

# Shaping a Doctorate Together

**Guidelines for  
Doctoral Candidates**



Imprint:

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Printed by Onlineprinters GmbH, Neustadt a. d. Aisch

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Circulation of 1250 brochures, 2012

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## **Shaping a Doctorate Together**

### **Guidelines for Supervisors and Doctoral Candidates**

The conditions for doctoral candidates at many universities in Germany and Europe have improved considerably as a result of the development of a broad spectrum of measures related to supervision, support and qualifications, within the framework of structured doctoral training. The goal of structured training is the formation of an extremely attractive research environment for young researchers. This has been accompanied by changes in academic cultures and in the understanding of management within universities. The burdens of doctoral training are shared by offering new support programmes and involving new actors, such as the managing directors of graduate schools, professional trainers and mentors. Young researchers are provided with special support, particularly in the field of professional qualifications and management competence, and this makes it easier for them, together with their supervisors, to concentrate on the research itself.

The focal point of the whole process of pursuing a dissertation remains the candidate's research performance and the supervisory relationship between supervisor and candidate. In some respects this has become even more important, because supervisors who have been relieved of some advisory duties can now concentrate more exclusively on the key responsibilities of supervision and support of the candidates' research and also on the specialist qualifications their candidates are acquiring. The transparency of this supervisory relationship makes a decisive contribution to the success of the doctorate.

These guidelines are intended to help to make doctoral supervision even more efficient. They provide a kind of supervisory biography of the course of a doctorate, offering suggestions for the preparatory, research and completion phases and giving all those involved a clearer idea of the organizational questions, problems, technical details and support measures that come into play during the different phases. The goal of doctoral supervision is to provide young researchers with the best possible advice as they prepare to become highly qualified colleagues who are fully integrated into the academic community. This process will work best

if its requirements are equally transparent and comprehensible for both sides, if both sides define, communicate and document their reciprocal expectations and if they understand the doctorate as a project to be developed and fine tuned together.

This English translation of the guidelines aims at two purposes: Firstly, we want to help those international students considering coming to Germany or already pursuing their doctoral degree at a German institution. Secondly, at the international level we intend to contribute to the discussions and, even more important, to the progress on how to improve standards and transparency for doctoral supervision and careers. As our remarks and suggestions have been made from the point of view of the German system, at the inter-national level adjustments may be necessary to meet the specific requirements.

### ***Qualitätszirkel Promotion***

This paper is the result of a joint project set up by the *Qualitätszirkel Promotion* (Quality Circle for the Doctorate), a German network involving 11 graduate schools and institutions responsible for quality assurance and support for young researchers, belonging to 10 different universities from different federal *Länder*. The project sees itself as a forum for the discussion and further development of guidelines and materials, and so ultimately of quality standards for good doctoral supervision at the universities involved and elsewhere. We are aware that our guidelines must be adapted to the different universities and to the current situation of their specialist cultures. They therefore cannot be a patent remedy that will apply everywhere; rather, they are intended to provide food for thought, proposals and the hope and expectation that further discussions and joint measures will follow.

We are circulating our guidelines internationally, in both German and English, and we would be pleased to see as many people as possible using them for the optimization of doctoral supervision in their own institutions. We would also be happy to receive feedback, reports of your own experiences and suggestions for revision. We will be glad to circulate this new knowledge via the national and international networks.

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## Before Beginning a Doctorate

“Should I do a PhD?” Deciding whether to start work on a doctorate is not easy. Writing a PhD thesis takes up a large chunk of one’s life and requires a good deal of energy. Doctoral candidates should therefore be clear in their own minds at the start of the process about their expectations, and should ask themselves certain fundamental questions. However, agreeing to supervise a PhD thesis is not an easy decision to make either. It requires supervisors to commit themselves to a candidate’s research project and to allot resources to that project over a period of time, without any guarantee that the project will be brought to a successful conclusion. In our view, therefore, both *candidates* and *supervisors* should consider these questions.

