Standards and requirements for the quality of doctoral programmes at the University of Iceland

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1. Introduction
The University of Iceland is authorised by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture to offer doctoral programmes in all of its schools in accordance with Act no. 63/2006 on Universities, and Rules no. 37/2007 on rules for doctoral programmes in universities. The authority was granted following a professional evaluation by foreign specialists in 2008 and 2009.

At the University of Iceland heavy emphasis is placed on ensuring that doctoral programmes are in accordance with internationally recognised requirements. In 2004 the University Meeting (now University Forum) and the University Council approved formal Standards and Requirements for the quality of doctoral programmes, which were reviewed in 2012. The Graduate School of the University of Iceland was established in 2009 with the function of ensuring and strengthening the quality of doctoral programmes at the University and enforcing set criteria and requirements, cf. Article 66 of University of Iceland's Rules no. 569/2009 [Annex 1].

2. Organisation of doctoral programmes
Schools and faculties of the University organise and bear academic responsibility for doctoral programmes at the University, their content, structure and implementation. Under the Act no. 63/2006 on Universities, and the Act no. 85/2008 on Public Universities, the University Council sets general rules on doctoral programmes and their completion with a viva voce examination. These general rules are in Chapter VI of University of Iceland's Rules, No. 569/2009. It states therein that the University's schools and faculties may organise doctoral programmes in accordance with the framework set out there. More detailed provisions on graduate studies are in the special rules of schools and faculties regarding such programmes, which are confirmed by the University Council. Academic titles, which are conferred upon completion of a programme, are listed in Article 55 of The Joint Rules.

3. Quality of doctoral programmes, founded on law and rules
The above acts and rules deal in detail with the various formal elements of doctoral programmes, such as access to a doctoral programme, doctoral committees, application deadlines, handling of applications, number of credits, length of time and structure of a programme, the relationship between Master's and doctoral studies, tutors and supervisors, requirements for those assessing the study and final project, external examiners and opponents, assessment, submission and finishing of final projects, relations with other universities and academic titles. The acts and rules constitute a formal framework for a doctoral programme, which specifically stipulates the standards and requirements for the quality of a programme, such as what is required of supervisors, schools, faculties and courses. However, the separation between acts and rules, on one hand, and standards and requirements on quality, on the other, is not
always clear. Thus, the acts and particularly the rules apply, to some extent, to the quality of a programme, and the standards and requirements on quality below constitute a more detailed implementation of the rules.

4. Standards and requirements for the quality of doctoral programmes

These standards and requirements for the quality of doctoral programmes are part of the University of Iceland's formal quality control system. Emphasis is placed on their being comparable to those commonly found in the University of Iceland's reference universities abroad.

Below are the distinctions between general, academic and material standards and requirements.

- **General** standards are a framework referring to internationally recognised prerequisites for the quality of doctoral programmes.¹

- **Academic** standards specify the minimal requirements for the education, supervisory experience and research activity of supervisors and doctoral committees.

- **Material** standards entail the minimal requirements for doctoral students' study facilities.

4.1 General standards

- **Objective and learning outcomes of a doctoral programme.** The objective of a doctoral programme at the University of Iceland is to provide doctoral students with the knowledge and skills necessary for them to engage in independent scholarly research, acquire new knowledge and perform diverse tasks in Iceland and other countries requiring skills to employ scholarly methods. Doctoral students shall be required to participate actively in the scholarly community they have joined. The learning outcomes of a doctoral programme are further detailed in *Criteria for Higher Education and Degrees*, published by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture [Annex 2].

- **Transparent admissions process.** Every effort shall be made to attract students to a doctoral programme at the University of Iceland who are most inclined to take initiative in research. Selection of doctoral students is done on the basis of academic qualifications, equal rights and fairness. It shall generally be clear what is expected of students registering for a doctoral programme at the University of Iceland.

