research management
- External position
- Scholarship
- Family support
- Other

Consider the advantages and disadvantages of each type of financing!

Consider the advantages and disadvantages of each type of financing!

- Does the doctoral candidate require my support? (position at the university; support with applying for a scholarship?)
- What impact might the doctoral candidate's professional activities outside academia have on their doctoral time plan?
- How long will the financial support last?
- Does the planned project require research stays and how can these be financed?  
Are funds available at my professorship, in my working group or at my institute?

## **4. What do I need to consider about the prospective doctoral candidate's personal circumstances and expectations?**

- What are the personal circumstances of the prospective candidate? Are there any special circumstances to consider (disability or chronic illness, family responsibilities such as caregiving or childcare, volunteer work, etc.)?
- Does the prospective candidate have the necessary skills to carry out the projected tasks (research, teaching, coordination, etc.) as well as good time and self-management skills?

- Do the personal circumstances of the prospective candidate allow for any necessary research-related travel or stays abroad?

## **5. Do I prefer a particular form of dissertation in my field?**

Am I open to the wishes of prospective candidate when it comes to choosing the form of the dissertation, or do I prefer a certain form and only want to supervise those? Do my expectations in this regard match the expectations of the prospective candidate?

Forms of dissertation:

- Writing a monograph and publishing it after successfully completing the doctorate
- Writing a cumulative dissertation with the stipulation that the progress of the work must be documented during the doctoral phase by publishing journal articles; submission of a collection of these articles framed by an introduction, conclusion and transitions as a dissertation

## **6. What do I need to consider when selecting the second reviewer?**

- When is the appropriate time to select the second reviewer?
- Should and can the second reviewer be involved in the supervision at an early stage?

## 7. Entering into a supervision agreement

Entering into a supervision agreement helps doctoral candidates and supervisors clarify mutual expectations and document them in writing. The higher education laws of some federal states or the doctoral regulations of universities make it mandatory to enter into a supervision agreement. It differs significantly from a mere commitment to supervise, particularly in terms of scope and depth of content.

Universities or faculties/departments or graduate institutions usually provide templates for this purpose.

The following points are typically included in a supervision agreement:

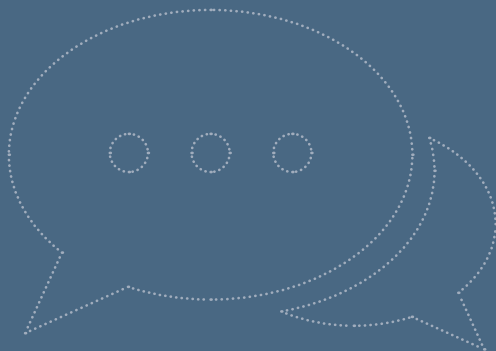
- Formal details of the names of the participating parties, title of the project, department/faculty, institution awarding the doctorate
- Commitment to maintaining good research practice
- Frequency and framework conditions of supervision meetings
- Agreements on supervision services provided by the supervisors
- Agreements on the academic work of the doctoral candidate
- Work plan for the entire duration of the doctorate
- If applicable, information on the financing of the doctorate
- Special measures or arrangements for balancing family life and academic work
- Contact persons and procedure in the event of conflict

Further details on the supervision agreement can be found in the QZP booklet  
“Doing your doctorate – Making conscious decisions and getting off to a good start”.



[www.qz-promotion.de](http://www.qz-promotion.de)

# Research Phase



Before the research phase begins, it is advisable to consider a few important intermediate steps.

**These practical issues need to be considered:**

- Firstly, informing the doctoral candidate about the administrative steps that need to be taken in the coming years to obtain a doctorate (e.g. the procedure for registering and submitting the dissertation).
- Secondly, clarifying with the doctoral candidate how and by when a second supervisor should be found and integrated into the work and supervision process.
- Thirdly, considering whether the dissertation should or can be written cumulatively; here, you should discuss the advantages and disadvantages from a work efficiency and career perspective with the doctoral candidate while also taking into account the doctoral regulations.
- Fourthly, it is important to discuss at an early stage what costs are to be expected throughout the course of the doctorate. Possible publication costs should also be taken into account.
- Fifthly, it is necessary to clarify whether the dissertation should be written in a foreign language for subject-specific or strategic reasons. The applicable doctoral regulations must thereby be observed.