**Doctoral candidates** should examine their motivation, since the decision to start work on a doctorate will have an effect on their professional and personal development and on what happens to them in the next few years. They should remember that if they want to write a PhD thesis, they are taking a decision about a period of several years during which the focus of their life will take on a new shape or even change completely. One cannot write a thesis in one’s spare time! It is also important to consider at an early stage the question of one’s possible professional development after completion of the doctorate.

**Supervisors** have the advantage of being in a better position to assess the perspectives and prospects of an academic career that may be open to their doctoral students. They should be clear in their own minds about why the prospective candidate wants to take a doctorate, and should expect the candidate to be clear about this too. Sometimes it can be helpful for both sides for a doctoral project application to be rejected, as long as the rejection is based on sound arguments.

The following recommendations are addressed to doctoral candidates. They consist of



a checklist in the form of questions designed to help in reaching a decision, and which can be used as a kind of self-assessment. In order to establish a shared basis for the discussion, we have divided prospective doctoral candidates into possible types. This is not intended to be in any way exclusive or final, but should simply be understood as a way of using ideal types to get an idea of the range of motivations involved on the part of candidates.

You should ask yourself the following important questions in this phase:

### **1. Why do I want to do a doctorate?**

In order to answer this question, it can be helpful if – as already mentioned – you consider the possible types of doctoral candidates. Depending on the kind of doctorate and also on the goals you are pursuing, you need to think about a range of different aspects and are likely to give different answers to the individual questions:

- a. **intrinsic interest in the research topic**
- b. **academic career**
- c. **non-academic career**
- d. **professional goals in science and research management**
- e. **lack of direction**
- f. **the offer of a post**

a. **Intrinsic interest in the research topic:** Are you fascinated by the discipline or by a particular topic, and are you determined to investigate this topic and to carry out further research in this field?

- You need the best possible research environment. Will that environment be pro-

vided by this professor's chair or this particular research institute?

- Is a graduate school or doctoral programme an option? Find out more about these possibilities.
- Does your prospective supervisor work on the topics that interest you? Ask your fellow students and colleagues about this. You should also ask doctoral candidates who are already being supervised by the professor about their experiences.
- Is there a system of mentors in place, and are networks available?
- How far would you be prepared to go to be able to work on this particular topic?
- Is the topic embedded in the disciplinary environment? What professional opportunities are likely to be available once you have completed the doctorate?

**b. Academic career: Do you hope to pursue an academic career?**

- You need the best possible research environment. Will that environment be provided by this professor's chair or this particular research institute?
- Is a graduate school or doctoral programme an option? Find out more about these possibilities.
- If you want to become a university teacher, you need teaching experience. Will you have opportunities to teach while working on your doctorate? Will you be able to take courses providing instruction in university teaching?
- Will you be able to publish academic work?
- Does your prospective supervisor work on the topics that interest you? Ask your fellow students and colleagues about this. You should also ask doctoral candidates who are already being supervised by the professor about their experiences.
- Is there a system of mentors in place, and are networks available?
- How far would you be prepared to go to be able to work on this particular topic?
- Is the topic embedded in the disciplinary environment?
- What professional options will be open to you later?

- Are you aware that you may well not get a teaching post? Will you be able to deal with a period of personal uncertainty – do you have the necessary staying power and other personal attributes?
- If this happened, would you have a Plan B?
- Are you prepared to get involved in the scientific community? Is your character compatible with this?

c. **Non-academic career:** You need the academic qualification in order to pursue professional success outside the university, e.g. in industry.

- It may make sense, in relation to the management of your time and resources, to proceed more pragmatically than you would if your doctorate was designed to lead to a career in academia.
- You will need to acquire additional professional qualifications, perhaps specifically targeted ones, during the period of work on your thesis.
- In your case, it may be better to finance your doctorate by working in a related field rather than via a scholarship, since you need to acquire professional experience.
- Select your research topic with these pragmatic concerns in mind.

d. Professional goals in **science and research management**

- It may make sense, in relation to the management of your time and resources, to proceed more pragmatically than you would if your doctorate was designed to lead to a career in academia.
- When selecting your research topic, bear in mind pragmatic aspects too, e.g. in relation to the field in which you want to work.
- It is important to acquire professional qualifications during the period of work

on your thesis.