¹ Numerous models abroad have been drawn on, such as the policy of the European University Association (EUA) in *Salzburg Principles* (2005) and *Salzburg II Recommendations* (2010), the European Commission's policy, The European Charter for Researchers and The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (2005), the policy formulation of the Organisation of PhD Education in Biomedicine and Health Sciences in the European System (ORPHEUS), The Association of Medical Schools in Europe (AMSE) and World Federation for Medical Education (WFME), published in the journal *Standards for PhD Education in Biomedicine and Health Sciences in Europe* (2012). Instructional writings of the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, which the Graduate School at the University of Iceland belongs to, have also been taken into account.
• **Programme plan and financing.** At the beginning of a programme, a written programme plan shall be prepared, stipulating among other things the mutual duties and rights of doctoral students, supervisors, doctoral committees and the Graduate School, on behalf of the University of Iceland. The programme plan shall state a realistic plan for the financing and progress of the doctoral programme, provisions on publication rights, study facilities and other data and qualities, such as laboratory facilities required by the programme [Annex 3].

• **Annual programme progress report.** A doctoral student shall submit to the relevant faculty/school an annual programme progress report confirmed by the supervisor. Faculties/schools submit a copy of it to the Graduate School. The report shall give an account of the progress of the doctoral project, credits completed (ECTS), meetings between the doctoral student and supervisor, published writings, participation in conferences, teaching jobs, financing of the programme and the planned programme completion [Annex 4].

• **Programme period.** A doctoral programme at the conclusion of a Master's programme is 180-240 credits (ECTS). Assuming full-time studies, the period for a doctoral programme is therefore 3-4 years. On average the maximum time for concluding a doctoral degree shall be 5-6 years.

• **Recording of credits.** The doctoral committee and supervisor shall monitor whether the credits recorded in the student system (Ugla) are in accord with the programme's actual progress.

• **Research environment.** A doctoral programme shall go on in an active research environment, in a group of recognised scholars or in close contact with such a group. In order to enhance a doctoral programme's international validity, it is desirable for doctoral students to do part of their programme and/or the entire programme in collaboration with a recognised foreign research university.

• **International experience.** Doctoral students shall have opportunities to follow developments and adopt innovations and exchange information and knowledge with other doctoral students and scholars, including through being facilitated, insofar as possible, in spending part of the programme period with foreign universities or research institutes and attending foreign conferences.

• **Joint doctoral programme.** If a doctoral programme is organised jointly with another university, a special agreement shall be entered into, and care shall be taken that the programme fulfils quality and programme requirements comparable to those at the University of Iceland, and that responsibility for quality of the programme is clear.

• **General skill and professionalism.** In addition to specialised academic knowledge, a doctoral programme shall promote students' acquisition of general and practical knowledge, such as scholarly ethics and methodology, preparation of grant applications, utilisation of intellectual works, presentation of scholarly findings to specialists and the general public and acquisition of the professional and social skills required in future work.

• **Instruction and counselling.** Supervisors shall promote good and constructive collaboration with their students since mutual trust between a supervisor and a
doctoral student is key to a productive doctoral programme. Supervisors shall not only provide their students with academic advice but also endeavour to assist them in obtaining grants to finance the programme and in acquiring the general and professional skills mentioned above. In order to ensure quality of supervision, each supervisor, shall generally not supervise more than four doctoral students at a time.

- **Code of ethics.** The provisions of the University of Iceland's Code of Ethics and, as relevant, the provisions of the University of Iceland's Ethics Committee, the State's Bioethics Committee and the Ethics Committee of Landspitali University Hospital shall be paramount for all parties involved in a doctoral programme at the University of Iceland.

- **Arm's-length relations and impartiality.** When an academic employee is enrolled in a doctoral programme at the University of Iceland, arm's-length relations and impartiality shall be ensured insofar as possible, for example, through a co-supervisor and/or having the majority of the doctoral committee come from outside the University of Iceland and/or by conducting the programme in collaboration with a foreign university. The Administrative Act's general rules of competency shall be paramount for all parties involved in a doctoral programme at the University of Iceland.