If the doctoral candidate is pursuing a doctorate that involves external partners (e.g. bi-national doctoral degrees/cotutelle, industry-sponsored doctorate, cooperative doctorate with a university of applied sciences, etc.), the partner institution and the relevant administrative bodies should be contacted at an early stage to negotiate any necessary contracts.

Once the supervisory relationship has been established and the formal questions arising from the preparatory phase have been settled, the research phase begins. During this phase, the following aspects are relevant to the supervision:

1. Supervision instruments
2. Framework conditions
3. Work on the topic
4. Personal relationship

## 1. Supervision instruments during the research phase

Various instruments have proven effective in the supervision of doctoral candidates. The main instrument is the individual supervision meeting. This meeting should take place at least once per semester, or more frequently if necessary or desired. In addition, it is advisable to involve doctoral candidates in working group meetings and doctoral colloquia, if these are offered. There, doctoral candidates can present their project progress to their supervisors and other early career researchers. These events make it possible for doctoral candidates to exchange ideas on research, work-related and personal topics. In addition, doctoral candidates will learn to give and receive feedback in a protected environment. It has proven useful to combine colloquia and supervision meetings and, if possible, to hold the supervision meeting immediately after the colloquium. In this way, you as the supervisor can supplement the previous group discussion; in addition, both parties are given a clear picture of the current status of the project.

In any case, it should be ensured that transparent agreements are made between doctoral candidates and supervisors, thereby avoiding misunderstandings from the outset.

It is therefore important to clarify at the beginning of the research phase,

- how often meetings will take place,
- what is expected of the doctoral candidate in these meetings,
- what standard is expected of the drafted chapters or articles being submitted for feedback or how comprehensive the text sections should be,
- whether the submitted drafts/sections will be commented on in writing,
- how the interim or partial results, work plans, experimental strategies will be discussed and regularly subjected to critical examination.

Due to the asymmetrical relationship between supervisors and doctoral candidates, it cannot necessarily be expected that doctoral candidates will clearly articulate their own expectations and ideas in these discussions. It is therefore recommended that the supervisor take the initiative in such exchanges.

The following measures are a suitable way of ensuring that agreements are transparent:

**Supervision agreement:** The initial arrangements can be formalised in a supervision agreement, as is already the case in numerous departments/faculties and graduate institutions (see chapter on orientation and initial phase).

**Supervision protocol:** In addition to the measures taken to ensure transparency in the supervisory relationship, it is advisable to keep record of all points agreed upon and so also document the progress of the project. As a rule, doctoral candidates summarise the key points of the meeting and submit them to their supervisors for review and confirmation. This not only helps to clear up any misunderstandings in communication during the supervision meeting but also provides both sides with better documentation and greater commitment to the joint agreements.

**When supervising international doctoral candidates,** transparency and written documentation are extremely important. Misunderstandings can easily arise at various levels in intercultural academic dialogue, so it is advisable to use tools that help to clarify intentions when communicating. It should also be taken into consideration that supervising international doctoral candidates can be very time-consuming due to possible language and cultural differences.

## 2. Create the necessary framework conditions

The term ‘framework’ refers to activities and tasks that are related to creating the best possible conditions for a successful completion of the doctorate. These should be discussed with the doctoral candidate and include the following:

**Financing the doctorate:** Although financing should be clarified in the initial phase, new challenges may arise throughout the course of the doctorate.

In such cases, you should discuss with the doctoral candidate whether

- and how third-party funding can be obtained,
- a scholarship application should be sought to finance the doctorate,
- local advisory services (career services, graduate institutions, etc.) can provide further assistance.

**Securing the necessary resources:** If it is foreseeable that the doctoral candidate will incur significant costs in carrying out the research (travel expenses, laboratory materials, usage fees, printing and publication costs, etc.), the available financing options and the steps that may need to be taken to secure funding should be discussed well in advance.