- In this case, it would be better to finance your doctorate by working in a job that will prepare you for your desired profession rather than via a scholarship, since you may need this professional experience later and will be able to start establishing networks. The most helpful option would be a post at the university, since this will give you direct insight into how university and science and research management structures work.
- During the period of work on your doctorate, try to acquire experience in coordination tasks and in committee work.

e. **Lack of direction:** Are you thinking of doing a PhD because you do not know what else to do?

- Assess your personal situation realistically.
- Are there any (professional) alternatives to a doctorate?
- Do you have sufficient motivation and staying power to see the doctorate through to the end, if you are only doing it because you don't have an alternative?
- What career perspectives do you see open to you after the doctorate?
- Seek advice from the institutions that offer it.

f. If you have received the **offer of a post** from the chair for purposes of qualification:

- Does the post offered fit in with your own professional perspectives?
- What is the situation around the chair? Ask colleagues and/or fellow students about their experiences.
- Clarify the question of your additional duties with the professor: teaching, administration and other duties and also the question of how much time you will have to devote to them.

Thinking about these issues in terms of certain doctoral types will also entail different answers to questions about other areas you need to think about (see below). This applies both to candidates and to supervisors, since the doctoral type is likely to have implications for the supervisory relationship. Depending on the doctoral type supervisors see their candidates as belonging to, they will allocate their own resources differently in respect of the way they make them available to their candidates. This may affect:

- financial resources
- time
- interest in the person
- encouragement of the individual's ideas
- choice of research topic (if the doctorate is more oriented towards a non-academic field, the topic will certainly be more narrowly and pragmatically defined than in the case of a future elite scholar)
- contacts and networks

Following on from these points, and continuing to bear them in mind, it is advisable to think about the following areas:

**2. Do I meet the formal requirements of the discipline at the university where I want to take my doctorate?**

- Doctoral regulations or the recognition of the formal equivalence of foreign degrees
- Would matriculation be helpful or necessary, e.g. with regard to a possible Law on Fixed-Term Contract ?
- The type of oral examination
- See the university's checklist

### 3. How am I going to fund my doctorate?

- an academic post attached to my supervising professor's chair
- a post in science and research management
- working as a graduate assistant
- a post outside the university
- a scholarship
- a post at the university, but one that does not lead to an academic qualification
- family support
- other

➤ **Think about the advantages and disadvantages of different kinds of funding!**

- ☒ Will I have enough time to work on the doctorate?
- ☒ What effect may my professional activity have on my personal schedule for completing the doctorate?
- ☒ How long is my contract? What will happen after that?
- ☒ Are my family and/or partner fully supportive of my plans?
- ☒ Can I get through periods without funding?
- ☒ Do I need to make research trips, and how can I fund them?
- ☒ Other considerations; consult the university's checklist if need be.

### 4. What about my personal and social situation?

- What plans do I have for my life and my family?
- Do I have sufficient motivation?
- How well can I manage my time and myself?
- Do I have a hobby that takes up a lot of my time? Am I prepared to spend less time on this, if it proves necessary?

- Do I need to take regular holidays, or can I go without a holiday for a year if need be?
- Do I need a lot of time for leisure activities? Can I spend less time with my friends and family?
- Will I be able to manage with less money, if need be?
- Can I cope with the fact that I will not attain a higher status for some time?
- Will I find it difficult to cope with insecure employment and uncertain career prospects for a lengthy period?
- Other considerations; consult the university's checklist if need be.

