

# Switzerland

## I. General information and application procedure

### **Which institutions award doctoral degrees?**

Universities and Federal Technical Universities (FTU) can award doctoral degrees. However, Universities of Applied Sciences, Universities for Teacher Education and companies do not have the rights to award a doctoral degree.

### **What forms of doctorate attendance are available?**

Generally, there are two forms (full-time and part-time) of doctorate available.

#### *Full-time doctorate*

These doctoral candidates work full-time to do their dissertation and beside that perform a limited amount of teaching (e.g. 100-400 h) and lead projects (e.g. surveys, certain lab-work, etc.). These doctoral candidates are employed as “person in qualification” and are only hired to do their dissertation - other institute-related work is limited. Contracts vary, contracts are generally at 60 % of a full position, but doctoral candidates work full-time. (Exception: Doctoral candidates at FTUs have a full position)

At many institutions these doctoral candidates are enrolled in graduate schools. Graduate schools provide a methodological and content framework of different programmes at different institutes. Graduate schools set certain standards to receive a doctoral degree and offer courses. However, a graduate school is not eligible to provide a doctoral degree. Doctoral candidates can also get a governmental or private fellowship, including all social benefits, for a full-time doctorate although they must be officially affiliated to an institute,.

#### *Part-time doctorate*

These doctoral candidates are employed for specific assignments either within a University/FTU or at a company, respectively University of Applied Sciences/Teacher Education. A part of their time is reserved for doing a doctorate, which does not need to be related to their tasks.

Doctoral candidates utilize their own resources to work independently based on their on their dissertation. They need to find an official supervisor at a University/FTU, because only these institutions can award doctoral candidates with a doctoral degree.

### **What is the formal length of time foreseen for completing a doctorate?**

There is no fixed length. The length of the doctorate varies by the contract, whether you are in full-time or part-time form and from your discipline.

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<sup>1</sup> **Doctorate** is understood as the institutional frameworks and processes geared towards the completion of a doctoral degree.

Full-time doctoral candidates in Sciences have 3-5 years contract usually and finish during that time. External doctoral candidates who work full-time take sometimes 10 years. Medical students who do a “Dr. med” (no full doctorate) sometimes just need 6 months.

The doctorate is structured by individual universities, taking account of institution- and discipline-specific conditions.<sup>2</sup>

## **What is the status of the doctoral candidates?**

It depends on the regulations of the university (doctoral candidates at Universities/ FTU are students, and in case they are also employed at the University/FTU also employees at the same time). But not all doctoral candidates doing their doctorate are enrolled at a university and have a student status (later named in this document “doctoral candidates with student status”), especially if these doctoral candidates are not paid to do their dissertation.

Normally every doctoral candidate in a graduate school has to be enrolled at a university and be therefore a “doctoral candidate with student status”.

That is the reason why Switzerland does not provide numbers about the amount of doctoral candidates who are doing a doctorate - because the status can vary a lot.

## **What are the social benefits for doctoral candidates with student status?**

Doctoral candidates with student status have:

- low study fees;
- can use the complete universal infrastructure for free or reduced prices (“student prices” → employees prices are higher), which includes sports centre, library, canteen, language courses, etc.);
- discount prices for public transport (age dependent) and for social cultural institutions (e.g. theater, museum).

## **How are doctoral candidates financially supported?**

The financial support depends on your contract and the form of doctorate.

### *Full-time doctorate*

- 60% contract employed at a university → minimum salaries for people employed at a university are different in each canton/district (variation from 2000-6000 CHF/months)
- for example in Zurich (per income before taxation, 1 CHF ~ (0.89 - 1.00) 1 EURO):
  - 1<sup>st</sup> year: 48 000 CHF per year
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> year: 49 200 CHF per year
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> year: 50 400 CHF/ year
- this salary is also given from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF). It is the main donor for research fellowships, e.g. fellowships for doing a doctorate (funding also only from 3 years).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.swissuniversities.ch/en/topics/promotion-of-young-talent/doctorate/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.snf.ch/en/Pages/default.aspx>

## *Part-time doctorate*

Salaries depend on the job.

### **What are the admission requirements for a doctorate?**

Admission is the responsibility of the individual universities and is decided case-by-case on the basis of individual qualifications.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, there is no set-in-stone admission system and there is no guaranteed right to be accepted to do a doctorate.

Some general rules apply:

- the requirement for starting a doctorate is a recognized Masters degree (diploma, licence);
- documents, which need to be submitted: certificate of Master's degree (diploma, licence), CV, and ID;
- complete assessment center (highly varies);
- sometimes universities require additional courses/training to be fully accepted to do a doctorate e.g. doing statistical courses equivalent to 15 ECTS, to be accepted in the doctorate program for biostatistics when one did not study mathematics/statistics before. People in these cases can start their doctorate, but need to fulfil the additional requirements normally within a year.