**Ensuring there is sufficient time for research:** In cases where the supervisor is also the doctoral candidate's superior, it is important that the doctoral candidate has sufficient time to carry out and complete their research project, while still fulfilling their work obligations for the institute or professorship. If necessary, it may be helpful to define specific research time in advance (e.g. time periods, days of the week, home office hours).

**Further qualification requirements and opportunities:** Supervisors should encourage doctoral candidates to pursue further qualifications during the doctoral process, so to expand their skills set (specialised skills, key competencies, etc.). Candidates can use the existing structures for further qualification at the university (e.g. graduate institutions, equal opportunities offices, university teaching institutions). The qualification strategy accompanying the doctoral project should be discussed regularly with the candidate and documented in the supervision protocol or supervision agreement. In connection with this, candidates should also be encouraged to continue to reflect on what they see as the career-related goal of their doctorate.

### 3. Work on the topic: Discussing content

In addition to organisational support, the supervisory relationship should provide a forum for regular discussions about the content of the work. Ideally, as a supervisor, you should have a high level of expertise in the doctoral candidate's field of research. However, your role as a supervisor can also be to provide a competent external perspective on the project. Specifically, the following areas of content-related advice can be provided:

**Research plan:** Throughout the entire doctoral process, supervisors should keep a close eye on the progress of dissertation project. It is especially important to make sure that the work and time plan is realistic in all areas and structured with clearly defined milestones. This makes it easier to keep track of how the work is progressing. Overall, it is advisable to keep work and time plans open to necessary modifications, as doctoral projects can develop dynamically, but to only make drastic changes in exceptional cases.

**Monitoring progress:** In every doctoral project, the research question, structure and theses must be continuously revised so to adapt them to the progress of the doctoral candidate's own work or to current research results and unforeseen developments. As a supervisor, you should therefore regularly discuss the basic structure of the doctoral project and discuss current shifts or readjustments with the doctoral candidates. Make sure that doctoral candidates stay up to date with the latest research findings and publications, even during the drafting phase of the dissertation. Doctoral candidates can take advantage of the services offered by graduate institutions, for example, on project and time management or academic writing. This will help to ensure that the academic quality of the research project is continuously assessed and improved.

**Broadening horizons – integrating doctoral candidates into the academic community:** Contact with other academics and productive discussion networks are important factors in successfully completing a doctorate and can support future careers. To actively promote this, other academics should be involved in the supervision process at an early stage of the doctorate (second supervisors, supervision teams). Encourage your doctoral candidates to give presentations and publish papers at national and international level, as this provides inspiration in terms of content and is also beneficial to their academic careers. Depending on the career goals of the doctoral candidates, supervisors should consider to what extent it is possible to establish valuable contacts within – and, if necessary, outside – the academic community using their own networks.

**Encourage doctoral candidates to define their position as researchers:** An important task for supervisors is to encourage doctoral candidates to think critically about their role as researchers. Particularly when giving presentations at conferences or at the defence of their dissertation, doctoral candidates are expected to act as independent researchers and so it is important that they have a clear idea of their position within their field of research and the contribution to that field.

**Good research practice:** Encourage doctoral candidates to familiarise themselves with the fundamentals of good research practice, research data management and open science in order to meet the requirements of the academic community and research funding organisations (e.g. the German Research Foundation, DFG) and to avoid scientific misconduct. Universities have their own statutes on good scientific practice, with which doctoral candidates should familiarise themselves. There are often informational events that offer further education on this topic.

#### **4. Establishing a trusting supervisory relationship**

The responsibility of a supervisor is not limited to providing specialist advice on doctoral projects. Human interaction also plays a significant role. Fostering a trusting supervisory relationship, one in which both parties prove themselves to be reliable partners by honouring joint agreements, makes it possible for candidates to ask their supervisors (critical) questions and communicate their needs.

**Motivation:** The doctoral process is often accompanied by setbacks. Supporting and motivating doctoral candidates in their actions can contribute significantly to the success of the doctoral project.