### **5. What kinds of doctorate are possible in my discipline?**

The form taken by the doctorate is of decisive importance for the course it will take. The way you go about things will depend on the kind of doctorate you decide on. The two main kinds are:

- The traditional procedure, with publication of the thesis as a monograph after successful completion of the doctorate.
- The cumulative procedure, with the stipulation that the progress of the work should be documented during the process via the publication of parts of the findings.

### **6. Choice of second examiner**

- At what point should the second examiner be selected?
- What procedures should be in place for the second examiner's participation in supervision of the thesis?

In our view, it would be ideal if the candidate and supervisor could clarify their reciprocal expectations at the start of the supervisory relationship, and even better if they could put this understanding in writing, for example in the form of a supervision agreement.

(🔗 [www.dfg.de/formulare/1\\_90/index.jsp](http://www.dfg.de/formulare/1_90/index.jsp))

In practice, things will not always be organized this way, and this way of proceeding can also give rise to problems when a more pragmatic kind of doctorate is the goal. Nevertheless, in such cases you as a candidate should be aware that for equally pragmatic reasons the supervisor will not supervise your project as closely as might otherwise be the case.

A further consideration is that this will result in the specification of requirements in those areas where the doctoral candidate is expected to pursue further training while writing their thesis. It may be a good idea to incorporate these considerations into a personal development plan (a supervision agreement or something similar).



## Research Phase

After the fundamental questions of whether to proceed with a doctorate and who will supervise it have been answered, it is advisable before beginning work to think about some important intermediate steps. The most important things to think about at this stage are practical questions:

- Firstly, you should make sure you are informed about the administrative steps that need to be taken along the way, e.g. the procedures involved in registering and submitting your thesis.
- Secondly, you need to talk to your supervisor about how and at what point in time a second examiner should be identified and integrated into the work and the supervision process.
- Thirdly, in some faculties the important question arises of whether the thesis should or can be written cumulatively; in this case you need to consider, together with your supervisor, the advantages and disadvantages of this way of proceeding from the point of view of the most efficient way of working and your professional aspirations.
- Fourthly, the question of the expenditure that will be required in the course of writing the thesis should be discussed at an early stage; the cost of publishing the thesis should also be mentioned.
- In cases where the thesis is being written in a bi-national framework, the partner university and the administrative department responsible should be contacted at an early stage so that a cotutelle de thèse agreement can be negotiated.

After the supervisory relationship has been established and the formal questions emerging from the preparatory phase have been settled, work on the thesis can begin. This phase has four dimensions that are relevant for the contribution of the supervisor:

1. **instruments**
2. **the framework**
3. **work on the research topic**
4. **the personal relationship**

### 1. Supervision instruments during the research phase

There are two instruments that have proved their value in the supervision of doctoral candidates. The main instrument is the individual supervision meeting, which should take place at least once every semester. In addition, it is advisable to take part in your supervisor's doctoral colloquium, if one is offered. This gives you an opportunity to present the progress you have made in your project to your supervisor and fellow candidates. The colloquium enables you to discuss academic questions and problems related to your work and also to talk about personal problems. In addition, you learn how to provide academic feedback in a protected circle. It has been found to be beneficial if the supervision meeting follows as soon as possible after the colloquium. This makes it possible for the supervisor to add to things that have been said in the group discussion, and both parties will be up to date on the current state of the project.

Apart from the question of instruments, there is a need to ensure that agreements reached between candidates and supervisors are transparent. If this is done, misunderstandings can be avoided from the start. It is important to clarify at the beginning of the research phase

- how often meetings should take place,
- what is expected of the candidate in these meetings,
- what form the supervisor's feedback will take – what standard is expected of draft chapters handed in beforehand, how comprehensive the text segments handed in should be, whether written comments on the work handed in will be provided,

and to what extent the candidate's data-gathering strategies will be discussed and regularly subjected to critical examination.

The following measures are suitable as ways of ensuring that the agreements are transparent:

**Supervision agreement:** The points on which agreement has been reached can be put in writing in a supervision agreement; this is already established practice in numerous graduate schools and centres.

