

EURODOC survey on the Doctorate¹ structure across Europe (version August 2020)
prepared by the EURODOC Doctoral Training Working Group

Germany

I. General information and application procedure

Which institutions award doctoral degrees?

Traditionally, only “full” universities have a right to award doctoral degrees (and habilitation treatise). Additionally, some Universities of Applied Sciences and Universities of Education can also award doctoral degrees, but their number is so far limited – depending on the regional law (“Bundesland”) – and it is a new phenomenon in Germany.

What forms of doctorate attendance are available?

There are full-time or part-time attendance possibilities.

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

It depends on the doctorate. If it is a structured program² or a scholarship³ it's between 2 and 4 years; if it is no structured program and depending on the subject, the length can be for many more years as it is not formally defined.

Between all types of doctorates, the average duration has been estimated to be 4 1/2 years⁴.

What is the status of the doctoral candidates?

A doctoral candidate can be:

- an employee;
- an employee with student status;
- a student;
- a fellowship holder; or
- an external doctoral candidate with other forms of funding (e.g. job outside academia, in industry or self-employed).

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

There are no social benefits connected to the student status apart from some discount possibilities, e.g. for public transport or cultural offers etc. (though sometimes they have an age limit, typically below 28 or 35 years).

The most important benefits of social security (sickness allowance, maternity/parental leave, pension, unemployment benefits, health insurance) are connected to the employee status.

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

² **Structured programme** is a PhD program which includes obligatory classes, no financial support is involved.

³ **Scholarship** is a funding program, giving monthly financial support to selected persons.

⁴ [2017 National Report on Junior Scholars, page 152](#) ([English summary](#) is also available).

How are doctoral candidates financially supported?

There are many different options for income for doctoral candidates and only some of them directly connected to the doctorate. Options include a salary as an employee; stipends/scholarships for basic costs or for additional purposes (travel grants etc.) or self-financing (usually through jobs outside of academia).

A full scholarship for a doctoral candidate (single person, no family) is oftentimes around 1300 euros. The salary at universities is according to the collective agreement for the public service salary scheme (German: TvöD)⁵. There is a lack of information related to doctoral candidates salaries with other (external) employment situations. In case of industrial doctorates, the situation is similar to public service salary tariff or paid exemption.

What are the admission requirements for a doctorate?

The doctorate can be started if a Master degree has been completed and a full professor or a committee has agreed to supervise the doctoral candidate. In case of committees, one professor is usually still the main responsible, and in cases of cotutelle⁶, there are two responsible professors.

Beyond these basic requirements, it depends on the status; usually interviews for employees and stipends, required qualification and sometimes a threshold grade for the Master thesis; recommendation letter; foreign language skills depend on the discipline and field of research (typically English, but also other languages like Latin or specific to the topic).

Unless it is a structured program, there are usually no fixed dates to (officially) start the doctorate.

II. Progression

How is a doctorate organized in your country?

It depends on the format; usually little to no mandatory courses for those doctoral candidates who are not enrolled in structured programs but there are training offers aiming at advancing disciplinary and transferable skills; teaching is often part of the job of doctoral candidates who are employed; the doctorate is completed by successfully defending the written thesis.

How is doctoral supervision provided?

A scientific supervision is mandatory for every doctoral candidate and there must be a supervisor or a team of supervisors usually led by a fully tenured professor. However, supervision can vary significantly in structure, frequency and quality, e.g. from simply reporting on progress up to additional support in career development.

Best practice examples and recommendations for supervision are given in a study⁷ by UniWiND⁸ (2015).

⁵ Situation for the year 2020, based on the collective agreement: single person, no family, salary starting range with Master degree, full time contract is 4000 euros per month brutto before taxes, 2300 euros per month net after taxes.

⁶ Doctorate across countries at two universities.

⁷ [Recommendations and good practice for universities and doctoral supervisors](#) (UniWiND, 2015).

⁸ [UniWiND/GUAT](#) - the German University Association of Advanced Graduate Training.

What are the main obligations of doctoral candidates?

It depends on the format (employee, structured program, stipend, doctorate in cooperation with industry, external doctoral candidate with self-financing), on the discipline, doctoral regulation of the university's department or graduate school, and supervisor(s).

