

Quality Standards for Doctorates at Osnabrück University

Preliminary remarks:

These Quality Standards are recommendations for studying for a doctorate at Osnabrück University. Most of these are routine procedures for the majority of supervisors and doctoral candidates. For the sake of clarity, however, these points have been summarized to ensure that doctoral candidates and their supervisors are aware of their rights and obligations with regard to doctoral studies.

Doctoral candidates often fit the work on their dissertation around other commitments in a variety of different ways. This influences the duration of their doctoral studies. The amount of time a doctoral candidate has available to work on their dissertation can typically be reduced by the following activities or obligations (possibly extending the overall length of time required to complete the doctorate):

1. Work on research projects (not directly connected to the dissertation)
2. Activities within the school, subject area, working group and/or in committees not associated with the doctorate
3. Teaching responsibilities
4. Work outside the university
5. Family responsibilities (children or caring for family members)
6. Personal restrictions

Acknowledging these various factors and considering the doctoral candidates' individual situation is a key aspect of responsible supervision. The expectations placed on doctoral candidates (e.g., deadlines for completing the doctorate or parts thereof, meetings with supervisors, gaining additional professional skills) may differ considerably depending on the doctoral candidates respective circumstances.

1 Before embarking on a doctorate

1.1 Contextual Prerequisites

Before embarking on a doctorate, the doctoral candidate and their supervisors should discuss the motivation behind the intended doctorate. The supervisor should only accept the doctoral candidate if the demands and scope of the envisioned project can be managed by the doctoral student within the scheduled period (i.e., if they have the knowledge and skills required or can acquire it in time) and the supervisor has the expertise required to supervise the topic. Before starting, it should also be clarified whether the necessary equipment and software are available and whether access can be granted to archives and documents. If the topic for the dissertation has not yet been defined, the candidate and supervisor should identify a topic in collaboration.

Sufficient funding is essential when studying for a doctorate. Before starting work, candidates and their supervisors should agree on the financial basis for the doctorate; if necessary, supervisors should inform their candidates about the possibility of external funding and refer

them to relevant resources of support (e.g. consultation at ZePrOs). If funding is not secured or if doctoral candidates need to spend too much time in jobs not related to the dissertation to support themselves, there should be careful consideration of whether the doctorate is a realistic proposition. It is also essential to discuss beforehand how any "additional expenses" incurred within the doctorate (visits to archives, consumables, attending conferences, publication costs, study abroad, etc.) will be financed.

1.2 Acceptance formalities

The formal acceptance procedures and the criteria for acceptance into doctoral studies should be clearly defined and communicated transparently. In the interests of the prospective candidate, checks should be made to ensure that the formal prerequisites for a doctorate have been satisfied before the letter confirming supervision is sent. When reviewing the equivalence of degrees obtained abroad, the assessment proposals put forward by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Central Office for Foreign Education) shall apply. A school letter confirming supervision is the basis for formal enrollment. It is important to specify at the earliest opportunity which doctoral regulations will apply, particularly in the case of interdisciplinary doctorates. Here, recognizing the scope of subject areas, there should be prompt establishment of a team of supervisors by the doctoral candidate and their supervisor.

1.3 Supervisors

At the start of the doctorate, the doctoral candidate and their supervisor should decide together who else may also be involved in the doctoral proceedings (e.g., co-supervisor, mentor). It is often sensible for a doctorate to be supported by a co-supervisor as well as a supervisor. This may be important because of the topic chosen (e.g., in the case of interdisciplinary subjects), and because it offers contingency for the doctoral candidate in the event of the loss of a supervisor (e.g., relocation to another university or illness). It can often also benefit the candidates' research.

1.4 Clarifying mutual expectations

At the start of the doctorate, mutual expectations should be clarified. This could include the intended timescales, the extent to which the project can be incorporated into the school's research activities, or the need for publications during the doctorate, internships, participation in conferences, or periods spent abroad. The following generally applies:

Doctoral candidates can expect supervisors to support the doctoral project in compliance with the agreements made and in line with the work schedule, and to feel committed to the project. University and supervisors can in turn expect that doctoral candidates devote themselves to their research endeavor, adhere to the agreed-upon times and tasks and maintain the necessary commitment.

