

Guidelines for a good supervision of PhD candidates at Leibniz Universität Hannover



Imprint

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at Leibniz Universität Hannover

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Translation

Lynne Fritsch

Preface

The doctoral period is characterized by independent research on the one hand and accompanying/guiding supervision on the other. The harmony of these two aspects defines the framework for the successful qualification of young researchers.

Since doctoral students make a particularly valuable contribution to the academic success and the visibility of Leibniz University, we have been striving for many years to create good framework conditions at our university. A contribution to this is the guidelines for good supervision in doctoral studies, which were already passed by the senate in 2013. They reflect our self-image and provide doctoral researchers and supervisors with a reliable orientation framework for the doctoral phase they shape together.

In my function and as director of the Graduate Academy, it is a personal concern of mine to ensure that the best possible conditions are in place to be able to complete a doctorate successfully.

I am convinced that these guidelines will provide all participants with a tool that answers fundamental questions, encourages a comparison of mutual expectations, ensures the quality of the doctorate and serves as a basis for successful cooperation.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Escher'.

Prof. Joachim Escher
Vice President for Appointment Issues,
Human Resources Development and
Continuing Education
& Director of the Graduate Academy

Preamble

The provision of doctoral study and the conferring of the title of doctor are integral features of a university. The structuring of the doctoral phase is of decisive importance for the qualification of the next generation of academics, who are in turn essential for the academic performance of a university.

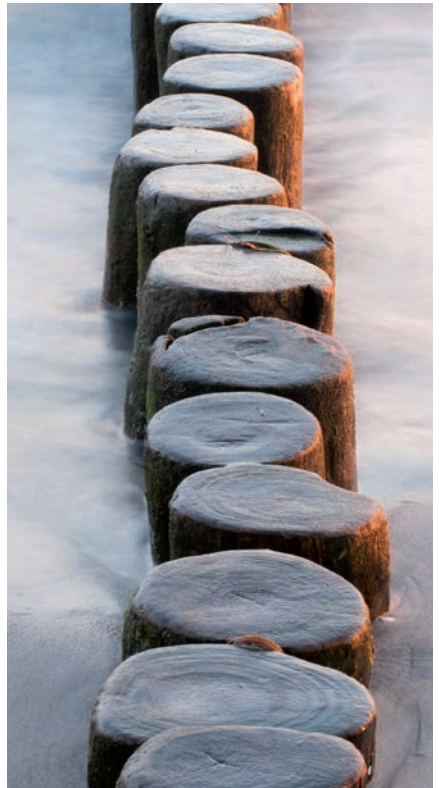
It is therefore the aim of Leibniz Universität Hannover to provide excellent supervision of PhD candidates and to structure the doctoral phase as effectively as possible. It is the task of doctoral supervisors to support PhD candidates in their research and to accompany them on their way to academic independence.

The present "Guidelines for a good supervision of PhD candidates" are intended to ensure a transparent structuring of the doctoral phase and to provide reliability as regards the conditions and aims of successful doctoral study from the point of view of all concerned (i.e. PhD candidate and supervisor).

Adhering to the principle that responsibility for the organization of the doctoral process lies with the faculties, the guidelines are formulated such that they endeavour to take into account the wide spectrum of disciplines with their diverse cultures which are offered at Leibniz Universität. Some recommendations may thus differ in relevance from department to department. Due to the wide spectrum of research carried out at Leibniz Universität Hannover, it is not possi-

ble to cover special features and conditions specific to the various departments in these guidelines.

The guidelines were passed by the senate on 10th July 2013 and by the executive committee on 14th August 2013.



Taking on doctoral supervision

Taking on doctoral supervision means committing oneself to accompanying a PhD candidate reliably throughout his or her academic qualification phase. Before doctoral study commences, not only the formal suitability of the candidate but also his or her motivation as well as his or her aims and expectations should be clarified. When agreeing to supervision, supervisors should take care that the subject of the PhD is sufficiently close to their own field of interest.

Being a doctoral supervisor is a time-consuming commitment. Supervisors should therefore take care not to accept more doctoral candidates than they can supervise adequately. While junior doctors can also be involved in supervision, final responsibility lies with the principal supervisor. At the beginning of the supervision period, the resources required to carry out doctoral study (workplace, access to laboratories and equipment, research funding etc.) should be specified bilaterally in a supervision agreement. The supervisor should actively support the candidate if he or she needs to look for funding for his or her doctoral phase.

Once the supervisor has given his or her assent, the candidate must apply to the faculty for acceptance as a doctoral candidate. By awarding doctoral status, which is do-

cumented by the acceptance as a doctoral candidate, the faculty accepts responsibility for the PhD candidate. This expresses in particular the willingness of the faculty to supervise the doctoral candidate while he or she is working on his or her PhD and to assess a thesis on the intended subject as an academic work. Should the post of supervisor fall vacant, the faculty will try to find a solution for the vacancy.

Doctoral status can be granted initially for a maximum of one year on a trial basis. The status of doctoral candidate is granted equally to all candidates irrespective of the format of their doctoral study (individual doctoral study as a research staff member, doctoral study within the framework of a structured study programme etc.) and irrespective of the way in which the PhD is funded. It must therefore be guaranteed on the basis of a supervisory agreement that all doctoral students receive a good supervision irrespective of a contractual or other connection with the university.

