

Guidelines and criteria for accreditation of doctoral degree programmes in Lower Saxony

Guidelines and criteria

General objectives of the doctoral programme

In compliance with the Dublin Descriptors, (23 March 2004 version), for accreditation students should have been able to achieve the following general objectives in order to gain accreditation.

- Doctoral candidates should create an original piece of scientific research work, some of which merits national and international refereed publications. They should also demonstrate a systematic understanding of their subject and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field.
- Doctoral candidates should develop independent (interdisciplinary) scientific methods and critical scientific thinking that should enable them to undertake critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new, complex ideas.
- Doctoral candidates should be capable of making a sustainable contribution to national and international scientific debate.
- Doctoral candidates should develop key skills needed for academic life and academic management (presentation, project management, acquisition of research resources etc.).
- Doctoral candidates should be trained to undertake leadership tasks both within and outside the academic world.
- Doctoral candidates should be able to present their subject or special area of study in their own courses and in academic presentations.¹
- Doctoral candidates should be familiar with and be able to reflect on the central rudiments of knowledge production in the current academic world: genesis, structure, function and consequences. They should also be able to place scientific activity in the context of societal development and consider their own research from the point of view of possible risks.

Access, selection and admission

- In order to meet entrance requirements to the doctoral programme, it is generally necessary to have completed an (accredited) Master's degree or similar qualification.

The university is free to define further qualification for entry or to set its own selection procedure. The details are set out in the university regulations.

- If the university wishes to accept applicants with only Bachelor's degrees or graduates of technical colleges for doctoral studies, it must establish a procedure to establish their suitability; details of this procedure must be included in regulations.²
- Admission to a doctoral programme is decided by an appropriately qualified board from the institutions involved and in compliance with regulated procedures that meet quality standards.
- Candidates are formally registered on the doctoral programme and are granted the status of doctoral candidates.

Organisational structure

- The doctoral programme assumes institutional responsibility for the orderly execution of the doctoral process on behalf of the faculty/subject area. Where available, a part of this task is assumed by an interdisciplinary graduate school.
- The right to confer doctorates and provide doctoral degree regulations is granted.
- The doctoral program is institutionally embedded and connected with other organisational and funding structure, and, when applicable, clearly ascribed to an interdisciplinary graduate school.
- Care must be taken for degree programme to be professionally managed and coordinated. Coordination tasks may be carried out by a dedicated degree programme coordination centre, but within existing structures, such as an interdisciplinary graduate school or a university administration.
- Suitable facilities are provided for the organisational tasks.
- There is official agreement on what constitutes "good scientific practice," and this must be adhered to by all those involved.
- An overarching topic, broken down into individual research projects, should be formulated. The participating researchers are located within this topic area and they have access to the corresponding national and international research contacts.

² This is particularly significant if, after being awarded their doctorate, they go on to immediately to become junior professors.

³ Subject to the appropriate legal provisions.

- The individual doctoral process should generally be completed within 3 years. In exceptional cases (for example, in particularly time-consuming empirical and seasonal work) a longer doctoral period may be necessary.
- Provided it suits the publication culture of the discipline, early publication of research outcomes should be made in pertinent subject journals. But publication of the dissertation on completion should be the rule.
- A doctoral thesis defence (Disputation) should replace the viva (Rigorosum) as the final exam.
- It should be considered whether awarding an internationally recognised qualification is meaningful in terms of the subject culture.

Curriculum

Doctoral programmes include a modular offer of courses of between 20 and 30 CP (1 CP = 1 ECTS credit and corresponds to 30 hours study), depending on the prior qualifications of the students and the subject culture. General criteria for the issue of credits apply.

The modules for the doctoral course are generally divided into three subject areas, that aim to:

- a) enable further subject qualifications (in content and methods, by means of special lectures, courses on research methods, seminars, etc., and, when applicable, attendance of modules from Master's courses),
- b) support the development of students' scientific careers and reflection on their own research behaviour (Generic Skills).
- c) develop communicative competences in the subject area, both within and outside the discipline.

The curricular (modular) courses offered are organised as follows:

- a) the volume of courses goes down gradually;
- b) part-time study is possible for doctoral students who have family commitments;
- c) the module descriptions are consistently available in English, more than 50% of classes are held in English, and the course of study is also available online in English;
- d) the modules comply with KMK (German culture ministry) specifications regarding the introduction of credit systems and the modularisation of courses (2000, version 22 Oct 2004) and in particular end with module examinations.

Supervision

The responsibility for supervising the doctoral students lies with a thesis committee, which, in addition to the principal supervisor, is composed of two further members of the teaching staff (and may, where appropriate, include external scientists and scholars). The thesis committee is formed in agreement with the principal supervisor. The principal supervisor reaches an “agreement on objectives” with the doctoral student on the doctoral programme, which sets out clearly their respective rights and duties.

In addition to subject supervision, there are appropriate overall conditions for the doctoral process. Where available, these duties are assumed by the interdisciplinary graduate school:

- a) Particularly for international students, social support are provided (e.g. with regard to finding accommodation, help with applications, etc.).
- b) Measures to enable family support are welcome (e.g. care facilities for children).
- c) There are opportunities to work at the university with the necessary infrastructure for doctoral students.
- d) Doctoral students must have sufficient funding in order to successfully complete the course in the time set. Funding is provided by external funding, grants, or centres for junior researchers.

Cooperation and internationality

Doctoral programmes are characterised by underlying subject specialisation’s fruitful national and (as a rule) international relationships. The active involvement of doctoral candidates is not only desirable but also evidence of the national and international competitiveness of the research focus.

The academic performance and publications carried out during the doctoral programme must comply with the appropriate scientific standards in the respective discipline. With an eye to international visibility,

- attempts should be made to attract a high proportion of international students to the programme. For this reason the programme should be offered and promoted internationally.
- as far as possible, tuition should be in English (see above).
- it should be permitted to write the dissertation in English.
- the doctoral programme should enable students to act on an international scientific level, e.g. by:

- a) taking part and presenting students own research results at international congresses,
- b) taking part in international courses (e.g. summer schools),
- c) enabling research stays in international partner research institutions,
- d) inviting international guest lecturers.

Quality Assurance

The doctoral programme has a system for evaluating, assuring, and improving quality (when applicable, in compliance with existing standards in the interdisciplinary graduate school). The most important measures in this respect are the assessment of research foci and the individual selection of participants. In addition, doctoral candidates must present and discuss an account of their progress at the university at least once a year.