1.5 The work schedule

The doctoral candidate and their supervisor agree upon a work schedule together. This work schedule should be sufficiently precise to enable the doctoral student to work on the project at least for the first year. The work schedule should include a clear formulation of the main research issue or the roadmap for identifying a topic, as well as the methods to be applied and procedures to be followed. Various stages of the work can be designated as milestones. The work schedule should be updated during the course of the doctorate.

1.6 Inclusion in related research activities

Doctoral candidates should be included in activities of the school that are related to their area of research, ensuring consistency with the doctoral project. Doctoral candidates are expected, where possible, to at least participate regularly in colloquia.

1.7 Rules of Good Research Practice

Doctoral candidates and their supervisors undertake to comply with the rules of Good Research Practice (DFG Standard, Richtlinien zur Sicherung guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis und zum Umgang mit wissenschaftlichem Fehlverhalten an der Universität Osnabrück, see <https://www.uni-osnabrueck.de/en/research/good-research-practice>). For supervisors, this also means having to acknowledge and cite the authorship of doctoral candidates concerning texts, data, or knowledge. Osnabrück University has an ombudsman to ensure Good Research Practice and to deal with scientific malpractice.

2 During the doctorate

2.1 Supervisory meetings / progress reviews

The central element of supervision comprises meetings between the supervisor and the doctoral candidate. The aim of such meetings is to discuss the progress of the doctoral thesis. Progress should be critically assessed in these discussions (What results have been achieved and which milestones have been reached? Have the work schedule and time schedule been met? If not, why not?). It is often advisable to arrange these meetings at set intervals, which should be observed by both parties. In many cases, summary minutes of these sessions, signed by both parties, have proved useful. Sections of the dissertation/results submitted in consultation should be read promptly by supervisors, and timely feedback should be given.

Supervisors should encourage doctoral candidates to complete the work within the agreed timeframe. If the doctoral candidate repeatedly fails to meet agreements or the work schedule, the supervisor may end the supervisory relationship. In the event of a supervisor and candidate being unable to resolve a conflict between them, suitable contact persons should be available for both the supervisor and the candidate.

2.2 Presentation of work to the scientific community

Both the doctoral candidate and his or her supervisors should seek to present the project within scientific debates and to discuss it with the scientific community. This may include presenting the work steps and results in subject area colloquia or to other work groups, publishing (interim) results, delivering lectures at conferences or to specialist associations and industrial representatives or practitioners.

2.3 Courses and institutions to support doctoral studies

The doctoral candidates and their supervisors should jointly consider which key competences courses could successfully complement the work on the dissertation and prepare the candidate for their subsequent career. In this respect, supervisors should refer to institutions that offer such courses and can provide additional support during the doctorate, such as the university

library, virtUOS and the PhD Career Center at Osnabrück University (ZePrOs). ZePrOs and promos, the representative body for doctoral candidates, also support doctoral candidates to engage in networking with one another.

2.4 Prospects beyond the doctorate

If required, supervisors should advise their doctoral candidates on their career prospects in academia. If doctoral candidates fail to complete their doctorate, they should be advised on suitable alternatives.

2.5 Loss of supervision

According to its capacities, the school should ensure that in the event of the loss of a supervisor (departure, illness or death), the candidate is offered an alternative that will enable them to successfully complete their doctorate. For such cases, it is advisable to appoint a second supervisor from a related subject area, or possibly an external supervisor, already at the beginning of the doctorate.

3 Completion of the doctorate

3.1 Formal procedures, assessors

The work is completed in accordance with the respective doctoral regulations. It is advisable for at least one of the assessors not to be a co-author of the doctoral candidate; if necessary, a third assessor shall be engaged. It is recommended that schools have in place suitable procedural arrangements for awarding the grade summa cum laude.

3.2 Suitable assessment periods

The maximum assessment period should be three months.

3.3 Publication of the dissertation

Supervisors should help doctoral candidates seek or choose suitable publication options.

- The "Quality Standards for Doctorates" were passed by resolution by the Senate on November 30, 2011 and by the President's Cabinet of Osnabrück University on January 19, 2012.