



UNIVERSITÄT
LEIPZIG

Research Academy Leipzig



Recommendations for

GOOD DOCTORAL SUPERVISION

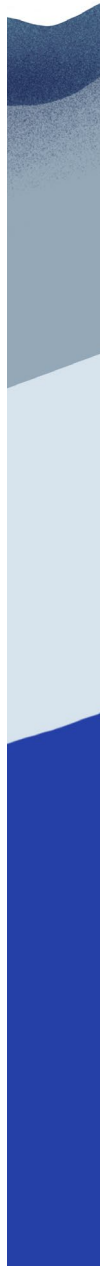
PREFACE

A doctoral thesis is an independently written academic piece of work. The thesis is supervised by experienced academics, with the quality and quantity of the supervision being crucial for the success of the doctorate. The requirements and standards necessary for good supervision are now recognised at most German universities and are supported accordingly with recommendations and measures. This includes transparency in the selection of doctoral researchers, a reasonable time limit, the conclusion of a supervision agreement, the supervision of doctoral researchers in teams, and the promotion of independence and personal responsibility on the part of the doctoral researchers. With the adoption of the graduate school concept (Graduiererschulungskonzept) in 2018 and the establishment of (currently) three graduate schools, Leipzig University (UL) has set out to make quality assurance in doctoral supervision an established practice by using the above-mentioned standards as a guide, among other things. The standards are also increasingly adhered to outside structured doctoral programmes. In addition to the goal of establishing more graduate schools in the coming years to further strengthen structured doctoral programmes, the aim is to firmly establish the above requirements and standards for quality assurance in doctoral supervision across the board.

This guide summarises the recommendations for good doctoral supervision. Supervision takes place within the faculties, and this guide serves as orientation and information for supervisors and doctoral researchers. Its aim is to provide doctoral researchers with more structure, whether the thesis is written as part of a structured doctoral programme or not.

**MANY PROBLEMS CAN
BE SOLVED QUICKLY
BY COMMUNICATING
HONESTLY, OPENLY
AND IN A RESULT-
ORIENTED MANNER.**

Doctoral researcher Astrid Kupferer



The recommendations apply across all disciplines, which means the listed aspects' relevance may vary and specific aspects may be added depending on the faculty. The starting point for the preparation of this guide was a workshop conducted on 25 June 2020 which was organised by the Research Academy Leipzig (RALeipzig)¹ with representatives of the relevant status groups (doctoral researchers, postdocs, university lecturers). The group representatives were asked to share their supervision expertise. Additional input was obtained from, among others, the research commission, the board of directors of RALeipzig, the Office of Ombudspersons and from individuals with a particular focus on improving doctoral supervision at the UL. This guide also takes into account similar guides from other institutions and associations², the results of a survey of doctoral researchers at the UL on aspects of supervision³ and the Nacaps study⁴.

The guide consists of two parts: the first part focuses on the perspective of doctoral researchers and serves as orientation for (potential) doctoral researchers. The second part focuses on aspects that are relevant for supervisors. Both parts address the key requirements and standards of good supervision. The guide is regularly updated in line with the latest developments and needs.

1 The university's central service institution for the promotion and support of doctoral researchers and early postdocs..

2 See Bibliography.

3 The survey was conducted by the RALeipzig team; the online survey was open from 16 March 2020 to 22 June 2020; 282 doctoral researchers took part in the survey. For the results, visit <https://www.ral.uni-leipzig.de/en/quality-assurance/>.

4 German Centre for Higher Education and Science Studies (2019) National Academics Panel Study. A longitudinal study of doctoral candidates and doctorate holders in Germany.

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PART 1

PERSPECTIVE OF DOCTORAL RESEARCHERS

In the following section, the central aspects that shape the supervisor-supervisee relationship are presented from the perspective of the doctoral researchers and, where possible, specific aspects pertaining to the UL are added.

MOTIVATION AND CAREER GOALS ⁵

Before you decide to pursue a doctorate, it is advisable that you analyse your motivation in detail. Knowing your reasons for wanting to pursue a doctorate will make it much easier to cope with and survive the taxing phases of writing a thesis. This involves not only time management and financial planning, but also an analysis of your own abilities, interests and personal circumstances.

The following questions can help you decide which path to take:

- Do I have a strong interest in specific academic topics?
- Am I familiar with the standard theories and methods, and can I apply them?
- Am I able to work independently and autonomously?

5 Qualitätszirkel Promotion (2018a): Gemeinsam die Promotion gestalten. Handlungsempfehlungen für Promovierende, <https://www.qz-promotion.de/home/handbuecher/gemeinsam-die-promotion-gestalten/> viewed on: 08/07/2020.