- **Teaching.** Insofar as possible, doctoral students shall be offered teaching and projects related to their doctoral programme. Care shall nevertheless be taken that the workload remain within moderate limits and not delay normal progress of the programme. The criterion shall be that such teaching and projects for doctoral students, who are not employees of the University of Iceland having a teaching obligation, not exceed 20% of the total work load.

- **Doctoral dissertation.** A doctoral dissertation shall be the product of 3-4 years of independent research of international calibre. More detailed stipulations on the requirements for a doctoral dissertation appear in the rules of schools on doctoral programmes and doctorates.

- **Defence of doctoral dissertation.** Doctoral dissertations shall be defended during a viva voce examination. The dissertations shall be thoroughly presented, published and made available in accordance with the applicable rules.

- **Handbook for Doctoral Students.** The Graduate School issues and publishes on its website a handbook for doctoral students, with detailed information and instructions on doctoral programmes at the University of Iceland.

### 4.2 Academic requirements for supervisors of doctoral students

A supervisor shall generally

- have completed a doctorate or its equivalent in the relevant field of scholarship. A judgement of competence for the work of professor can replace a doctorate.

- be recognised as an active specialist in the relevant field of scholarship.

- be in active contact with a domestic and international academic association and announce this to his students.
• have published writings that, for example, are related to a student's project, in an area with stringent academic requirements.

• have demonstrated writing activity, measured in research points under a public university rating system, totalling at least 15 research points per year from specified categories of the rating system (so-called power points) or, on average, totalling 30 whole research points the last 3 years. If there are mitigating circumstances, the Board of Directors of the Graduate School may depart from this requirement.²

• have experience with supervising doctoral programmes, for example, by being a member of doctoral committees or having considerable experience supervising research-related Master's programmes.

• have considerable experience raising special funding from recognised research funds.

• have considerable experience collaborating on research with internationally recognised specialists in a relevant field of scholarship outside the University of Iceland.

The Graduate School provides supervisors with information on their duties, rights and role and organises instruction and training for new supervisors to-be.

4.3 Academic requirements for doctoral committees and opponents

• Those on doctoral committees or opponents shall hold a doctorate or equivalent degree. A ruling of doctorate equivalence for the work of professor can replace a doctorate. In addition, it is desirable that committee members fulfil other requirements for supervisors in doctoral programmes. It is also desirable that opponents work outside the University of Iceland.

• At least one member of a doctoral committee shall be from outside, i.e., not an academic employee in the relevant faculty

• To prevent conflicts of interest, parties assessing a doctoral project, such as the doctoral committee and opponents, shall not be related to the relevant doctoral student.

4.4 Material requirements for schools, faculties and interdisciplinary courses in doctoral programmes

• Doctoral students shall be offered research and work facilities satisfactory for their projects.

• Doctoral students shall be assured regular access to supervisors.

• A doctoral programme shall, as relevant, be connected with a foreign university, e.g., so that the student completes part of the programme there, or a representative from it sits on the doctoral committee.

² An example of this is if a supervisor does not meet the requirement for either research points or power points but does fulfil other professional requirements. This, for example, pertains to experienced scholars with successful research careers and supervisory experience behind them.
• Doctoral students shall have opportunities to attend academic conferences and present projects there.

• Doctoral students shall regularly be offered symposia and an organised forum for discussion and presentation of their projects.

5. Complaint procedure for doctoral students

Doctoral students can submit a letter to the Graduate School if they think that the relevant school, faculty or course does not meet these standards and requirements for the quality of doctoral programmes at the University of Iceland. Otherwise, the provisions of Articles 50 and 51 of the University of Iceland's Rules, no. 569/2009, on students and disciplinary sanctions apply to doctoral students regarding the process of complaints and formal student complaints.

