



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

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## 1 ORGANISATION OF DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES

Schools and faculties at the University of Iceland organise and bear responsibility for doctoral programmes at the University. The Graduate School oversees the set standards and requirements for the quality of doctoral studies. Article 2 of the Regulation on doctoral programmes in universities in accordance with Article 7 of Act no. 63/2006 states that universities must set rules for doctoral studies and issue these publicly. These general rules are found in Chapter VI of the Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009. They state that schools and faculties at the University are authorised to organise doctoral programmes within the set framework. Further provisions for graduate studies are included in the specific school and faculty rules, which are approved by the University Council. Academic titles conferred on completion of a study programme are listed in Article 55 of the Regulation for the University of Iceland.

## 2 QUALITY OF DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES, LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The aforementioned laws and regulations address in detail the various formal elements of doctoral programmes, such as criteria for admission to doctoral programmes, application deadlines, processing of applications, number of credits, length and structure of a programme, the relationship between Master's and doctoral studies, administrative supervisors, supervisors, doctoral committees, external examiners and opponents, assessment and more. The Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009 creates a formal framework for doctoral programmes. This document, however, provides more detailed standards and requirements for the quality of a study programme, e.g. standards required of supervisors, schools, faculties and interdisciplinary programmes. It also defines the primary responsibilities of the Graduate School.

## 3 STANDARDS FOR THE QUALITY OF DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES

These standards for the quality of doctoral studies are part of the formal quality assurance system at the University of Iceland. The University strives to set and maintain standards comparable to those of peer institutions in other countries.

- *Objectives and learning outcomes for doctoral programmes.* The objective of a doctoral programme at the University of Iceland is to provide students with the knowledge, skills and competences they need to meet the current learning outcomes for doctoral studies issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

- *Transparent admissions process.* Doctoral students are selected on the basis of academic competence, equality and fairness.
- *Research environment.* Doctoral studies shall take place in an active research environment, in the company of recognised scholars or in close contact with such scholars. Doctoral students shall have the opportunity to follow developments in their field, adopt innovations and exchange information and knowledge with other doctoral students and scholars. Whenever possible, they should be granted opportunities to conduct part of their studies at universities and research institutes abroad and attend international conferences.
- *Joint doctoral programmes.* When a doctoral programme is organised jointly with another university, a special agreement shall be established. The joint programme must meet quality and academic standards comparable to those at the University of Iceland and it must be clear which parties are responsible for upholding the programme's academic standards. The Graduate School reviews and manages agreements on joint degree programmes on behalf of the University of Iceland.
- *General skills and competences.* In addition to specialised academic knowledge, doctoral programmes shall support students in their acquisition of general and practical knowledge, including research ethics, research methodology, the writing of grant applications, the exploitation of intellectual property, the communication of research findings to specialists and the general public, as well as the professional and social skills required for future employment.
- *Supervision and counselling.* Supervisors shall not only provide students with academic advice but also endeavour to assist them in obtaining grants to finance their studies and acquiring the aforementioned general skills and competences. To ensure the quality of supervision, each supervisor shall generally not supervise more than four doctoral students at a time.
- *Code of Ethics.* All parties involved with doctoral studies at the University of Iceland shall uphold the University of Iceland's Code of Ethics and, as applicable, the provisions of the University of Iceland's Code of Research Ethics, the National Bioethics Committee and the Health Research Ethics Committee at Landspítali University Hospital.
- *Teaching.* As appropriate, doctoral students shall be offered teaching duties and projects related to their doctoral studies. Care shall nevertheless be taken to ensure the workload does not exceed reasonable limits or delay normal student progression. Teaching duties should not exceed the equivalent of 20% of a full-time position.

#### 4 REQUIREMENTS FOR THE QUALITY OF DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND

##### 4.1. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

- *Agreement on the organisation of the doctoral programme.* At the beginning of the doctoral programme at the University of Iceland, the student and supervisor shall sign an agreement regarding the organisation of the studies. This agreement shall stipulate the mutual rights and responsibilities of the student and the supervisor, ownership of data, publication rights and intellectual property rights, etc.
- *Study plan.* Within a year from the start of the programme, a written study plan shall be produced. The study plan shall include the following: a description of the doctoral research project and proposed schedule for progression, a funding plan, a description of study facilities and, where applicable, details on the involvement of companies and institutions outside the University of Iceland.