- Do I have the drive to research one question for several years?
- Do I enjoy academic writing and engaging with texts?
- How resilient am I and how strong are my problem-solving skills?⁶

The fact that the academic title can be a career advantage should be an additional motive at best, as this only focuses on the goal. You need to be motivated to tackle the tasks and challenges that await you along the way!⁷

While the career options you have with a doctorate should not be the main consideration, they should nonetheless be considered:

Academic career:

- Am I aware that pursuing an academic career involves at least one change of location and additional qualification phases, and that the chance of obtaining a professorship is low?
- Do I have the necessary stamina as well as the support I need to cope with difficult phases in my immediate environment?
- Does my supervisor have the necessary expertise?⁸
- Do I have a backup plan in case my academic career does not work out?

Non-academic career⁹:

- Will a doctorate help with my career aspirations? Do people generally have a doctorate in these careers or will I perhaps be overqualified?
- What additional qualification do I need to undergo while I work on my doctorate?

6 Ansgar Nünning; Roy Sommer (Hrsg.) (2007): Handbuch Promotion. Forschung – Förderung – Finanzierung, J.B. Metzler.

7 Helga Knigge-Illner (2002): Der Weg zum Dokortitel : Strategien für die erfolgreiche Promotion, Campus Verlag.

8 Find out about their current research projects, take a look at their list of publications and talk to doctoral researchers and colleagues.

9 Immediately after graduation, the majority of doctoral graduates work outside of academia; ten years later, only about one fifth of doctoral graduates still do, in: Konsortium Bundesbericht Wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs (2021): Bundesbericht Wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs 2021. Statistische Daten und Forschungsbefunde zu Promovierenden und Promovierten in Deutschland, p. 212 ff.

- Instead of a scholarship, might it make more sense to get a job related to my profession to finance the doctorate?
- Am I looking to work in a (specific) large company after my doctorate?¹⁰

In addition to considering your future career paths, you may also want to think about what the best working and research conditions are for you.

- Do I want to work on my doctorate on my own or in a structured environment (such as in a research training group or graduate school)? Is that possible in my subject/at this university?
- Do I want to do my doctorate at a university or at a non-university research institute such as the Max Planck, Leibniz or Fraunhofer Institutes or the Helmholtz Research Centres?
- Do I want to come up with my own topic? Would I be happy to join a third-party funded project where the topics are already determined?
- Do I want to do a career-integrated doctorate?

If you do decide to do a doctorate, you can play an active part in defining what this phase looks like; to do this, you should know your rights and obligations. But remember: don't embark on a doctorate just because you don't know what else to do! If you start a doctorate not because you are interested in researching the topic but rather to avoid risking unemployment you are more than twice as likely not to complete it.¹¹

STRUCTURED DOCTORATE

Many doctoral researchers like to do their research alongside others and support each other while working on the doctorate. Structured doctoral programmes, such as those offered by graduate schools and research training groups, provide additional training in the form of regular colloquia and summer schools.

10 In that case an industry-sponsored doctorate could be an option: you will be given a topic and you will be paid.

11 Silke Hell (2017): Soll ich promovieren? Voraussetzungen, Chancen, Strategien, Verlag Franz Vahlen.

The UL offers a number of structured doctoral programmes. The university's own graduate schools have the broadest range of topics across the natural sciences, the humanities and social sciences, and the neurosciences. There are currently (June 2021) three graduate schools at the UL:

- Graduate School "Building with Molecules and Nano-objects" (BuildMoNa)
- Graduate School Global and Area Studies" (GAS)
- Graduate School "Brain Dynamics"

There are also a number of DFG-funded research training groups which are either integrated into a collaborative research centre (iGRK) or are affiliated with the faculty/faculties.

FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

The doctoral regulations¹² lay out the requirements and formalities for obtaining a doctorate at your chosen faculty. There you can find out when and how you can be placed on the doctoral researchers list, about any additional credits you need or exams you have to take (e.g. oral exams, credit points) and what else to bear in mind before you start. Make sure you are familiar with the doctoral regulations that apply to you!

It is advisable that you are added to the doctoral researchers list as soon as possible after your supervision confirmation. This includes the following advantages¹³:

- If you are neither a doctoral researcher nor an employee (and therefore a member) of the UL, you become a member of the university when your name is added to a doctoral researchers list. This status allows you to use various services of the UL free of charge (e.g. university library, computer centre services).

¹² https://amb.uni-leipzig.de/?kat_id=40, viewed on 03/02/2021.

¹³ The PhD Candidates' Council of the UL has published the following recommendations on its [website](#) (in German).

- Being on the doctoral researchers list gives you a certain amount of legal protection because it means that you are recognised as a doctoral researcher of a faculty by the dean's office. This can be useful if you encounter problems or change your supervisor.
- In some cases, you have to have concluded a supervision agreement (see below) to be on a doctoral researchers list.
- If you are on the doctoral researchers list of a faculty you have the passive and active voting right for the doctoral representatives at the UL. This means that you can stand as a candidate for the PhD Candidates' Council and elect representatives to the PhD Candidates' Council.
- You have to be on the doctoral researchers list to enrol as a doctoral researcher and to make use of the services offered by the Competence School ("Kompetenzschule") of RALeipzig.

