

# Best Practices Doctorate

## Recommended practices, information and guidance for doctoral supervision

The various faculties are responsible for their doctoral studies, which they regulate differently with regard to various aspects. Despite these differences among the faculties concerning the implementation of their doctoral studies, the roles of doctoral students and their respective supervisors show parallel characteristics. Based on these commonalities, recommendations are formulated here below, which are summarised as Best Practices across faculties. These are non-binding and no rights can be derived from them.

The present Best Practices for doctoral supervision aim to strengthen doctoral studies and, in particular, doctoral supervision across the university. Taking into account the relevant regulations, they contain various guidelines that are formulated in a sufficiently open manner to allow for differing practices within the various faculties.

At the University of Fribourg, there is a wide range of different possibilities for completing a doctorate. Doctoral students may be attached to a professor as a graduate assistant; they may hold an SNF grant or other scholarship; or they may be independent. Their status depends largely on their funding source and can change during the doctoral training. The circumstances of the different doctoral researchers are therefore different in terms of salary, the possibility of an employment contract with the university, and in terms of the time they may need to devote to the department or institute. The Best Practices take into account these different realities. Some of the recommendations below, for example, are addressed only to doctoral candidates employed by the University. The Best Practices refer to doctoral studies (PhD), but not to the doctorate of medicine (MD).

This document addresses both doctoral students and PhD supervisors and specifies their roles and areas of responsibility. At the same time, it discusses the tasks of other university units such as faculties and central services. The structure of this document reflects the different phases of doctoral training, thereby making it relevant both at the beginning of doctoral training and at later points in time.

In terms of content, the Best Practices presented here are based on research conducted at various universities, including the University of Fribourg<sup>1</sup>, as well as on [satisfaction surveys](#) among present and past doctoral students as well as doctoral supervisors at the University of Fribourg.

The Best Practices, the guides mentioned therein (some currently in progress) as well as other collected PhD-related information are available on the [Graduate Campus](#) website.

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<sup>1</sup> Among others: [Bedingungen für eine erfolgreiche Betreuung von Doktorierenden \(Lambert, Niclasse, Charlier, 2020\)](#); [Charte du doctorat de l'Université de Lausanne](#); [Best Practice Recommendation Universität Zürich \(2019\)](#); [SNSF Early Career Researcher Survey \(2022\)](#).

### **Best Practice 1: Selection and, if applicable, employment**

- a) Publication of vacancies (in the case of employment)
  - Doctoral positions are advertised publicly.
- b) Admission
  - Admission to doctoral studies is only possible once the doctoral candidate fulfils the admission requirements issued by the university. Employment alone does not guarantee admission to the doctoral studies.
- c) Selection criteria
  - Transparent selection criteria are applied.
- d) Mutual expectations and motivation
  - The expectations of both the supervisor and the candidate are outlined and discussed prior to the start of the doctoral studies.
  - An (application) interview takes place at which the candidate's motivation and personal goals are discussed with the doctoral supervisor.
- e) Rights and obligations of doctoral candidates
  - The university informs doctoral students of their rights and obligations on the basis of the relevant regulations, with reference to the respective forms of doctoral training (assistants, FNS doctoral students, independent doctoral students, scholarship holders). It provides relevant contact persons, if necessary in cooperation with the faculties.
- f) Conditions of employment
  - In the case of employment, the terms and conditions of the contract, such as the salary progression (published on the university's internal platform Myunifr.ch), the duration of the contract and any options for extension options will be discussed in the job interview.
- g) Duration of the doctorate and the corresponding funding period
  - Each faculty formulates the usual duration of a standard study programme at the doctoral level.
  - At the beginning of the collaboration, the doctoral supervisor discusses with the doctoral candidate the duration of the funding for the employment and, if applicable, any subsequent possible funding options for further periods of employment.
- h) Percentage of employment
  - Full-time employment is the norm and should be sought.
  - Part-time employment should, if possible, be exceptional and should be considered only special circumstances.
  - In the event of part-time employment, the work to be done is clearly discussed, a realistic work schedule is drawn up, and the doctoral student's available time and financial resources for the period up to the completion of the doctorate are assessed. Part-time employment results in a presence requirement and workload that are reduced in accordance with the lower percentage of employment.