6. Revision

The Quality Control Commission of the University Council and governing board of the Graduate School regularly discuss these standards and requirements for the quality of doctoral programmes at the University of Iceland. The standards and requirements shall be revised no later than five years after their entry into force.
Annex 1 – Graduate School at the University of Iceland, cf. Article 67 of the University of Iceland's Rules, no. 569/2009

The Graduate School at the University of Iceland follows set standards and requirements for the quality of doctoral programmes at the University of Iceland. The role of the Graduate School is to ensure and enrich the quality of doctoral programmes at the University of Iceland and to promote their development in accordance with the decisions of the University Council. The Graduate School has overall supervision of doctoral programmes and works closely with schools and faculties, the Quality Control Commission of the University Council and joint administration. The Graduate School is thus a forum of consultation and cooperation on the programmes within the university and the contact for collaborating parties in Iceland and abroad. Other universities may be granted affiliation with the Graduate School, provided that they partially or completely fulfil the academic requirements for organising doctoral programmes in the relevant scholarly field, according to the assessment of the Graduate School's governing board, and after obtaining the consent of the University of Iceland's University Council and that of the member university.

The Graduate School performs its function, for example, by:

a. encouraging increased quality and servicing the growth and development of graduate programmes in every way, especially doctoral programmes,

b. following up on joint standards and requirements for the quality of graduate programmes, monitoring that courses being taught in research-related graduate programmes are in harmony with current standards and requirements and that the offering of courses is satisfactory and confirming faculties' descriptions of new courses in graduate programmes,

c. monitoring that faculties follow the general rules on the admission requirements and admission procedure for doctoral students, the progress of programmes and dates, which must comply with students being able to complete graduate programmes, for example, by confirming a programme plan and doctoral students' annual reports on programme progress,

d. monitoring that graduate students are always registered at the University during their studies, seeing to the recording of faculties' conclusions on applications for graduate studies, monitoring programme plans for research-related Master's programmes and changes to them and recording and confirming programme plans for doctoral programmes and changes to them.

e. verifying whether graduate programme supervisors meet set standards and requirements and recognise them as affiliates of the Graduate School,

f. confirming proposals of schools regarding opponents at a viva voce examination,

g. being a forum for consultation and cooperation on graduate programmes within the University and regarding requirements for graduate students and supervisors,

h. promoting at once coordination and diversity of graduate programmes at the University and closely monitoring developments in graduate programmes in the international arena, always striving to keep graduate programmes at the
University in step with recognised international quality requirements,
i. encouraging international collaboration and cooperation with foreign universities, for example, regarding joint degrees, and organising specialised collaboration agreements regarding graduate programmes and joint degrees,

j. strengthening understanding of the interests of graduate programmes and graduate students,

k. collecting, analysing and disseminating documents, data and information about all of the main aspects of graduate programmes at the University, including grants and statistics about the programmes in Icelandic and English and, as relevant, making proposals to the University Council regarding rules and/or standards promoting quality of the programmes,

l. seeing to administration of the graduate programme curriculum at the University, in consultation with faculties and teaching divisions and

m. organising instruction, conferences, discussion meetings and lectures on matters involving the functions and goals of the Graduate School, graduate programmes generally and academic work at the University.

Doctorate, level 3, 180-240 ECTS

The admission requirements are a Master's degree of level 2.1 or 2.2 or a comparable degree. Schools or faculties can require certain minimal grades and set special rules on the admission and qualifications of students.

Knowledge: Upon graduation a student possesses specialised knowledge in a scholarly field. This entails that a student:

- possesses a broad and detailed understanding of the main theories, basic points, concepts and latest available knowledge
- has taken initiative in creating new knowledge and interpreting it with research or other recognised scholarly methods
- has contributed important innovations in the form of new knowledge, original utilisation or interpretation of existing knowledge
- demonstrates knowledge of scholarly ethics and has taken a carefully considered position on his own research and that of others from an ethical standpoint.