FUNDING

You should sort out the funding for your doctorate at an early stage. What type of funding is suitable for you depends on your personal circumstances and your long-term career goals. You should try to obtain funding for three years if possible.

You can fund your doctorate as follows:

- As a research associate, which involves third-party funding (e.g. DFG, BMBF), or by taking on a training position, which is funded by the university¹⁴; these positions are often 65% part-time positions of pay category 13 (Wage Agreement for Public Service of the States "TV-L"), you will be required to pay social security contributions and your salary increases with experience. Temporary employment as a research associate is subject to the German Act on Fixed-Term Scientific Contracts ("WissZeitVG") and, in the case of doctoral researchers, is limited to six years.

¹⁴ E.g. through the Leipzig Excellence Fund for Young Researchers (LE4YOU) of the UL.

- As a research assistant (“WHK”) working a maximum of 19 hours per week; such a position also requires you to pay social security contributions. As a research assistant you are also subject to the German Act on Fixed-Term Scientific Contracts (“WissZeitVG”).
- Scholarship (such as from one of the organisations for the promotion of young talent (“Begabtenförderungswerke”)): as a scholarship holder you receive approximately 1,500 euros per month, but you are not covered by social security and have to take out your own health insurance. One advantage is that you can concentrate fully on your research project because you do not have to do any additional work. However, you should make sure that you are integrated into a research group or are at least in regular exchange with members of the institute.
- External position/self-funding: as this form of funding means you have little contact with colleagues at the institute, you are advised to create a small network of peers for regular exchange, such as in the form of colloquia.

You can discuss funding with your supervisor, who will be able to advise you on the most appropriate funding for you. You can also contact the [Research Academy Leipzig](#), the [PhD Candidates’ Council](#) or the [Department 2: Academic Administration of the UL](#). In addition, graduate schools and research training groups advertise doctoral positions on their websites or in the relevant forums.

SUPERVISION

Doctoral supervision involves more than just subject-specific guidance, the supervisor-supervisee relationship is also a (temporary) relationship of trust, which needs to be worked on. While supervision standards are important, what doctoral researchers consider good supervision can vary significantly. You as a (soon-to-be) doctoral researcher first of all have to figure out how to find a suitable supervisor. This is particularly important if you are not going to join a structured doctoral programme (in a graduate school or research training group), where the process of finding a supervisor often follows a specific predetermined procedure.¹⁵

¹⁵ See also the [websites](#) of the graduate schools and programmes of the UL.

The information below can help you make a decision:

Getting the support you need

First, you should be able to assess how much support you want and in what form. Are you looking for close supervision or do you prefer to work as independently as possible? If you need expensive equipment and materials or are planning many research trips, you should find out whether this will be provided. Participation in an international network and academic involvement can also help with your professional development.

Getting the information you need

It is of course advisable that you talk to a potential supervisor about their expectations (such as number of working hours, frequency of meetings, development support) and find out to what extent these expectations align with yours.

It can also be helpful to talk to current or former supervisees of the potential supervisor. This also allows you to find out how the working group is organised, what the tasks of the staff members are and what they think of the working atmosphere. Find out how long it took former doctoral researchers to complete their doctorate.¹⁶

In addition to your main supervisor, it is advisable to have additional supervisors who will ideally provide you with support as a team, with each of them having a different role.¹⁷ Structured doctoral programmes often have a supervisory committee, or thesis advisory committee (TAC). Such a committee generally consists of your main supervisor and two colleagues. This can be a second supervisor, a post-doc or a mentor; ideally, an external person is also involved.¹⁸ The members of the TAC are usually chosen by the doctoral researcher and the main supervisors – in some faculties, this is regulated in the doctoral regulations.¹⁹

¹⁶ From an Australian, UK and US perspective; Gemma Conroy (2020): How to choose the right PhD supervisor. 4 red flags to be wary of in the search for a good match.

¹⁷ UniWiND (2017): Betreuung Promovierender. Empfehlungen und Good Practice für Universitäten und Betreuende; DFG (2021a): Prinzipien wirksamer Karriereunterstützung in der Wissenschaft..

¹⁸ If your doctorate is interdisciplinary, it is advisable that your supervisory team covers all the disciplines involved.

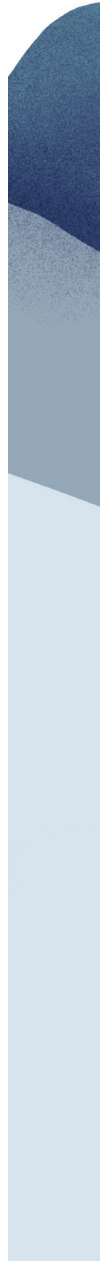
¹⁹ <https://www.ral.uni-leipzig.de/qualitaetssicherung/>, viewed on: 03/11/2020.