**Keeping a written record:** In addition to the measures taken to ensure transparency in the supervisory relationship, it is advisable to keep a record of all points agreed upon and in this way to document progress made in the jointly undertaken work. This can be done in one of two ways: either the supervisor makes a brief note immediately after the meeting of what emerged from the discussion, or the candidate makes a note of what they see as the main points to have emerged and gives this to the supervisor to check. This will ensure that any misunderstandings arising in communication during the supervision can be cleared up, and it also places both parties under a stronger obligation to keep to the commitments entered into.

## 2. Creating a framework

We use the term "framework" to cover all those activities and responsibilities of the supervisor which contribute to the creation of the best possible preconditions to enable the candidate to complete their doctorate as quickly as possible. These should be discussed with your supervisor; they consist of:

**Funding:** Funding issues should be resolved during the preparatory phase, but new problems may arise as the work proceeds. If this happens, you should consider the fol-

lowing questions together with your supervisor:

- Might external funding be obtained and if so how?
- Might it be possible to apply for a scholarship to fund the doctorate?
- Will you be able to get help from official sources of advice available within the institution (for example, a career services office)?

**Finding the necessary resources:** If it is foreseeable that you will incur considerable costs in carrying out the research (travel costs, research materials, printing costs for questionnaires, etc.), you need to consider possible sources of funding in advance and find out what steps will need to be taken to obtain the funding.

**Respecting the candidate's autonomy:** In cases where the supervisor is also the candidate's superior, it is important for both sides to be aware of the dual roles involved in their relationship with one another. In addition, candidates need to have enough space of their own to be able to carry out and complete their doctoral research project.

**The need for further training and opportunities:** Candidates should undergo further training while working on their thesis, in order to expand their areas of expertise (specialist skills, key competences, etc.). You should make use of services offered by existing structures at the university (e.g. programmes offering support for young researchers, women's offices, facilities for training in university teaching). The qualification strategy accompanying the doctoral research project should be discussed regularly by supervisor and candidate, and should be documented in the written record of supervision meetings. In connection with this issue, you should also think about what you consider to be the goal of your doctorate.

### **3. Work on the thesis topic: Discussing substantive issues**

In addition to organizational support, the supervisory relationship should provide a forum for regular dialogue about the contents of the work in progress. It goes without saying that the supervisor will not always be an expert on the particular field within which the thesis is located. The function of the supervisor can equally well consist of offering a competent external perspective on the project. One can distinguish the following substantive areas on which advice should be provided:

**The research schedule:** Each component of the schedule should be realistic, and it should be structured by clearly defined intermediate goals (milestones). If this is done, it will be easier for both candidate and supervisor to keep a check on the progress being made at each stage. Overall, it seems to be advisable to leave open the possibility of making any necessary modifications, while only making drastic departures from the agreed schedule in exceptional circumstances.

**Monitoring the progress of the project:** In every scholarly project, the question under investigation, structure and hypotheses must be constantly revised in order to bring them into line with the progress being made, the findings emerging from the research and unforeseen developments. You should discuss the basic shape of the project regularly with your supervisor and should also talk about any ongoing shifts of perspective or fine tuning. Take care to keep up to date with the latest developments in research findings and specialist publications even after you have started work on your own project, and take advantage of the support offered by programmes for young researchers, for example advice on managing projects and organizing one's time and workshops on writing skills.

**Widening horizons and integrating doctoral candidates into the scientific community:** Contacts with other scholars and productive discussion networks are important precon-

ditions for the successful completion of a doctorate. In order to promote these contacts in an active way, other scholars can be brought into the doctoral project at an early stage – as second examiners or as members of supervisory panels or committees. You should make an effort at an early stage to give lectures and publish your work, in both national and international forums, since this both provides substantive stimulation and will be beneficial to your academic career. Discuss suitable strategies with your supervisor.