**Further documents:**

- Guidelines for the employment of doctoral students (will follow shortly)
- List of salaries and salary development over the years of employment (myunifr.ch)
- [Admission regulations of the University of Fribourg](#)

**Contact persons at the UniFR:**

- [Human Resources UniFr](#)
- [Admissions and Enrolment Service](#)
- Contact persons at the faculties

**Best Practice 2: Job specifications and working conditions (in case of employment)**

- List of duties and activities
  - Each employed doctoral student receives a personal job specification which clearly lists his or her tasks and which is drawn up by the doctoral supervisor.
  - The job specification is regularly adapted and reflects the reality of the respective employment relationship.
  - The job specification is reviewed during the annual staff reviews in order to make any necessary adjustments.
- Division of tasks between the department or institute and one's own research (for graduate assistants).
  - A realistic time estimate is made for the respective tasks for the department or institute (e.g. for teaching, supervising students, correcting exams, etc.).
  - The scope of work for one's own research and the scope of work for the department or institute each amount to half of the contractually agreed working time over the course of the year (see [Regulations on Academic Staff](#)).
  - The doctoral student records his/her working hours for the department or institute and his/her own research and reports any imbalance to his/her doctoral supervisor.
  - If necessary, the doctoral supervisor will take the necessary measures together with the doctoral student to correct this imbalance.

**Further documents:**

- [Regulations for scientific staff](#)

**Contact persons at the UniFR:**

- Contact persons of the faculties
- [Human Resources](#)

### Best Practice 3: Doctoral supervision

- a) Doctoral agreement
  - The framework of the doctoral supervision and the requirements for the doctoral student are clearly communicated at the beginning of the collaboration and recorded in writing in a doctoral agreement or a comparable document.
  - The doctoral agreement is discussed at least once a year and adjusted if necessary.
- b) Prerequisite for obtaining the doctorate
  - The formal criteria for obtaining a doctorate are governed by the corresponding regulations of the faculties.
  - Any specifications are communicated by the doctoral supervisor at the beginning of the employment relationship and recorded in writing in the doctoral agreement.
- c) Dual supervision
  - Dual supervision is recommended. Ideally, the supervisors are selected so as to enable synergies in terms of content and methodology or interdisciplinary collaboration.
  - If dual supervision cannot be implemented or is not expedient, a second doctoral advisor will be appointed.
  - The individual responsibilities of the respective parties or persons (first and second supervisor or second advisor) are clearly defined and discussed with the doctoral candidate.
  - Both dual supervision and a second advisor serve to avoid one-sided dependency.
- d) Presence and accessibility
  - At the beginning of the cooperation, the mutual needs and expectations regarding presence and accessibility are defined.
  - Both parties inform each other about their respective periods of absence and the associated possible effects on the cooperation with regard to the doctorate at an early stage (e.g. sabbatical, stays abroad etc.).
  - Both parties respect the mutually agreed times of non-availability such as weekends and holidays.
  - Working outside the hours for doctoral students employed at the university specified by the Regulations on the [Working Hours of State Personnel](#) is only possible in justified exceptional cases.
- e) Regular exchange
  - The doctoral candidate and the doctoral supervisor meet regularly to discuss the progress of the doctoral thesis.
  - In case of questions and problems in connection with the research work, the doctoral candidate reports in a timely manner to the doctoral supervisor.
  - The doctoral supervisor intervenes as soon as he/she suspects that there are problems related to the research work or that the dissertation is not progressing.
  - Any decisions taken at the exchange meetings should be recorded in writing.
- f) First-year evaluation
  - After one year, the research results or the current status of the doctoral thesis are presented to the doctoral supervisor and ideally to a second competent person (or, if applicable, a jury),

who examine the progress of the project and its scientific suitability. If necessary, appropriate measures can be considered and discussed with the doctoral candidate.

- The criteria applied to the first-year evaluation or the progress and work expected during the first year are communicated to the doctoral candidate at the beginning of the doctorate and, if applicable, recorded in writing in the doctoral agreement.
- Decisions and mutual expectations resulting from the first-year evaluation are also recorded in writing, if applicable, in the doctoral agreement.

g) Scientific integrity

- The doctoral supervisor informs the doctoral candidate about the principles of scientific integrity, for example by drawing the doctoral candidate's attention to the [scientific code of conduct](#) published on the swissuniversities website and similar documents, as well as to the Regulations for scientific staff.
- Doctoral supervisors and doctoral students commit themselves to abide by the rules of scientific integrity.

h) Jury or Examination Committee

- To the extent permitted by the regulations, the doctoral supervisor discusses the composition of the jury with the doctoral candidate.
- The jury for the assessment of the doctoral thesis consists of active and established scientists in the respective field. Any conflict of interest between jury members, doctoral supervisors and doctoral candidates must be avoided.