All agreements as well as the rights and obligations of the doctoral researchers and the supervisors are to be recorded in a supervision agreement. It is important for this agreement to align with the individual needs of the doctoral researchers and supervisors. The RALeipzig has drawn up a [template](#) that can be used by the faculties, which can then add any subject-specific needs.

The supervision agreement should cover at least the following aspects²⁰; depending on requirements, different aspects can be prioritised or added:

- Information relating to the supervisor or the supervisory team
- Faculty, working title of the thesis, thesis language (if applicable), planned time frame for completion and expected submission date
- A structured time schedule and work plan with defined milestones
- Tasks and obligations of the doctoral researcher: such as regular reporting obligations (performance records, participation in the skills development programme, academic training etc.), regular submission of work in progress
- Tasks and obligations of the supervisor: such as regular subject-specific advice and feedback, supporting academic independence, career promotion/mentoring, quality assurance (regular progress monitoring etc.)
- Providing opportunities to present the thesis topic and the researchers' progress (such as at a colloquium for doctoral researchers)
- Integration into a research group, a research association or a graduate programme (research training group, graduate school etc.)
- Commitment on the part of both parties to comply with the rules of good scientific practice
- Agreement on the provision of resources (materials, travel and publication costs etc.)
- Strategy for integration into the scientific community (active participation in conferences, network meetings etc.) to promote academic independence
- Agreement on which additional specialist and interdisciplinary skills training is required/desired, in particular with a view to the researcher's future career
- Agreement on how to deal with conflicts
- Special measures or regulations to reconcile family and academic work or in the case of health impairments

²⁰ Based on: DFG (2019a): Empfehlungen für das Erstellen von Betreuungsvereinbarungen, DFG-Vordruck 1.90 and DFG (2021a); [Nacaps study](#); [template supervision agreement of the RALeipzig](#); results of the workshop of the RALeipzig on 25 June 2020.



THE DOCTORAL RESEARCHERS AND THE SUPERVISORS NEED TO KNOW WHAT THE MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS ARE, I. E. HOW THEY DEFINE THEIR SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP. THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP CAN BE VERY DIVERSE.

Professor Erich Schröger

International and intercultural differences should also be taken into account. Doctoral researchers in different circumstances, such as parents or people with care responsibilities, also have to be integrated into the working group and must have enough time to do their own research. The supervision agreement is signed by all supervisors or the TAC and the doctoral researcher. All parties involved must adhere to the supervision agreement and, if necessary, it must be possible for it to be terminated in a transparent manner by either party.²¹ A key part of the supervision agreement is the specification of the supervision meetings. There are two types of supervision meetings: annual status/progress meetings between the doctoral researcher and the TAC/supervision team (which the doctoral researcher has a duty to write a report on), and regular (at least semesterly) meetings with the main supervisor. Minutes should be kept of the status/progress meetings and signed to ensure both parties' commitment. It is also advisable to adjust milestones and deadlines.²²

INTEGRATION INTO THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

As a doctoral researcher, you should become active yourself and look to publish your work and attend conferences nationally and internationally as soon as possible to present your research results, get feedback and to network. Discuss how to do this with your supervisor.²³

BECOMING QUALIFIED FOR (NON)-ACADEMIC CAREERS²⁴

Working on a doctorate is about much more than just authoring a thesis. Preparing and becoming qualified for an (academic) professional career is also an important part of it.

²¹ UniWiND (2017).

²² Ibid.

²³ Qualitätszirkel Promotion (2018a).

²⁴ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Universität Hannover (2013): Leitlinien für eine gute Betreuung von Promovierenden.

Whichever route you decide to take, you should involve your supervisors and ask them for feedback. One possibility is to look at and discuss the requirements for specialised and general work-related skills development training measures.

DURATION AND COMPLETION OF THE DOCTORATE

The official duration of a doctorate is three years, and any funding you get is provided for this period; in practice, however, it depends on your personal situation and your discipline and in fact takes between 3.5 and 5 years on average.²⁵ You should therefore exercise good time management from the beginning. Doctoral researchers tend to spend too much time initially familiarising themselves with the current state of research and don't always practice good time management further into the programme either. Take advantage of the experience of your team of supervisors so that you avoid spending too much time on some steps – the time will pass quicker than you'd like it to.²⁶

This in particular also applies to the final phase of the doctorate: if possible, plan and organise this phase together with your supervisor. It would be helpful during this phase not to have any responsibilities that are not related to your thesis. You should consider the following²⁷:

- Make sure that your results so far are sufficient for a successful thesis
- Agree on a feasible submission date
- Preparing your thesis defence: you are advised to make in-depth preparations, such as attending relevant workshops²⁸, giving rehearsal lectures or attending other people's defences within the faculty
- Publishing the thesis: find out in good time about possible publication formats and costs, such as at the [Leipzig University Library](#)

²⁵ Structured doctoral programmes completed in 2018 took more than four years on average. Only 18 percent of doctorates were completed within 3.5 years, and another 40 percent within 3.5 to 4.5 years; see DFG (2021b): Sprint oder Marathon? Die Dauer von Promotionen in DFG-geförderten Verbänden, p.3.