# Completing the Doctorate



## 1. The start of the completion phase

The completion phase starts with a discussion between supervisor or the team of supervisors and the doctoral candidate, in which an agreement is reached on a realistic submission date for the dissertation and, if possible, on a deadline for scheduling the defence.

This, in turn, is influenced by

- the agreed upon period for revision,
- the preparation and submission of the reviewer assessments,
- the dates of the doctoral committee meetings,
- the period during which the dissertation is available for review, and
- the availability of the members of the examination committee.

As a rule, the points and questions mentioned in this chapter should be addressed and clarified at the latest during the completion phase, if they have not already been discussed during the research phase. An assessment should be made as to whether the results achieved so far are sufficient for a successful dissertation or whether additional work and time would yield an adequate further improvement in quality. It is also necessary to clarify the requirements for expression and style in the dissertation and whether professional help should be sought to polish the language of the work (proofreading or editing but not ghost-writing). This is particularly relevant if the work is written in a foreign language.

In addition, the following questions should be clarified:

- By when must the individual parts of the dissertation be completed?
- In the case of a cumulative dissertation, have all requirements been met, i.e. have all necessary articles been submitted for publication or already published, and have the other framing text sections (introduction, transitions and conclusion, if applicable) been written for submission?
- As the supervisor, are you willing to proofread individual chapters/parts of the dissertation or the entire text before it is submitted?
- How long will it take you to provide your revisions?
- Should reworked sections be submitted to you for further revision?

## 2. The completion of the dissertation

The next step is the preparation of the final version of the dissertation, for which supervisors and doctoral candidates should clarify the following points from their own perspective in the form of a final check before submission:

- Once again, with a critical eye, have the research questions been addressed in a competent manner and using appropriate methods?
- Is the structure of the dissertation logical and sufficiently structured or clearly organised?
- Are the text structure and content coherent?
- Have the findings been presented and discussed in a convincing manner?
- In the case of a monograph: Have the individual chapters been written with regard to their significance for the work as a whole? In the case of a cumulative dissertation: Do the introduction, individual articles and concluding discussion form a plausibly structured unit?
- Has an appropriate contribution to scholarly knowledge been made, e.g. a contribution to the expansion of the theory or methods of the respective subject or similar?

## 3. Preparing for the defence

After the dissertation has been reviewed, an oral exam is required, the format of which is defined in the doctoral regulations. The most common variant today is the defence, in which the doctoral candidate gives a presentation on their own research, followed by an academic discussion. Far less common is the viva voce in which the academic content of the graduate studies is examined orally and therefore topics (focus areas) should be prepared.

As a supervisor, you could recommend to doctoral candidates to prepare for the presentation and discussion during the defence in as many ways as possible:

- This may include attending a workshop on the topic and seeking help and feedback from other doctoral candidates or colleagues who have already completed their doctorates.
- Good preparation for the defence can include giving trial presentations to other doctoral candidates and/or supervisors or attending the defences of other doctoral candidates. Membership of a graduate school or a working group with a closer network of doctoral candidates and possibly several supervisors could also be used for this purpose.

Doctoral candidates should be made aware that they are now considered an equal member of the scholarly community and are expected to act accordingly as a discussion partner during the oral exam.

## 4. Publication phase

Since completion of your doctorate is only upon publication of the dissertation, as a supervisor, you could advise your doctoral candidates to inform themselves well in advance about the specific requirements for publication (e.g. deadlines, mandatory copies – depending on the doctoral regulations) and discuss various publication options with them.

- If parts of the dissertation have not already been published as contributions to a cumulative dissertation, text editing may be necessary, especially if the work was written in a foreign language.
- Where should the dissertation be published? Does it make sense to publish it online only? How should the publishers/publication series/journals that are suitable for publication be identified? What are the printing costs? Does your university offer financial support for this?
- How should the dissertation be published? Is open access publication possible? Does your university offer financial support for this?
- What layout is required, e.g. by the doctoral regulations or a publisher?
- What format must tables or image/graphic material have?
- Does new image/graphic material need to be produced (important: clarify costs and any copyright issues)?