Universities and doctoral school regulations can vary greatly, e.g. include (or not) attending courses with ECTS credits, holding (or not) bi-annual or annual colloquia for doctoral candidates and ECRs.

There are no teaching obligations, only if it is required according to a contract. The minimum obligation for doctoral candidates is to prepare a doctoral thesis (monograph or cumulative with peer-reviewed articles), pass the defense of the doctoral thesis and publish the thesis. Publishing articles is only obligatory for a cumulative thesis.

Is any mobility compulsory?

It is only compulsory in specific programs, e.g. joint doctorate/cotutelle where universities from different countries cooperate (binational procedure).

However depending on the research topic, mobility is encouraged and applications for (full or partial) funding are possible.

How are courses in transferable skills provided?

This might be mandatory for doctoral candidates in structured programs. For all others, the courses are usually voluntary, provided by either central service units of the university (e.g. graduate academies), at the level of the graduate school, as specific offers in certain (time limited) research programs/groups or by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) or research institutions (e.g. summer schools). They are mostly face-to-face.

How is the progress of the doctoral candidate evaluated?

It depends on the format (employee, structured program, stipend, doctorate in cooperation with industry, external doctoral candidate with self-financing), discipline, doctoral regulation of the university's graduate school, and on the supervisor(s). There might be regular reports in writing or orally; reviewing of the research results, informal status quo talks etc.

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

In general, it is possible to change the supervisor. Practically, it is often difficult to find another supervisor if one wants to change. It depends on the reason for the change. Often doctoral candidates have to search for another supervisor themselves, but they might get support from central university units (like a graduate academy) or from the research community.

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

No. Some universities offer such training on a voluntary basis.

Full professors at universities and senior academic staff who have completed their habilitation treatise (typically stage 3 or stage 4 researchers, i.e. established or leading researchers)⁹ at universities with so-called promotion-rights can become supervisors of the doctoral candidates.

⁹ According to [Research Profile Descriptors by the European Commission](#).

III. Defence procedure

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

It depends on several factors, especially the school's doctoral regulations (and they can differ a lot between the different graduate schools of one university and between similar graduate schools of different universities).

Standard requirement is always the submission of a doctoral thesis on a pre-defined research topic and its acceptance by the university or the department respectively. Depending on the doctoral regulations, additional requirements (such as taking courses with ECTS points) are possible.

What documents are required to start the defence procedure?

It depends on the school's doctoral regulations. Typically, this includes the complete submission of a doctoral thesis, either as a monograph or as a cumulative thesis with a certain number of published peer-reviewed journal articles. The thesis has to be reviewed, graded and accepted by two (or more, depending on regulations) supervisors, independent from each other.

Other documents can include (depending on the department's or graduate school's requirements): CV with academic achievements of the candidate, review letters of the supervisors, proof of completing additional requirements (e.g. in case of structured doctoral program).

What is the defence procedure?

It depends on the graduate school's doctoral regulations. Typically, it includes either a presentation of the doctoral thesis followed by questions from the defense committee and/or an oral exam about research issues from the discipline or even from another discipline that are not related to the thesis.

After the successful defense, it is always obligatory to publish the thesis. However, modes of publication can vary, depending on the school's doctoral regulations, e.g. as a print or open access book, a series of articles (cumulative), or through an e-diss service (electronic publication).

Note: The authors like to emphasize that large differences exist between different disciplines, universities and doctoral regulations across Germany. Therefore, all information outlined in this document can be of a general character only.

Author/s: Anna Tschaut¹, Claudia Dobrinski², Anja Hagedorn, Katharina Mueller³

University affiliation: ¹Technical University of Dresden,

²University of Paderborn & Theological Faculty Paderborn,

³University of Goettingen & German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer



*National Association affiliation: THESIS e.V., The Interdisciplinary Network for Doctoral
Candidates and Early Stage Researchers in Germany*

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EURODOC survey on the Doctorate structures across Europe was prepared for the EURODOC Doctoral Training Working Group by the following members (in alphabetical order): Melania Borit¹⁰ (NO), Gergely Buday (HU), Eva Hnatkova (CZ), Filomena Parada (PO) and Olga Shtyka (PL).

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