²⁶ Knigge-Ilner (2009): 89ff.

²⁷ Qualitätszirkel Promotion (2018a).

²⁸ Workshops for people nearing the end of their doctorate are hosted by RALeipzig, for example.

GOOD SCIENTIFIC PRACTICE

Compliance with the rules of good scientific practice (GSP) is of course a must when you write a doctorate. It is assumed that you know the rules and discuss anything that is unclear with your supervisors. Your supervisors are responsible for your doctorate and therefore also for making sure that you comply with the rules of good scientific practice.

As a doctoral researcher you should be familiar with the relevant documents (e.g. statutes of the UL for the safeguarding of good scientific practice²⁹, DFG guidelines on the safeguarding of good scientific practice³⁰) and attend at least one further training course. If you become aware of any scientific misconduct, you can contact the [Office of Ombudspersons of the UL](#), anonymously if you wish.

DEALING WITH CONFLICTS AND CRISES

In the course of a doctorate, there are a number of possible reasons for conflicts to arise between supervisors and their supervisees or other people involved. If you are unable to resolve these problems amongst yourselves, you can contact the conciliators at the UL.³¹ They are independent and bound to confidentiality. The doctoral programmes (graduate schools and research training groups) usually have their own persons of trust you can turn to in the event of a conflict.

Writing a doctorate takes several years and can be divided into different phases (e.g. orientation phase, introductory phase, research phase, completion phase).³² The process will not always be straightforward. You will encounter challenges (e.g. dealing with an enormous amount of material, motivational crisis) that can turn into real crises if you do not seek support in time.

In the event of a crisis you do not want or cannot resolve with your supervisors you can get in touch with contact points at the UL, such as the occupational health management department or the [Studentenwerk student services](#) (for enrolled doctoral researchers).

²⁹ https://www.uni-leipzig.de/fileadmin/ul/Dokumente/2015_Satzung_wissenschaftliche_Praxis.pdf, viewed on: 01/02/2021.

³⁰ Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) (2019b): Leitlinien zur Sicherung guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis, Kodex.

³¹ Prof. Roderich Barth and Dr. Nadja Walter; for more information visit the [website of RALeipzig](#). Doctoral researchers at the medical faculty can currently (June 2021) contact Prof. Johannes Hirrlinger, Carl-Ludwig-Institute for Physiology.

³² UniWiND (2019).

PART 2 PERSPECTIVE OF THE SUPERVISORS

In the following section, the central aspects that shape the supervisor-supervisee relationship are presented from the perspective of the supervisors and, where possible, specific aspects pertaining to the UL are added.

MOTIVATION TO BECOME A SUPERVISOR

By deciding to support and supervise a doctoral researcher you commit to investing time, energy and financial resources. It is therefore advisable to transparently communicate mutual expectations and needs as early as possible during the decision process.³³

As a potential supervisor you should have the appropriate level of expertise in the topic of the doctoral thesis. If this is not the case, you and the potential doctoral researcher should look for a more suitable university lecturer. If you as a university lecturer want to advertise a doctoral position, the guide of the HR department of the UL will help you formulate the advertisement, analyse the application documents, conduct interviews and with the final selection process.³⁴

33 Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz (2017): Leitlinien zur Betreuungsvereinbarung an der Johannes Gutenberg- Universität Mainz.

34 Universität Leipzig (2020): Handreichung Personalauswahl. Methodische Hinweise (available on the intranet).

How many doctoral researchers a professor can reasonably supervise is a controversial question. There is no set limit to the number of doctoral researchers you can have, but it is advisable that you think about whether you have the time to meet all the needs of your doctoral researchers. Doctoral researchers also require funding for research stays, publications and conferences; the number of doctoral researchers per supervisor should therefore be proportionate to the size and personnel structure of the institute.³⁵

Before you make a commitment to be someone's supervisor, you should discuss various aspects in as much detail as possible and also get to know each other. You will be more familiar with your own students than a potential doctoral researcher from elsewhere or a candidate who was selected as part of an application process for a specific project/training position. In any case, you should have a meeting with your prospective supervisee³⁶ discussing in detail your and the potential supervisee's expectations and requirements given that you will be working together for years.