Skills: Upon graduation a student can employ specialised procedures and work methods in a specialised scholarly field. This entails that a student:

- can organise and carry out extensive research that broadens and/or redefines current methodology in a scholarly field
- can investigate or develop projects addressing the problems and subjects in a scholarly field
- has at his fingertips the basic skills, technology, methods, materials and references related to the relevant scholarly field
- can employ critical analysis, assessment and integration to new and complex projects
- can utilise general and specialised equipment for research and research techniques
- can use software to support and improve work in the relevant scholarly field
- can specify specialised software for improvements to methods and work procedures
- can critically assess statistical and graphical information
- has applied recent research or developed working methods improving or expanding the current scope of knowledge of the relevant scholarly field
- demonstrate originality in developing and utilising new knowledge, understanding and methods
• has dedicated himself to a critical stance on knowledge and has presented an academic article publishable in a peer-reviewed publication in Iceland or the international arena.

**Qualifications:** Upon graduation a student shall be able to utilise his knowledge and skills in work and/or further studies. This entails that a student:

• can assume full responsibility for his own projects and the work of others
• can demonstrate independence and initiative in professional and academic work
• can effectively tell cohorts, other scholars and the general public about his academic specialty
• can participate in critical discussions, take initiative and lead academic communications.
Annex 3. Contents of a doctoral programme plan

At the beginning of a programme, a doctoral student, supervisor and [faculty, school, University of Iceland?] shall make a written programme plan, stipulating, among other things, the mutual duties and rights of the doctoral student, supervisor, doctoral committee and the Graduate School, on behalf of the University of Iceland. The programme plan shall include stipulations on the following points:

1. Name and short description of the doctoral project.
2. Plan for financing the programme and period of studies
3. Relations between the supervisor and doctoral student, i.e., the supervisor's obligation to provide the doctoral student with supervision and other assistance, as relevant, and the doctoral student's obligation to apply himself diligently to the programme, in accordance with the provisions of the standards.
4. Facilities for the programme, i.e., depending on the institution's obligation to provide the doctoral student with acceptable work facilities, ensure the doctoral student's safety, welfare and health and provide him with other assistance, such as financing for the programme, and the doctoral student's obligation to abide by the institution's work rules and the directives of statutes and regulations regarding, for example, safety, confidentiality, etc.
5. If a doctoral project is to some extent done at an institution or company, a separate agreement regarding this shall be entered into between the doctoral student, the relevant faculty of the University of Iceland and the institution/company involved, wherein there are stipulations on the facilities, organisation of professional responsibility and communications, ownership of data, grants, wages and any other relevant points. This agreement shall accompany the programme plan. The Graduate School supervises the drafting of such agreements and confirms them on behalf of the University of Iceland. The relevant doctoral committee [or permanent committee of the faculty/school] supervises execution of the agreement.
6. The publication right, i.e., as relevant, the return of original data upon completion of the programme, the submission of a manuscript(s) for an academic article(s) to peer-reviewed scholarly journals, authorisation to publish the doctoral dissertation, co-authorship, etc.
Annex 4. Contents of doctoral students' annual programme progress report

At the beginning of each year, a doctoral student submits to the relevant faculty/school a programme progress report confirmed by the supervisor. Faculties/schools submit a copy of it to the Graduate School before 1 February. The following points shall appear in the programme progress report:

1. Name and birth date of the doctoral student
2. Start of the doctoral programme according to the programme plan
3. Name of the supervisor
4. Name and brief description of the doctoral project
5. Number of credits (ECTS) completed in the preceding year and the total number of completed credits since the start of the programme
6. Brief report on meetings with the supervisor in the previous year, for example, the number of meetings, data available at the meetings, decisions taken, etc.
7. Brief report on the progress of the doctoral project during the previous year
8. The previous year's published writings and/or intellectual works
9. Participation in the doctoral student's symposium the previous year
10. Participation in domestic and/or foreign conferences during the previous year
11. Teaching jobs during the previous year
12. Status and prospects regarding financing of the programme
13. Programme facilities
14. Planned conclusion of the programme
15. Other things that the doctoral student would like to mention