**Self-reflection as a researcher:** Think about your role as a researcher. As a young researcher, you should be able to form a clear idea of where you are positioned in your research field and what specific tasks you see yourself as carrying out within that field, especially in view of the Disputation (viva voce examination), in which you will be expected to present yourself as an autonomous researcher.

**Good scientific practice:** Candidates should make sure they are familiar with the fundamental principles of good scientific practice, in order to ensure that they meet the standards expected in the scientific community.

#### **4. The personal relationship needs to be taken into consideration**

The responsibilities of supervisors are not confined to the provision of specialist advice in relation to work on the doctoral research project. Human interaction also plays an important role. A relationship of trust between supervisor and candidate should be the goal here. Both sides should show that they are reliable partners who keep to agreements that have been reached. A supervisory relationship characterized by trust makes it possible for the candidate to formulate (critical) questions and requirements in their dealings with the supervisor.

## Completing the Doctorate

### 1. The start of the completion phase

The completion phase starts with a discussion between supervisor (or supervisory committee) and candidate, in which agreement is reached on a realistic submission date for the thesis and, if possible, on the specification of a period within which the defence (viva voce examination) should take place; the length of this period will, in turn, be affected by

- the period agreed for any corrections that may be necessary,
- the preparation and submission of the necessary examiners' reports,
- the dates for the meetings of the doctoral committee,
- the period in which the thesis will be made available for consultation and the need to agree on a date when all members of the examination board are available.

The basic requirement here is that any questions not dealt with during the phase of work on the thesis should now be addressed; the points and questions mentioned in this section should be raised, and they should be settled to the satisfaction of both sides as far as possible.

- There should be an assessment of whether the findings of the project so far are sufficient for a successful thesis, or whether the investment of additional time and effort might be worthwhile in order to improve the quality of the thesis.
- At this point at the latest, a decision should be taken on the language in which the thesis will be written. In particular, in cases of candidates writing in a language other than their mother tongue, there is a need to establish what standard is

required in terms of expression and style and whether professional assistance may be needed in order to polish the language of the thesis.

- In addition, the following questions should be settled:
  - ☐ By what dates must the individual parts of the thesis be completed?
  - ☐ Will individual chapters be handed in to the supervisor for correction, or will this only be done when the whole thesis is complete?
  - ☐ What is the timeframe for the supervisor to make corrections?
  - ☐ If some parts are revised after correction by the supervisor, will they be handed in once again for further correction?

## 2. The final version of the thesis

Once these issues have been resolved, the final revisions can be made. Supervisor and candidate should now, each from their own perspective, conduct a final review of the thesis before it is submitted. The most important points to be clarified are the following:

- Together with your supervisors, you should once again ask, in a critical spirit, whether the research questions examined in the thesis have been investigated competently, using the appropriate methods.
- Has the thesis been put together in a way that makes sense; is the structure adequate and clear?
- Do the structure of the text and the contents of the argument cohere?
- Have the findings been presented and discussed convincingly?
- Have the individual chapters been written in a way that makes their significance for the thesis as a whole sufficiently clear?
- Does the thesis make a significant contribution to scientific knowledge, e.g. a contribution to the development of the theory or methods of this particular field?
- Have you made a substantive original scientific contribution of your own?



### 3. Preparing for the defence (viva voce examination)

In preparing for your defence (viva voce examination), you should talk to your supervisors about the procedure and what will be expected of you:

- It is important to prepare yourself adequately, so that you can deal with all aspects of the presentation of your thesis and the scholarly discussion that will follow; you must also be able to respond to criticism.
- It is strongly recommended that you ask other candidates and also colleagues who have already obtained their doctorates, for help and criticism in relation to the presentation and discussion of your thesis. It may also be a good idea to practise making your presentation to an audience of fellow candidates and/or supervisors. If possible, make use of your membership of a graduate school or a working group with a smaller group of candidates and, perhaps, several supervisors.
- Candidates need to be aware that they are no longer in a subordinate position as undergraduate students or doctoral candidates. In the defence (viva voce examination), they now have equal status as partners in a scholarly exchange and discussion. You should make a point of practising this.

