

Guidelines for Doctoral Supervision at Johann Wolfgang Goethe University



Information for (prospective) PhD Candidates,
Supervisors of Phd Candidates, and Faculties

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Preamble

As one of the largest research universities in Germany, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University (hereafter referred to as Goethe University) places great value on creating excellent conditions for the qualification of Early Career Researchers (ECR). Excellent supervision of doctoral candidates in the context of a transparent and committed organization of the doctoral phase promotes the development of highly qualified researchers. The present “Guidelines for Doctoral Supervision” formulate key points on the organization of the doctoral phase, which strengthen the reliability of the supervisory relationship for both doctoral candidates and supervisors with regard to the prerequisites, framework conditions, and objectives of a successful completion of a doctorate and provide consistent orientation for all parties involved in the doctoral process at Goethe University. In this way, Goethe University reinforces the link between research and training/education in accordance with the recommendations by the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat). The formal, substantial and legal structure of the doctoral degree at Goethe University is determined by the General Conditions for the Doctoral Regulations and the doctoral degree regulations of the faculties based on them.

The guidelines are based on the recommendations for the improvement of doctoral supervision by the leading institutions promoting science and research in Germany (German Council of Science and Humanities¹, DFG², HRK³). The General Conditions for the Doctoral Regulations of the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt am Main and the doctoral regulations of the faculties of Goethe University are not affected by these guidelines. The individual faculties of Goethe University are responsible for the implementation of the requirements mapped out in these guidelines.

¹ Wissenschaftsrat (2011): *Anforderungen an die Qualitätssicherung der Promotion. Positionspapier*. Bonn. (Quality Assurance Standards for Doctoral Theses. Position Paper)

² DFG (2008): *Empfehlungen für das Erstellen von Betreuungsvereinbarungen*. Bonn. (Recommendations on the Draft of Supervision Agreements)

³ HRK (2012): *Zur Qualitätssicherung in Promotionsverfahren. Empfehlung des Präsidiums der HRK an die promotionsberechtigten Hochschulen*. Bonn. (Quality Assurance in Doctoral Studies. Recommendation by the Chair of HRK to tertiary institutions offering doctoral programs)

The objective of doctoral supervision is to provide guidance to the doctoral candidates on their way toward a doctorate degree, to support the completion of the work required for the qualification, and to form independent researchers for whom careers are available both in and outside of research and academia. The attainment of this goal is especially facilitated when the requirements of the doctoral process are transparent and comprehensible to the doctoral candidates and their supervisors and when mutual expectations are defined, communicated and documented early on. Doctoral supervision ought to support the independent work of the doctoral candidate and to foster the academic creativity of all parties involved.

1. Prior to Acceptance of Supervision

Suitability of the candidate: The candidate's formal academic suitability will be examined by the doctoral committee of the faculty. This step should take place before the start of the PhD project. Prior to agreeing to act as a supervisor for the doctoral thesis, the supervisor should discuss the motivation for the doctoral project with the doctoral candidate, agree to an estimated timeframe for the doctoral thesis, and discuss mutual goals and expectations concerning the supervisory relationship.

Supervisory capacities: Accepting the supervision of a doctoral thesis implies that the supervisor is willing to supervise the doctoral thesis reliably and responsibly over an extended period of time and to expend the necessary time resources. In view of this, supervisors are called upon to only take on as many candidates as their time commitments allow.

Acceptance by the faculty: The application for acceptance as a doctoral candidate by one of the faculties of Goethe University should also take place in close cooperation with the main supervisor. In exceptional cases in which the candidate does not appoint any supervisor, the faculties are to stipulate suitable procedures to establish a supervisory relationship and/or

to provide for quality assurance during the PhD phase. Upon accepting the doctoral candidate, the faculty/doctoral committee assumes responsibility for conducting procedures in due form and for the final evaluation of the academic work, including the conferral of the doctoral degree as soon as all prerequisites have been met.

2. The Supervisory Relationship after Acceptance by the Faculty

Rules of good scientific practice: Doctoral candidates and supervisors commit to following the rules of good scientific practice. Supervisors should inform their doctoral candidates of these rules and expressly demand compliance with them. Binding guidelines are set out in Goethe University's policy regarding good scientific practice⁴ and the recommendations by the German Research Foundation for safeguarding good scientific practice⁵.

Supervision: One supervisor (hereafter referred to as main supervisor) will have primary responsibility for the supervision of the doctorate. Within the first year after acceptance of the doctoral thesis by the faculty, at least one other member of Goethe University (a full or assistant professor, senior lecturer or postdoc) is to be appointed co-supervisor. The co-supervisor is not necessarily the same person as the second reviewer of the thesis. The involvement of additional persons in the supervisory team is encouraged. Supervision provided by several persons is supposed to enrich the doctoral thesis with subject-related and methodical expertise and to promote quality assurance.

Specifics of the Doctoral Thesis: The doctoral candidate and the main supervisor will agree on a preliminary thesis title as well as on a written preliminary work schedule and timetable for the project. Depending on the progress of the research, this plan may be updated or adapted. The language in which the doctoral thesis is to be written should be fixed prior to the preparation of the (cumulative) dissertation.

⁴ Goethe University (2005): *Johann Wolfgang Goethe University policy regarding good scientific practice*. Frankfurt am Main.

<https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/59424245/Grundsatz-guter-wissenschaftlicher-Praxis.pdf>

⁵ DFG (2013): *Proposals for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice*. Bonn.

http://www.dfg.de/download/pdf/dfg_im_profil/reden_stellungnahmen/download/empfehlung_wiss_praxis_1310.pdf

Information: The doctoral candidate will regularly inform the main supervisor and the other supervisors of the progress of her or his work. In the case of longer periods of absence, the parties involved should inform each other on how they can be contacted.