You could discuss the following:

- Are they a suitable doctoral candidate, both with regard to their specialist and personal skills? Do I believe that they will be able to complete a doctorate on the topic?
- Is it possible for the research question to be dealt with within a reasonable time frame (target time of 3-4 years, longer for part-time researchers)?
- Is writing a doctoral thesis the best way for the candidate to achieve their career goal?
- Are the necessary resources available and/or to what extent am I willing to make such resources available (workplace, equipment, travel expenses etc.)?
- Where will the funding for the minimum three-year period come from? Does the candidate need help obtaining a scholarship?
- What form will the doctoral supervision take? A team of supervisors is recommended, which as a rule means a main supervisor, a second supervisor, a postdoc and/or a mentor.

³⁵ UniWiND (2017).

³⁶ Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München: Empfehlungen für die Gestaltung der Promotionsphase an der LMU.

An important point to consider when deciding whether to take on the applicant is their motivation – this tells you what the candidate's specific requirements are.³⁷

The candidate has a strong research interests

- Does my field of work offer an ideal research environment? Does the research topic complement my research interests?
- Do I have the necessary networks and/or resources in place to facilitate (international) exchange?

The candidate is looking to embark on a career in academia

- Same points as above
- Can the person be involved in teaching?
- Is the research topic suitable for high-quality publications?
- Will it be possible to integrate the candidate into the scientific community?
- Does the candidate have the necessary personal skills (see The perspective of doctoral researchers: Motivation and career goals)?

The candidate is looking to embark on a non-academic career

- Am I able to adequately support my supervisee's career goal (e.g. via contacts with non-university networks, overview of the skills necessary after graduation)?
- Am I willing to enable the doctoral researcher to take part in further training opportunities for non-academic careers?
- Does the content of the thesis meet my own quality standards for an academic piece of work?

³⁷ Qualitätszirkel Promotion (2018b).

The candidate does a doctorate because there is a "lack of alternatives"

- Do I consider this adequate motivation?³⁸
- Would I be able to handle the fact that the researcher might drop the doctorate or not complete it even after many years? Should we agree from the outset on the conditions under which the doctorate can be dropped?

You are free not to accept a supervision request from a doctoral candidate if you do not have enough time or for other reasons (for example, the candidate does not have the relevant aptitude or you yourself do not have sufficient expertise in the subject of the proposed thesis, it is unlikely that the candidate will receive the required funding.


FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

In the supervision and support of doctoral researchers, a distinction is made between supervision, assessment and involvement in a supervision committee. While the University Freedom Law of the state of Saxony ("SächsHSFG") does not stipulate any requirements regarding supervision and involvement in a supervision committee, there are stipulations regarding the assessment of doctoral theses.³⁹

Under certain circumstances academics with a doctorate but without a habilitation qualification can assess a doctoral thesis. As is required by a number of funding bodies such as the DFG or the Volkswagen Foundation, a working group of the research commission of the UL has developed guidelines to support academics with a doctorate on their way towards academic independence.

38 If the candidate is unsure, they may also seek advice from the Career Center or RALeipzig.

39 SächsHSFG, §40 (6) "[...] According to § 60 or § 62 an assessor must be an appointed professor at a university. Additional assessors can be professors at a university of applied sciences or junior professors or demonstrate academic accomplishments at least equivalent to those of a person with a habilitation qualification."



I WOULD LIKE THE SUPERVISOR TO TAKE INDIVIDUAL LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES INTO ACCOUNT AND WORK WITH THE DOCTORAL RESEARCHER TO FIND WAYS TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY.

Doctoral researcher Kathleen Zeidler

These guidelines are intended to support the faculties to establish processes that allow certain outstanding academics with a doctorate to be involved in the supervision of a doctoral researcher.⁴⁰

Once you have agreed to supervise a doctoral researcher, the supervisee will be placed on the faculty's doctoral researchers list and will thus be officially a doctoral researcher.

FUNDING

The doctoral researcher must have an adequate income for a period of three years – continuous funding must be available in order not to jeopardise the doctoral project. A minimum of 0.65 FTE (full-time equivalent), salary group 13 (TV-L) is recommended for the academic qualification phase.⁴¹

As the supervisor, you can help the candidate and provide information about the various funding options such as third-party funded projects, positions funded by the university and scholarships. Since it takes longer than three years on average to complete a doctorate, it is important to think about possible funding after this period.⁴²

40 At its meeting on 17 December 2020, the research commission decided to recommend to the faculties that they follow specific guidelines regarding the involvement of outstanding postdocs in the supervision of doctoral researchers. The recommendation is to make a distinction between supervision, assessment and involvement in a supervision committee. The recommendation is, depending on the subject, to enable certain outstanding postdocs to be involved in a doctoral programme project (e. g. early career research group leaders in programmes with a transparent high-quality peer review process; postdocs heading subprojects in SFB, FOR, clusters of excellence; postdocs with a sufficient number of relevant high-ranking publications).