### 4. The publication phase

Since publication is a central feature of a completed doctorate, you must make sure you understand the publication framework in good time and discuss different options with your supervisor.

- If parts of the thesis have not already been published as contributions to a cumulative doctorate, it may be necessary to revise the text, especially if it has been written in a language other than the author's mother tongue.

- Where should the thesis be published?
- What kind of layout is specified, for example by the doctoral regulations or the publisher you want to approach?
- What format is required for any tables or for visual or graphic appendices?
- Is there a need to prepare new visual or graphic material? (Don't forget to clear up any questions relating to costs and, if necessary, copyright.)
- Does it make sense to publish the thesis online?
- Might it be possible to publish parts of the thesis as journal articles, contributions to collections or other articles, regardless of where and how the whole thesis is published?
- How are the presses, series or journals that might be worth considering to be evaluated?
- What are the likely printing costs?
- From what sources could the printing costs be met, and would these require applications supported by letters of recommendation?

## **5. Clarifying the candidate's professional options**

In many cases, a doctorate is the first step in a career in universities or in research institutes outside academia. But, doctoral candidates often hope to pursue careers in other fields related to academic work. Because there are so many professional options in a wide range of fields, and because these all need to be approached in different ways, you need to start thinking about your future career during the research phase of your thesis. You will benefit from support provided by your supervisor, and can participate in relevant workshops, coaching sessions or consultations offered by, for example, graduate schools or career advice services. If you have not done this earlier, it is very important to discuss these questions with your supervisor, and to take advantage of the advice he or she offers on what can be done during the completion phase.

You can also ask your supervisor for help in your search for and acquisition of suitable new research desiderata:

- You can ask supervisors and other scholars if you can use their contacts with other researchers or institutions when you are looking for ways to add further options to your academic qualifications (posts, postdoctoral scholarships, publication options, etc.).
- The graduate school office (if there is one) or the university's office for research funding may also be able to help you.

## **Conflict Situations and How to Resolve Them**

One reason why we have drawn up these guidelines is that we hope they may contribute to the avoidance of conflicts. Even so, it is possible that fundamental difficulties may arise between candidate and supervisor. These may relate either to the substance of the doctorate – the contents of the research, the approaches used, misunderstandings, a failure to adhere to agreements or organizational questions – or to personal relations between the two parties.

If this happens, both sides should do their best to bring problems out into the open as early as possible and to deal with the situation in as professional and unemotional a manner as they are able. If this is done, it should be possible for interaction between the two parties to continue and for a way out of the situation to be found. Both parties should seek assistance and advice from uninvolved third parties who can act as mediators; in many cases, their perspective from the outside will enable them to identify constructive ways out of the crisis.

There are a number of people to whom you can turn for advice and assistance. Each individual must decide which of these people offer the best option or options; your decision will depend on who may be familiar with the conflict situation, who you feel you can trust, and who would also be likely to be acceptable to the supervisor as a mediator.

Possible contacts include:

- other professors; another member of the supervisory team, if there is one, would be the ideal person.,
- the chair of the doctoral committee,
- postdoctoral researchers or your fellow candidates,

- bodies responsible for directing or coordinating structured doctoral programmes or other institutions involved in support for doctoral candidates,
- equal opportunities officers,
- members of the staff council.

However, there will be occasions when no other course of action is open than to consider ending the supervisory relationship and finding another supervisor. For example, it may be that a research project develops in a direction that takes it too far away from your field of interest or that of your supervisor. It is easier to realize in good time that this is happening, and to react to the situation, if both sides reach agreement at an early stage on the direction the thesis is to take, meet as regularly as possible and define the intermediate goals (milestones). If it is impossible to avoid a change of supervisor, both sides should do everything they can to find a solution that is acceptable to all involved.