## 5. Determining the next steps in the doctoral candidate's career

A doctorate is often the first step in a career in academia or non-university research. However, doctoral candidates often pursue other career paths in fields related to research. Due to the many and varied career opportunities, each of which requires different considerations, doctoral candidates should be advised to start thinking about their future career already during the research phase of the doctorate. As a supervisor, you can support this process and also recommend to your doctoral candidates to participate in relevant workshops and coaching or counselling services, e.g. offered by graduate or career services. If you have not already done so, we strongly recommended that you discuss and advise your doctoral candidates about any remaining steps in the completion phase of their doctorate.

- If doctoral candidates are considering a career in academia, it can be helpful to talk to them about gaps and horizons in their field of research.
- Your willingness to facilitate access to your networks or to provide relevant contacts (with regard to positions, postdoctoral or habilitation fellowships, publication opportunities, etc.) could be very helpful for both academic qualification opportunities and non-academic career aspirations of doctoral candidates. Also, doctoral candidates often depend on your support when applying for postdoctoral/habilitation fellowships, positions, stays abroad, etc. Your expert opinions or letters of recommendation can be of great help here.

# Conflict Situations and Finding Solutions



These recommendations for action were drawn up in the hope, among other things, that they would help to prevent conflicts. The supervision agreement, in which mutual expectations and obligations are clarified and recorded at the beginning of the doctoral process, also serves this purpose. It is nevertheless possible that problems may arise between doctoral candidates and their supervisors. These problems can be of a practical nature – e.g. with regard to research content, approaches, misunderstandings or failure to comply with agreements, or organisational issues – or of a personal nature. In such cases, both sides should endeavour to address problems as early as possible and maintain an objective, respectful approach to the situation and to each other, so that mutual feedback remains possible and solutions can be found. If necessary, both sides should seek help and advice from uninvolved third parties acting as mediators, who, with their outside perspective, can often point to constructive ways out of the crisis.

There are a number of different contact persons available to you. In each individual case, everyone must decide for themselves which contact person(s) is/are appropriate for them, who may be familiar with the conflict situation, who they trust, and who could also be accepted as a mediator by the doctoral candidate.

### Possible contact persons include:

- Other professors you trust; if available, a member of the supervisory team would be the ideal contact person
- Postdocs or also other doctoral candidates
- Representatives of non-professorial staff ('Mittelbau') or doctoral candidates
- Heads or coordinators of structured doctoral programmes or other graduate institutions
- Ombudspersons or arbitration boards
- Equal opportunity officers
- Members of the staff council
- The chair of the doctoral committee

However, sometimes ending the supervisory relationship is unavoidable. Conflicts may arise with regard to content, working methods, time plans, etc. Such situations can be identified more easily and dealt with more effectively if both sides cooperate from an early stage, maintain regular contact and define interim goals (milestones). If a change of supervisor cannot be avoided, both sides should make every effort to find an acceptable solution.

A conflict of interest may also arise if you transfer to another university. In this case, close supervision of the doctoral candidate may no longer be guaranteed, and a change of supervisor or location for the doctoral candidate may be necessary. In the event of the termination of a supervisory relationship, it is important to take into account the requirements of the doctoral regulations.

Finally, we recommend that you advise your doctoral candidates to register for their doctorate with the department/faculty at the beginning of the doctoral process, if possible. This has the advantage for both parties that, in the event of conflicts or problems, assistance can be expected from colleagues in the department or faculty, and it also increases the level of commitment from both sides in the supervisory relationship.

# Mutual Expectations in the Supervisory Relationship

## Questionnaire for Supervisors

With this questionnaire, we would like to provide you with a tool to reflect on your role as a supervisor and your expectations of doctoral candidates.

This questionnaire, formulated from the perspective of doctoral candidates, can also be found in the corresponding section in the text version for doctoral candidates.

You can use the questionnaire during a preliminary meeting to confirm whether you will accept or reject the prospective doctoral candidate or, once the decision to supervise the doctoral candidate has been made, to structure the collaboration and align mutual expectations.