## **II. Progression**

### **How is a doctorate organized in your country?**

The doctorate is structured by individual universities, taking account of institution- and discipline-specific conditions.<sup>2</sup> Structured programmes:

- Graduate Schools

Structured and formalized (compulsory modules, ECTS), generally a more intense supervision of doctoral candidates, e.g. the Graduate School Life Sciences Zurich.

- Doctoral programmes

Sometimes they are a part of graduate schools, sometimes not. Comparable to graduate school but more specific to one topic. Normally these programs have their own requirements.

Example (in case of The University of Zurich):

The doctoral program of Epidemiology and Biostatistics is a part of the Graduate School Life Science. For being accepted in the program and to receive a doctorate at the end - you need to fulfil both the requirements of the Graduate School and of the doctoral program).

- Not-structured programmes

Not-structured, general doctorate: less formalised, less strict rules, normally just a core set of requirements (e.g. compulsory ECTS, but not compulsory modules).

## **How is doctoral supervision provided?**

Doctoral candidates have normally one main supervisor, and one second supervisor. Requirements (number of supervisors) are again different and depend on universal/graduate schools/program requirements. In some Graduate Schools an additional external supervisor is required.

## **What are the main obligations of doctoral candidates?**

There are no “fixed” main obligations for doctoral candidates in Switzerland. Obligations are dependent on how a person does her/his doctorate.

In general (elements which repeat across regulations): The doctorate serves as proof of the ability of the candidate to gain and communicate new findings through independent scientific research (*Die Promotion dient dem Nachweis der Fähigkeit der Kandidatin bzw. des Kandidaten, durch eine selbstständige wissenschaftliche Forschungsleistung neue Erkenntnisse zu gewinnen und zu kommunizieren...*).

The other elements are:

- attending conferences, courses etc.;
- teaching;
- reporting of results in committees etc.;
- writing dissertation and/or publications taking into account applicable research ethics and subject-specific guidelines and principles; and
- (public) defence of thesis.

## **Is any mobility compulsory?**

Not obligatory, sometimes doctoral candidates are allowed to do a research stay somewhere else while there are doing their doctorate, sometimes not. It is now more common to do a research stay abroad but this is still subject to the supervisor's support.

## **How are courses in transferable skills provided?**

Participation in professional and interdisciplinary courses is usually provided in Graduate Schools and doctoral programs. The organization differs across universities.

Additionally, there is the possibility to participate in courses and lectures, summer schools, webinars etc. to develop specific, leadership, business, and other transferable skills and competences. Furthermore, there are also doctorate schools to provide specific trainings for doctoral candidates of the same field across universities (e.g. SSPH+ doctorate Program in Public Health).<sup>4</sup>

## **How is the progress of the doctoral candidate evaluated?**

This again is dependent on how a person does her/his doctorate. In some structured programs doctoral candidates have an annual committee meeting (they have to provide a progress report beforehand), or they just have to do that once or twice during the doctorate's duration. These progress reports include information about the achieved results according to project schedule, amount of publications, participation in conferences, congresses, courses, seminars, obtained awards, patents and grants, teaching hours, etc.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sspplus-phd.ch>

In unstructured programs there is normally no structured evaluation.

### **Is it possible for doctoral candidates to change supervisor(s)?**

It might be possible, but how to do it depends on the university.

### **Are supervisors required to have training in order to supervise doctoral candidates?**

There are no requirements for special training for supervisors in order to be allowed to supervise doctoral candidates. However, this is slowly changing, with workshops organized by graduate schools and their respective programmes to train professors and group leaders to improve supervision skills. The first official supervisor must be a professor with so-called promotion rights.

## **III. Defence procedure**

### **What requirements should be met to receive acceptance to enter the defence procedure?**

The doctorate is structured by individual universities, taking account of institution- and discipline-specific conditions.<sup>2</sup> There is no unified and standardized set of regulations..

There are however several general requirements:

- a scientific topic of dissertation should be accepted by the Scientific Board of faculty/department/institute (this usually occurs within two first years of doctoral training)
- possible: The necessary amount of ECTS credits depending on faculty, department, or institute has to be achieved
- possible: The necessary amount of teaching hours fulfilled
- thesis is accepted by audit commission
- (public) defense is passed (decided by audit commission)
- the Scientific Board of faculty/department/institute finally approves thesis.

### **What documents are required to start the defence procedure?**

The doctoral thesis can be in a form of a monograph, i.e. dissertation, as well as a set of publications in peer-reviewed journals (amount of publications depends on the discipline and institution) put into one document with a general introduction and discussion/summary. The language of the thesis can be German, Italian, French or English. Other languages are possible when approved by the Scientific Board.

Additional documents which may be required: CV of doctoral candidate, list of his/her achievements, supervisor's recommendation letter and confirmation from the supervisors that the thesis is suitable for defense.

### **What is the defence procedure?**

Defences can be public, partly public (parts of the defence) or non-public.

Normally the following parts are included:

- presentation of doctoral thesis;

- questions from the audience;
- questions from the defence committee on the presentation;
- oral doctorate exam with the defence committee;
- consultation among members of the defence committee;
- announcement whether doctoral candidate has passed the defence.

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