A conflict of interest can also arise if a supervisor moves to a new post at a university some distance away. This may mean that it is no longer possible to guarantee sufficiently close contact between supervisor and candidate, and a change of supervisor may be necessary. In such cases, it is very important to inform the candidates affected as soon as possible and to search together for solutions.

As a safeguard both for you and for your supervisor, we would like to conclude by recommending that you should, if at all possible, register with the university's doctoral committee right at the start of your work on your thesis. Once you have been accepted as a doctoral candidate, the department or faculty is under an obligation to make it possible for you to complete your doctorate.

## Further reading

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- Cone, J. D. & Foster, S. L. (2006) *Dissertations and Theses from Start to Finish: Psychology and Related Fields* (2nd ed.) American Psychological Association
- Enders, J. & Bornmann, L. (2001) *Karriere mit Dokortitel? Ausbildung, Berufsverlauf und Berufserfolg von Promovierten*. Campus
- Lee, A. (2011) *Successful Research Supervision: Advising Students Doing Research*. Routledge Chapman & Hall
- Lovitts, B. (2007) *Making the Implicit Explicit: Creating Performance Expectations for the Dissertation*. Stylus Pub LLC.
- Matthiesen, J. & Binder, M. (2009) *How to Survive Your Doctorate*. Open University Press
- Nünning, A. & Sommer, R. (Eds.) (2007) *Handbuch Promotion: Forschung – Förderung – Finanzierung*. Metzler
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- Stock, S., Schneider, P., Peper, E. & Molitor, E. (2009) *Erfolgreich promovieren: Ein Ratgeber von Promovierten für Promovierende*. Springer Berlin Heidelberg (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).
- Walker, M. & Thomson, P. (2010) *The Routledge Doctoral Supervisor's Companion: Supporting Effective Research in Education and the Social Sciences*. Routledge
- Wisker, G. (2005) *The Good Supervisor: Supervising Postgraduate and Undergraduate Research for Doctoral Theses and Dissertations*. Palgrave Macmillan

## Ressources on the internet

- Best-Practice-Papier Thesis – Interdisziplinäres Netzwerk für Promovierende e.V. und DHV - Deutscher Hochschulverband  
[www.hochschulverband.de/cms1/fileadmin/redaktion/download/pdf/pm/BestPractice-Thesis\\_Endfassung.pdf](http://www.hochschulverband.de/cms1/fileadmin/redaktion/download/pdf/pm/BestPractice-Thesis_Endfassung.pdf)
- Positionspapier: Anforderungen an die Qualitätssicherung der Promotion. Wissenschaftsrat  
[www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/1704-11.pdf](http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/1704-11.pdf)

Promotionsratgeber. Universität Koblenz-Landau

[www.uni-koblenz-landau.de/ipz/promotion/literaturhinweise/promotionsratgeber](http://www.uni-koblenz-landau.de/ipz/promotion/literaturhinweise/promotionsratgeber)

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

[www.graduatecenter.uni-muenchen.de/promotion/betreuung/gestaltung\\_promotion.pdf](http://www.graduatecenter.uni-muenchen.de/promotion/betreuung/gestaltung_promotion.pdf)

Study Advice: Working with Supervisors. University of Reading. United Kingdom

[www.reading.ac.uk/internal/studyadvice/postgraduates/sta-working.aspx](http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/studyadvice/postgraduates/sta-working.aspx)

Re-Envisioning the PhD – Mentoring: A Guide for Faculty. University of Washington

[www.grad.washington.edu/mentoring/faculty/](http://www.grad.washington.edu/mentoring/faculty/)

The Responsive Ph.D. – The Woodrow Wilson Nationals Fellowship Foundation

[www.woodrow.org/responsivephd/](http://www.woodrow.org/responsivephd/)

Supervising a Doctorate Vitae

[www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/14862/Supervising-a-doctorate.html](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/14862/Supervising-a-doctorate.html)

Supervision – Post graduate online training. University of London

[www.port.igrs.sas.ac.uk/tutorials/supervision](http://www.port.igrs.sas.ac.uk/tutorials/supervision)