### **(A) Selecting a doctoral candidate**

1. What criteria are relevant for selecting doctoral candidates?
2. What should be considered when selecting international doctoral candidates?
3. Under what circumstances would you refuse to supervise a doctoral candidate?
4. What is the maximum number of doctoral candidates you would accept for supervision?  
When would you reach your limit in terms of quality and time?
5. Would you supervise a doctoral candidate whose doctoral project is not closely related to your main fields of research in terms of content or methodology?
6. If so, what would this mean for the supervision (in terms of content, time and organisation)?

## **(B) Framework of the supervision**

7. Which instruments of communication and forms of supervision are relevant for effective supervision? How often should content-related discussions take place?
8. How should meetings for supervision be planned (ad hoc and/or scheduled appointments)?
9. After a long break in communication, who should take the initiative to resume discussions?
10. How should the progress of the work be ensured? Who has what responsibilities in this process?
11. What should be taken into account when supervising international doctoral candidates?
12. To what extent should the personal circumstances of doctoral candidates be taken into account? What would be the ideal balance between closeness and professional distance?

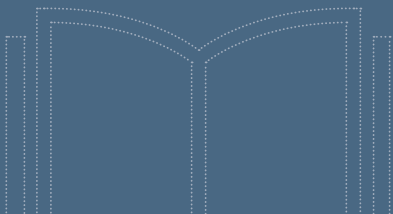
## **(C) Content and feedback**

13. How should doctoral candidates and their supervisor prepare for a supervision meeting?
14. How should the supervision meetings be followed up?
15. How extensively should the dissertation be read before it is assessed? How intensive should the feedback be?
16. How involved do you think the supervisor should be? How independent should the doctoral candidate be?
17. When (and to what extent) would it make sense to intervene in the content and structure of the dissertation?
18. What should be taken into account with regard to joint work on content and the feedback culture of international doctoral candidates?

## **(D) Measures supporting the doctoral process**

19. What role should supervisors play in the supportive measures that accompany the doctoral process?
20. What additional services offered by the university should doctoral candidates make use of during the doctoral process?
21. What importance is placed on a doctoral candidate's participation in the academic community? How should the supervisor take action in this regard?
22. How should the different career aspirations of doctoral candidates be handled? Should a distinction be made in supervision between doctoral candidates with career goals in academia and those with career goals outside academia? If so, what might this look like – if not, how could the diverging career aspirations still be taken into account?

# Further Reading



Further reading that is specifically for doctoral candidates can be found at the end of the text version for doctoral candidates.

Berenger-Currias, N., et al., Leiden University's "Golden Rules for PhD Supervision", Leiden 2019. | <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/ul2staff/onderzoek/promoveren/golden-rules-phd-supervision>

Böhringer, D., Felde, R., Korff, S., Maack, L. (Eds.), Die Situation(en) der Promotionsbetreuung. Praktiken, Prozesse und Bewertungen, Wiesbaden 2022. | <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-658-36081-8>

Carmesin, B., Hoffmann, U., Huskobla, G., Huster, S., Küster, J.-A., Neumann, J., Wegener-Feldbrügge, S. (Eds.), Betreuung Promovierender. Empfehlungen und Good Practice für Universitäten und Betreuende. UniWiND-Publikationen Bd. 4/2014, 2nd ed. 2017. | [https://www.uniwind.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publikationen/2017-UniWiND\\_Bd4\\_2\\_Auflage.pdf](https://www.uniwind.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publikationen/2017-UniWiND_Bd4_2_Auflage.pdf)

Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung GmbH (DZHW) (Ed.), Datenportal der National Academics Panel Study (Nacaps), Hannover n. d. | <https://nacaps.de>

Dülcke, D., Moes, J., Plietzsch, A., Schüle, J., Steidten, T. (Eds.), Promovieren mit Perspektive. Das GEW-Handbuch zur Promotion, Bielefeld 2021.