- *Progress report.* Doctoral students shall submit regular progress reports to the administrative supervisor, which have been reviewed by the doctoral committee. The report must include information on thesis progress, completed credits (ECTS), meetings between the student and supervisor, publications, participation in conferences, teaching, and project funding. It must also include a plan for the next period and a proposed date of completion. The progress report shall be submitted through the PhD Portal, the online management system for doctoral studies. The administrative supervisor is responsible for submitting progress reports to the faculty.
- *Interim evaluation.* The doctoral committee is responsible for conducting a thorough evaluation of the doctoral student's knowledge once during the programme in the schools where such an evaluation is required and in accordance with each faculty's rules.
- *Length of study.* A doctoral programme following completion of a Master's programme is 180–240 credits (ECTS). Based on full-time study, a doctoral programme should therefore take 3–4 years. Faculties are authorised to enrol doctoral students in part-time study, in which case the study plan should be based on 50% progression and the programme is extended accordingly. A student may switch their enrolment to and from part-time study at any point during their studies, subject to the approval of the doctoral committee as well as the standing committee at the faculty or school.

#### 4.2 REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOLS, FACULTIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES

- Doctoral students shall be provided with research and work facilities suitable for their project.
- Doctoral students are guaranteed regular access to their supervisors.
- Efforts shall be made to bolster the international dimension of a doctoral programme, e.g. by the student taking part of the programme at a university abroad or by inviting a representative of a university abroad to sit on the doctoral committee.
- Doctoral students shall have the opportunity to attend academic conferences and present their work there.
- Doctoral students shall have the opportunity to attend regular seminars and organised forums where they can present and discuss their work.
- Doctoral programmes shall be clearly defined, including descriptions of the knowledge, skills and competences that students should possess on completing the programme. It shall be stated by what means (coursework and other programme components) the student is expected to achieve these outcomes.

#### 4.3 REQUIREMENTS FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Doctoral students shall

- always be registered at the University and pay registration fees during the entirety of their studies,
- submit a progress report to their administrative supervisor through the PhD Portal – the online management system for doctoral studies,
- obtain approval from the standing committee regarding all significant changes to the study programme – e.g. extending the length of the programme or taking a leave from it – and inform the committee if withdrawing from the programme,
- attend to their studies conscientiously and actively participate in the academic community which they have joined,

- follow health and safety rules and working procedures at the University of Iceland and/or partner institutions, including provisions on confidentiality.

#### 4.4 REQUIREMENTS FOR SUPERVISORS OF DOCTORAL STUDENTS

The supervisor (*leiðbeinandi*) guides the doctoral student throughout the thesis project, helps the student as much as possible in obtaining funding, and supports them in acquiring the knowledge, skills and competences required of doctoral graduates. A faculty may permit a student to have an external supervisor, provided that this individual meets the requirements set here and in the rules of the relevant faculty.

A supervisor shall generally

- have completed a doctorate or equivalent qualification in the relevant field. Professorial competence may stand in lieu of a doctorate,
- be a recognised and active specialist in the relevant field and have published works on subjects related to the student's thesis in rigorous academic venues,
- have experience of research collaboration with internationally recognised specialists in the relevant field working outside the University of Iceland.

#### 4.5 REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE SUPERVISORS OF DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Each doctoral student must, from the outset of their programme, have an administrative supervisor (*umsjónarkennari*) who is a permanent member of academic staff at the University in the relevant subject. If the academic supervisor (*leiðbeinandi*) has such an appointment at the University, then he normally serves as the administrative supervisor as well. If the academic supervisor is not permanent academic staff at the University, then an administrative supervisor is appointed who has this permanent academic affiliation to the University. The role of the administrative supervisor is to be the student's point of contact with the University. The administrative supervisor has access to the PhD Portal – the management system for doctoral studies – and is responsible for delivering the student's progress report to the faculty once it has been approved by the supervisor. The administrative supervisor sits on the student's doctoral committee and must meet the requirements for committee members, cf. Section 4.6 of this document.

#### 4.6 REQUIREMENTS FOR DOCTORAL COMMITTEES

The faculty shall appoint a doctoral committee for each doctoral student. The doctoral committee shall be appointed within one year of the start of the programme.