**Further documents:**

- Example of a doctoral agreement (will follow shortly)
- [Regulations on the Working Hours of State Personnel](#)
- [Scientific code of conduct](#) (swissuniversities)
- [Regulations for scientific staff](#)
- Faculty regulations (see websites of the faculties)

**Best Practice 4: Networking and further education for doctoral students**

- The doctoral supervisor promotes the integration of the doctoral student into the research team and supports scientific exchange among the doctoral students.
- The doctoral supervisor supports the doctoral candidate in publishing scientific articles, participating in conferences and other forms of scientific activity. He/she supports the doctoral student in establishing scientific contacts and networks.
- The doctoral supervisor draws the doctoral candidate's attention to the university's or faculties' networking and continuing education offers as well as to extramural offers (CUSO, summer schools, etc.) and supports his/her participation in potential offers.

- Participation in a continuing education programme that interferes with the duties of the doctoral student employed at the university, such as through reduced presence and availability for required research work, should be discussed in advance with the doctoral supervisor.
- The doctoral supervisor informs the doctoral candidate about the funding opportunities available for doctoral training, such as participation in conferences and summer schools, reimbursement of travel expenses, and further projects.
- The University informs and advises doctoral students and doctoral supervisors about the possibilities of financing various scientific activities and the possibilities of mobility stays through the Research Promotion Service and the International Relations Office.
- Participation in various activities, further education and mobility stays is recommended. Such participation is discussed and planned with the doctoral supervisor.

**Further documents:**

- [Overview of funding opportunities for residency programmes](#)

**Contact persons at the UniFR:**

- [International Relations Office](#)
- [Research Promotion Service](#)
- [Service for university didactics and digital skills](#)
- [Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Service](#)

**External offers for doctoral students of the UniFR:**

- [CUSO](#)
- [BeNeFri](#)

**Best Practice 5: Planning one's career**

- The doctoral supervisor discusses further possibilities of a potential academic career with the doctoral student and clarifies the real opportunities and actual requirements of such a career. He/she also points out alternate career opportunities.
- The university provides information on further professional opportunities and offers counselling for both academic and non-academic careers for the time after the doctorate.

**Contact persons at the UniFR:**

- [Career Services](#)
- [Service for Research Promotion \(SPR\)](#)
- [Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Service](#)

**Best Practice 6: Conflict prevention and management**

- The cooperation between doctoral students and doctoral supervisors is based on mutual respect.
- In case of disagreement, doctoral students and supervisors should talk to each other promptly and, if necessary, involve the second supervisor or the second advisor.
- If no solution can be found between the two parties, the doctoral candidate or, if applicable, the supervisor, contacts a third person, either one of the contact persons within the faculty, the university's human resources service, or the ombudsman's office.
- The faculties appoint a contact person to deal with any problems that may arise during the doctoral studies.
- The university or, depending on the competence, the faculties or departments, examine complaints submitted by doctoral students and doctoral supervisors and respond accordingly.

**Further documents:**

- Conflict Prevention and Management Guide

**Contact persons at the UniFR:**

- Contact persons of the faculties (see websites of the faculties)
- [Ombudsman's office](#)
- [Human Resources](#)

**Best Practice 7: Quality management**

- a) Counselling and further training for doctoral supervisors
  - The university informs the doctoral supervisors about available counselling services and further training opportunities within the framework of doctoral supervision.
  - Doctoral supervisors overseeing a dissertation for the first time - especially professors - complete further training on the topic of doctoral supervision and staff management, if possible.
- b) Final balance
  - After the thesis defense, the doctoral candidate together with the doctoral supervisor take stock of their now completed dissertation project.
  - The doctoral supervisor incorporates the knowledge gained in the final assessment into his or her next doctoral supervision.
- c) Evaluation
  - The university regularly conducts surveys among doctoral students and doctoral supervisors.
  - The results obtained in this process will be taken into account as suggestions for improving the framework conditions of doctoral education.

**Further documents:**

- [Summary](#) Results Satisfaction Survey Doctorate
- [Graduate Campus](#)