European Commission (Ed.), Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Guidelines on Supervision, Brüssel 2021. | <https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/about-msca/msca-guidelines-on-supervision>

Goethe-Universität Frankfurt (Ed.), Leitlinien für die Betreuung von Promotionen an der Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt 2019. | [https://www.grade.uni-frankfurt.de/76348285/Leitlinien\\_Promotion.pdf](https://www.grade.uni-frankfurt.de/76348285/Leitlinien_Promotion.pdf)  
Englische Version: [https://www.grade.uni-frankfurt.de/83210145/Leitlinien\\_Promotion\\_eng.pdf](https://www.grade.uni-frankfurt.de/83210145/Leitlinien_Promotion_eng.pdf)

Graduate Center Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU) (Ed.), Empfehlungen für die Gestaltung der Promotionsphase an der LMU, München n. d. | <https://www.graduatecenter.uni-muenchen.de/promotion/betreuung/gestaltung-promotion.pdf>

Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft Deutscher Forschungszentren (Ed.), Helmholtz-Promotionsleitlinien, Bonn 2019. | [https://www.helmholtz.de/fileadmin/upload\\_Karriere/190520\\_Helmholtz\\_Promotionsleitlinien\\_DE.pdf](https://www.helmholtz.de/fileadmin/upload_Karriere/190520_Helmholtz_Promotionsleitlinien_DE.pdf)

Hillebrand, H., Leysinge, C., LERU's view on holistic doctoral supervision, Leuven 2023. | [https://www.leru.org/files/Publications/2023.02.28\\_LERU-view-holistic-Doctoral-Supervision-full-paper.pdf](https://www.leru.org/files/Publications/2023.02.28_LERU-view-holistic-Doctoral-Supervision-full-paper.pdf)

Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK) (Ed.), Zur Qualitätssicherung in Promotionsverfahren, Empfehlung des Präsidiums der HRK an die promotionsberechtigten Hochschulen, Bonn 2012. | [https://www.hrk.de/uploads/tx\\_szconvention/Empfehlung\\_Qualitaetssicherung\\_Promotion\\_23042012.pdf](https://www.hrk.de/uploads/tx_szconvention/Empfehlung_Qualitaetssicherung_Promotion_23042012.pdf)

Hund, A.K., Churchill, A.C., Faist, A.M., et al., Transforming mentorship in STEM by training scientists to be better leaders, in: Ecology and Evolution, 8/2018, pp. 9962– 9974. | <https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.4527>

Lee, A., Successful Research Supervision: Advising Students Doing Research, London (2nd ed.) 2020.

Nerad, M., Bogle, D., Kohl, U., O'Carroll, C., Peters Ch., Scholz, B. (Eds.), Towards a Global Core Value System in Doctoral Education, London 2022.

Taylor, S., UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) (Eds.), Good Supervisory Practice Framework, n. p. 2019. | <https://supervision.ukcge.ac.uk/good-supervisory-practice-framework>

University of London (Ed.), The Good Supervision Guide for new and experienced research supervisors of PhDs, London n. d. | <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/publications/2019/aug/good-supervision-guide-new-and-experienced-research-supervisors-phds>

UniWiND (Ed.), Vielfalt durch Kooperation – Empfehlungen des UniWiND-Vorstands zu Promotionsverfahren mit Partnereinrichtungen, n. p. 2019. | [https://www.uniwind.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Stellungnahmen\\_Positionen/2019-UniWiND-Promotionsverfahren\\_mit-Partnereinrichtungen.pdf](https://www.uniwind.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Stellungnahmen_Positionen/2019-UniWiND-Promotionsverfahren_mit-Partnereinrichtungen.pdf)

Vitae (Ed.), Supervising a doctorate, n. p., n. d. | <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/supervising-a-doctorate/supervising-a-doctorate>

Walker, M. & Thomson, P., The Routledge Doctoral Supervisor's Companion: Supporting Effective Research in Education and the Social Sciences, Milton Park 2019.

Wissenschaftsrat (Ed.), Ausgestaltung der Promotion im deutschen Wissenschaftssystem. Positionspapier, (Drs. 1196-23), n. p. 2023. | <https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/2023/1196-23.html>