- The doctoral committee comprises the supervisor, the administrative supervisor and one to three other specialists.
- At least one member of the doctoral committee shall be external, i.e. not an academic staff member at the faculty in question. Whenever possible, at least one member shall be a specialist at another university or research institute.
- Doctoral committee members must have a doctorate or equivalent. Professorial competence may stand in lieu of a doctorate. Ideally, doctoral committee members should also meet the other requirements for supervisors of doctoral students, in accordance with Section 4.4.

The purpose of the doctoral committee is twofold; first, it ensures that the student has access to the expertise required to complete their research and, second, it monitors the student's academic progression.

The doctoral committee

- meets with the student to discuss the status and progress of the thesis, typically around the time the student submits their progress report, at the very least, but more often if deemed necessary.
- is responsible for conducting a thorough evaluation of the student's knowledge once during the programme (e.g. a defence of the research plan or an interim evaluation) in the schools where such an evaluation is required and in accordance with each faculty's rules.
- When the doctoral committee judges the doctoral candidate ready to defend their thesis, the committee sends a written justification to the faculty arguing that the candidate should be granted the opportunity to submit the thesis for the defence.

#### 4.7 REQUIREMENTS FOR OPPONENTS

If it deems the doctoral thesis fit to be defended, the faculty appoints, upon approval by the Graduate School, two opponents for the oral defence of the thesis. Following the oral defence, the faculty head, together with the opponents, shall decide whether the title of Doctor will be awarded.

Opponents shall

- be recognised specialists in the subject of the doctoral thesis. have published work on subjects related to the student's project in rigorous academic venues and be capable of participating in scholarly debates on the topics of the doctoral research.
- have a doctorate or equivalent. Professorial competence may stand in lieu of a doctorate.
- not be members of the student's doctoral committee or have worked in the same research team.
- not have professional connections to the doctoral student, supervisor or doctoral committee of such a nature that they could call the opponent's impartiality into question. Examples of such connections include joint publication of academic papers in peer-reviewed journals (recent publications and/or a high number of papers over the years) or recent scientific collaboration (e.g. joint research grants).

Where possible, at least one opponent shall be a specialist or member of teaching staff at another university or research institute.

#### 5. GRADUATE SCHOOL

The aim of the Graduate School is to uphold and enhance the quality of graduate studies at the University of Iceland and contribute to their development in accordance with the decisions of the University Council.

The primary responsibilities of the Graduate School are as follows:

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

- a. define shared standards and requirements for the quality of graduate studies at the University and ensure they are implemented
- b. closely monitor international developments in graduate studies and focus on ensuring that graduate studies at the University meet internationally recognised standards at all times,
- c. regularly discuss and review standards and requirements for the quality of graduate studies at the University of Iceland and, as appropriate, propose rules and/or standards that improve the quality of the said studies,
- d. handle complaints from doctoral students who believe that their school, faculty or programme has failed to meet established standards and requirements for the quality of doctoral studies at the University,
- e. review and provide evaluations of proposed changes to school and faculty rules on graduate studies before they are submitted to the University Council for approval,
- f. provide evaluations on proposals from schools for new graduate programmes (cf. the Rules of procedure on the preparation and organisation of new programmes at the University of Iceland) before the request to organise a new programme is submitted to the University Council for approval,
- g. ensure, by regularly requesting data from schools and Student Registration, that active research-based graduate programmes meet current standards and requirements,
- h. review and approve or reject faculty proposals regarding opponents for doctoral defences,
- i. review and manage ad hoc partnership agreements for graduate studies and joint degrees in consultation with the Division of Academic Affairs.

#### SUPPORT FOR SUPERVISORS AND STUDENTS

- j. regularly organise courses and discussion forums for supervisors in collaboration with the Centre for Teaching and Learning and schools,
- k. organise the induction of new doctoral students at the University,
- l. regularly organise courses and discussion forums for doctoral students on general skills and research competences,
- m. promote as much as possible teaching experience for doctoral students,
- n. support professional development for doctoral students in collaboration with the Student Counselling and Career Centre,
- o. develop, maintain and oversee the online management system for doctoral studies (the PhD Portal).

#### COMMUNICATION

- p. manage a website and other appropriate online resources for the Graduate School featuring annual statistics on doctoral studies and information about funding opportunities, exchange studies and available graduate courses,
- q. act as a forum for consultation and cooperation in matters concerning graduate studies within the University, including requirements for graduate students and supervisors.

#### 6 REVIEW

The board of the Graduate School shall regularly discuss these standards and requirements for the quality of doctoral studies at the University of Iceland. The standards and requirements shall be reviewed every five years at the least.