41 The relevant review boards of the German Research Society (“DFG”) recommend a minimum position of 0.65 FTE (full-time equivalent); the relevant criterion here is the national and international competitive situation in the respective subjects, https://www.dfg.de/foerderung/faq/grako_faq/grako_faq_promovierende/index.html, viewed on: 04/11/2020.

42 The State Postgraduate Scholarship (“Landesgraduiertenförderung”, LFG) of the Free State of Saxony provides for a graduation grant in certain circumstances; see: <https://www.uni-leipzig.de/forschung/wissenschaftliche-laufbahn/promotion/finanzierung/landesgraduiertenstipendium/>, viewed on: 04/11/2020.

If the doctoral candidate applies for a scholarship, you can support them with a letter of recommendation. You can also refer candidates to vacancy ads on the websites of graduate schools and research training groups or to the relevant forums

SELECTION

A vacancy ad should not only address local graduates. An (inter)national placement may attract more suitable candidates and allows a comparison of potential candidates. Doctoral positions are filled according to a defined selection process.

Graduate schools or programmes often have fixed procedures and bidding rounds; information on upcoming vacancies should be published on the websites and in the relevant forums. Women in particular should be encouraged to do a doctorate and pursue an academic career if they are suitable.⁴³

SUPERVISION

In order for the doctoral project to be successful for both parties involved, the key tools of the doctoral supervision should be taken into account from the outset: Before the actual work phase, you should schedule an introductory meeting even if you already had an advisory meeting.

During the introductory meeting the main aspects of the doctoral project should be touched upon:

- Talk about your expectations – these will be put down in writing in the supervision agreement
- Draw up a time schedule and work plan (which are regularly updated)
- Talk about the integration in various academic networks
- Think about who might act as second assessor

43 See also Universität Leipzig (2020).

- If the doctorate is binational, you must prepare the necessary administrative requirements at an early stage
- Weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of a cumulative doctoral programme
- Talk about a publication strategy
- Discuss next (possible) career step⁴⁴

If possible, several people should be involved in the supervision and mentoring of the doctoral researcher; the TAC format has proven successful.⁴⁵ The members of the TAC are the main supervisor and two additional colleagues who support the doctoral project. This can be a second supervisor, a postdoc or a mentor. Ideally, an external person is also involved.⁴⁶

The following basic aspects should be considered for the regular meetings between the doctoral researcher and the supervisory committee/TAC:⁴⁷

- Meetings should take place at regular intervals. There are two types of meetings: annual meetings with the TAC/supervision committee (which the doctoral researcher is required to document in writing) and regular (e.g. half-yearly or quarterly) meetings with the supervisors
- Mandatory longer-term scheduling and allowing for sufficient time
- Open and fair communication (e.g. on data management, publications)
- Giving honest feedback, pointing out strengths and weaknesses
- Both parties communicate what they expect from the supervisor/supervisee relationship
- Comparing notes on academic processes (publication processes, networking, presenting)

A supervision agreement must be concluded between the supervisor (or supervisory committee) and the doctoral researcher.

44 Qualitätszirkel Promotion (2018b).

45 UniWiND (2017); DFG (2021a).

46 If the doctoral programme project is interdisciplinary, it is advisable that the supervisory team covers all the disciplines involved.

47 Universität Bielefeld (2010): Leitlinien der guten Betreuung von Promotionen.

This should cover at least the following aspects⁴⁸; depending on requirements, different aspects can be prioritised or additional aspects can be added:

- Information relating to the supervisor or the supervisory team
- Faculty, working title of the thesis, thesis language (if applicable), planned time frame for completion and expected submission date
- A structured time schedule and work plan with defined milestones
- Tasks and obligations of the doctoral researcher: such as regular reporting obligations (performance records, participation in the skills development programme, academic training etc.), regular submission of work in progress
- Tasks and obligations of the supervisor: such as regular subject-specific advice and feedback, supporting academic independence, career promotion/mentoring, quality assurance (regular progress monitoring etc.)
- Providing opportunities to present the doctoral topic and the researcher's progress (such as at a colloquium for doctoral researchers)
- Integration into a research group, a research association or a graduate programme (research training group, graduate school etc.)
- Commitment on the part of both parties to comply with the rules of good scientific practice
- Agreement on the provision of resources (materials, travel and publication costs etc.)
- Strategy for integration into the scientific community (active participation in conferences, network meetings etc.) to promote academic independence
- Agreement on which additional specialist and interdisciplinary skills development training is required/desired, in particular with a view to the doctoral researcher's future career
- Agreement on how to deal with conflicts
- Special measures or regulations to reconcile family and academic work or in the case of health impairments

International and intercultural differences should also be taken into account. Doctoral researchers in different circumstances, such as parents or people with care responsibilities, also have to be integrated into the work group and must be given enough time to do their own research.