Supervisory meetings: The doctoral candidate and the main supervisor are entitled to at least one supervisory meeting per semester. Meetings with the supervisory team should be held at least once a year; subject of these talks should be the progress of the research, the next planned steps and the handling of any complications arising during the research process. The doctoral candidate commits to adequately preparing for the supervisory meetings and – if not otherwise agreed – to present the progress of his or her work in writing. The main supervisor commits to set aside an adequate amount of time for the meeting and to provide full professional support. How the meetings and the next steps following from it will be documented is subject to the stipulations of a supervision agreement between the doctoral candidate and their supervisor(s).

Framework/Infrastructure: The university, its faculties and departments are to provide each doctoral candidate with access to the scientific literature in libraries, additional sources necessary for their research (for example in the university archive or affiliated collections), and to the digital infrastructure of Goethe University. As far as it is within their means, the university, its faculties and departments ought to make available any resources that a doctoral candidate needs for their doctoral research. The doctoral candidate and the main supervisor should jointly discuss how the doctorate will be funded. Supervisors should support doctoral candidates in the application for job positions or scholarships. This is especially important for international doctoral candidates whose visa may depend on the securing of funds. Before the start of the doctoral project, it must be clarified if the work or laboratory space and necessary funding for implementation of the project are available and how the candidate is integrated into the supervisor's research context.

If the doctoral candidate is the research assistant of one of the supervisors and their employment contract stipulates the doctorate as a qualification goal, the main supervisor must ensure that the amount of time for work not related to the doctoral thesis is limited in accordance with the employment contract.

Duration of doctoral studies: The schedule for the completion of the doctorate should be based on a realistic timeframe, which takes the realities and standards of the academic discipline, the requirements of the individual research project and the employment and living situation of the doctoral candidate into account.

Integration into the Scientific Community: The main supervisor declares her or his willingness to contribute to the integration of the doctoral candidate into the Scientific Community. This may be through procurement of publication opportunities, providing access to scientific networks and facilitating conference participation and overseas stays. Doctoral candidates are to report on the progress of their work on a regular basis in research colloquia or in the main supervisor's work group. Doctoral candidates who are interested in gaining teaching experience should be given the opportunity to do so. The faculties and departments of Goethe University support supervisors and doctoral candidates as far as it is within their means by providing the infrastructure and funding necessary to facilitate these important components of the doctorate.

Career perspectives and further education: Talks between doctoral candidates and supervisors should include counseling on the career perspectives of the doctoral candidate both within and outside of academia. Supervisors should give doctoral candidates the opportunity to participate in interdisciplinary qualification programs and skills training and/or to be active in university committees.

Completion of doctoral thesis: The reviewers of the doctoral thesis commit to submitting their reviews in good time. The doctoral committees are to define the maximum time spans for the submission of the reviews. The doctoral committee should also be consulted to negotiate a realistic time span between the submission of the thesis and the oral defense.

Supervision Agreement: In a written supervision agreement, to be concluded at the start of the doctoral phase, the specifics of the thesis project will be determined: the supervisors, framework conditions of the PhD phase and responsibilities of the doctoral candidates and supervisors as well as regularly scheduled supervisory meetings. The development of faculty-specific supervision agreements, based on sample documents provided by Goethe University, which take the DFG recommendations for the drafting of supervision agreements⁶ into account, is recommended.

3. Termination of the Supervisory Relationship

In accordance with the doctoral regulations of the faculties, the supervisory relationship will terminate upon completion of the doctoral examination or after the issue of a publication license for the thesis. If it is not possible for the doctoral candidate to continue working on their dissertation for a substantial period of time, the candidate and supervisor(s) may agree to suspend the supervisory relationship temporarily. The doctoral committee has to be informed about this development.

The supervisory relationship may be terminated at any time by mutual agreement. The supervisor will inform the doctoral committee immediately and in writing; the supervisory relationship will end with this notification. In this case, the doctoral committee and the doctoral candidate discuss the further course of action.

⁶ DFG (2008): a.a.O.

Each party may terminate the supervisory relationship for compelling reasons. One such reason might be a severe breach of the supervision agreement. The terminating partner immediately informs the other partner of the supervisory relationship and the doctoral committee in writing; the supervisory relationship will end with this notification. In this case, the doctoral committee and the doctoral candidate discuss the further course of action.

Should a supervisory relationship end prematurely because of the supervisor, e.g. when the main supervisor is offered a professorship at another institution, the doctoral candidate and the doctoral committee must settle on a further course of action to ensure the continuation of the doctorate including adequate supervision.

4. Dealing with Conflicts

In case of conflicts, especially those which cannot be resolved by talks between doctoral candidate and supervisor, the parties may consult a faculty representative⁷ or an ombudsperson at the interdisciplinary graduate academy⁸ or at Goethe-University⁹.

⁷ The names of faculty representatives are either published on the faculty's website or website of the relevant dean's office or may be requested from the head of the dean's office.

⁸ Information on the GRADE ombudspersons can be found at <http://www.goethe-university-frankfurt.de/54287720/Ombudsperson>

⁹ Information on the ombudsperson in the case of matters related to studies, the doctorate and the work of the university administration can be found at http://uni-frankfurt.de/47859932/ombuds_studierende

Information on the ombudspersons responsible for handling breaches of good scientific practice can be found here http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/47859946/ombuds_wiss_fehlverhalten

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