Team supervision

The responsibility for supervising the PhD candidate should lie with one principal supervisor. Taking into consideration the cultures of the various disciplines, it is recommended that, wherever possible, further persons be involved in supervision work so as to enhance the research project with further viewpoints. In such a case, team supervision makes a contribution towards ensuring the quality of the content of the PhD.

Depending on the subject and method of the latter, further supervisors should, as far as possible, be selected in the first year of doctoral study. It may additionally prove useful to involve postdocs or also mentors without expert knowledge of the field in question. As far as team supervision is concerned, it

is important that agreement be reached among all supervisors regarding supervisory practice and the advice to be given to the doctoral candidate on the content, method and concept of the PhD. Further, responsibilities should be divided up clearly and transparently for all parties concerned.

Disagreements regarding aspects of advice on the content, method and concept of the PhD and aspects of personal supervision must not be carried out at the expense of the PhD candidate.



Supervisory agreement

The relationship between supervisor and candidate is above all a relationship based on mutual trust. In order to make the content and the timeframe of the supervision transparent, a supervisory agreement is to be drawn up between the PhD candidate and the supervisor at the beginning of doctoral study. This agreement is designed to help establish expectations on both sides, to narrow down roughly the subject of the PhD, to formulate a working title for the same and to make a picture of the extent of the planned thesis. Correspondingly, regular supervisory talks should be set up in the long term in the agreement and a provisional work and time schedule be drawn up.

Doctoral study is a creative process. The agreed work and time schedule can therefore only be a framework which can then be modified as necessary. Both the social circumstances and the financial situation

of the candidate (family commitments, employment, etc.) should be taken into consideration. The supervisory agreement should be signed by all persons with a supervisory function, the doctoral candidate and the head of the faculty.



Supervisory talks

Regular talks on the progress of the planned thesis are part of a good supervision. Irrespective of the customs of the various disciplines, detailed supervisory talks should be held with the supervisor or supervisory team at least once or twice a year. In these talks, the progress made to date, any problems and difficulties which may have arisen and the further structuring of the PhD should

be discussed. Supervisors who are also the superior of the doctoral candidate should be aware of this double role. The further professional development of the PhD candidate should also be discussed in the supervisory talks. The results of the talks should be documented.

Integration in the academic community

The quality of the thesis and the perception of research results also depend on the extent to which PhD candidates are able to position their work in the context of academic discussion. Against this background, it is one of the central tasks of supervisors to actively support candidates in their integration in the given academic community. This is especially valid for the integration of external candidates. Furthermore, candidates should be given the opportunity to take part in a doctoral or research colloquium or a conference and to report there on the status of their own project at least once a year.

Supervisors should also inform the candidates of national and international symposiums and actively encourage their participation. Publications - particularly in peer-reviewed journals - should be advised and supported. As experience abroad is of great significance for an academic career, both parties should consider to what extent research or study abroad might enhance the PhD.



Qualification

Supervisors should support candidates with regard to their career development and sound out with them the requirement for further professional training or the acquisition of general skills and competences. Participation in appropriate training programmes should be made possible and encouraged.

Especially those candidates who are envisaging an academic career should be given the opportunity to gather their own experience of teaching and to widen this in courses in university pedagogy.



Good academic practice

It is part of the task of supervisors to make candidates aware of the rules of good academic practice and to underline the necessity of their adhering to the same.

In the case of academic misconduct, the ombudsperson for ensuring good academic practice at Leibniz Universität is to be informed.

Conflict situations

In order to avoid conflicts wherever possible, the expectations of the supervisor and the candidate should be clarified at the beginning of supervision. Should problems and difficulties arise nonetheless, these should be addressed as early as possible. In more

difficult conflicts which can no longer be resolved directly by the persons involved, a mediator from the faculty or the arbitration board of the Graduate Academy can be called upon.

Length of doctoral work

It is a central task within supervision to support candidates in the structuring of their PhD in order to avoid excessively long periods of doctoral study. For doctoral students who devote themselves exclusively to their research work, the aim should normally be to complete their thesis within a period of three years and their doctoral study within a maximum period of four years. For those candidates who in their capacity as research staff take on a large number of tasks in research and teaching which are not directly

associated with their PhD, the aim should be a period of maximum five years.

In the case of research staff whose contract of employment provides for academic qualification within the framework of doctoral study, care should be taken that activities which are not directly associated with their PhD be limited from the point of view of time and content.

Completion of the PhD

The final phase commences once the PhD candidate and his or her supervisor have agreed on a date on which the thesis is to be submitted. Any points and questions which are still open should be clarified by the supervisory team and the candidate and a timescale for completion be decided upon.

In order for the doctoral process to proceed smoothly, the period of time between the submitting and the defending of the thesis should not normally exceed four months..

Quality of supervision

In order to guarantee continuing high-quality supervision, Leibniz Universität arranges events at which university staff can meet and share their experiences of supervision.

The university also offers workshops on supervisory competences which are intended especially for young academics.

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