48 Based on: DFG (2019a); DFG (2021a); [Nacaps study: template supervision agreement of the RALeipzig](#); results of the workshop of the RALeipzig on 25 June 2020

INTEGRATION INTO THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

The best support you can give your doctoral researcher is to promote their academic independence. Give them access to your (inter)national academic environment, for example by integrating them into working groups or academic networks. You are also expected to support the doctoral researcher in publishing their research results at an early stage and presenting them at (international) conferences. Talk to them about the appropriate strategies.⁴⁹ Regular participation in doctoral/research colloquia also allows doctoral researchers to present their research and receive helpful feedback.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

At some universities, supervisors of doctoral researchers can attend skills development courses; in other European countries, leaders with personnel responsibility are in fact expected to do so. Peer formats are particularly useful; they allow supervisors to exchange ideas with (experienced) colleagues or get input from other experts on the topic. If you would like to attend such an event, please get in touch with the personnel development department (Department 3: Human Resources) or the RALeipzig.

DURATION AND COMPLETION OF THE DOCTORATE

How long a doctorate takes depends on the researcher's individual situation and the respective discipline. The average is between 3.5 and 5 years.⁵⁰ Doctoral researchers sometimes spend too much time initially familiarising themselves with the current state of research and don't always practice good time management further into the programme either. Help your doctoral researcher practice good time management and set milestones, especially for the critical phases.

⁴⁹ Qualitätszirkel Promotion (2018b).

⁵⁰ DFG (2021b): p. 3.

If a doctoral researcher has a job in a faculty/institute, it must be ensured that the research, teaching and academic management this involves does not unduly delay the completion of the thesis.⁵¹

The schedule for the doctorate must be such that the thesis can be completed within a defined period of time. The start of the completion phase should be discussed and agreed, and support should be provided. This should be done in such a way that the doctoral researcher has plenty of time for the subsequent writing phase.

Plan and schedule the completion phase of the doctorate early and together with your supervisee. The following aspects need to be discussed and taken care of:⁵²

- Making sure that the results so far are sufficient for a successful thesis
- Agreeing on a feasible submission date
- Preparing the defence, such as with rehearsal lectures, by attending relevant workshops⁵³ and other people's defences within the faculty
- Publishing the thesis: What is the most suitable format for the doctoral researcher? Inform them about the possible publication formats in good time.

GOOD SCIENTIFIC PRACTICE

Compliance with the rules of good scientific practice (GSP) is of course a must for a doctoral researcher. As a doctoral supervisor, it is your responsibility to inform the doctoral researcher about their duty to comply with this (e.g. statutes of the UL for the safeguarding of good scientific practice⁵⁴, DFG guidelines on the safeguarding of good scientific practice⁵⁵) and you should also carry out spot checks.

⁵¹ Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

⁵² Qualitätszirkel Promotion (2018b).

⁵³ Workshops for people nearing the end of their doctorate are hosted by RALeipzig, for example.

⁵⁴ Universität Leipzig (2015): Satzung der Universität Leipzig zur Sicherung guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis.

⁵⁵ DFG (2019b).

The RALeipzig, for example, hosts regular training courses for doctoral researchers and postdocs, and some faculties also host similar events. Attending such courses is mandatory in some structured doctoral programmes – enable participation and exchange. In cases of scientific misconduct, you can contact the [Office of Ombudspersons of the UL](#), anonymously if you wish.

DEALING WITH CONFLICTS AND CRISES

In the course of a doctorate, there are a number of possible reasons for conflicts to arise between supervisors and their doctoral researchers or other people involved. If you are unable to resolve these problems amongst yourselves, you can contact the conciliators at the UL⁵⁶. They are independent and bound to confidentiality.

⁵⁶ Prof. Roderich Barth and Dr. Nadja Walter; for more information visit the [website of RALeipzig](#). Doctoral researchers at the medical faculty can currently (June 2021) contact Prof. Johannes Hirlinger, Carl-Ludwig-Institute for Physiology.

Doing a doctorate takes several years and can be divided into different phases (e.g. orientation phase, introductory phase, research phase, completion phase).⁵⁷ These can cause doctoral researchers to experience crises (e.g. dealing with an enormous amount of material, motivational crisis).

Give your supervisee support and refer them to the relevant contact points at the UL, such as the occupational health management department or the psychosocial counselling of the [Studentenwerk student services](#) (for enrolled doctoral researchers).

⁵⁷ UniWiND (2019).

**MUTUAL TRUST IS
JUST AS IMPORTANT
AS MUTUAL
APPRECIATION.**

Doktorand Richard Friedrich



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Illustration
Sophia Lehmann

Printing
Die Umweltdruckerei