

# Quality Standards for Doctorates at Osnabrück University

## **Preliminary remarks:**

These Quality Standards are recommendations for studying for a doctorate at Osnabrück University. Most of these are routine procedures for the majority of supervisors and doctoral students. For the sake of clarity, however, these points have been summarized to ensure that doctoral students and their supervisors are aware of their rights and obligations with regard to doctorate studies.

Doctoral students often fit their work around other commitments in a variety of different ways. This influences their relationship with the university and the duration of their doctorate programme. The amount of time a doctoral student has available to work on their dissertation can typically be reduced by the following activities or obligations (possibly extending the overall length of time required to complete the doctorate):

1. Work on research projects (not directly connected to the dissertation)
2. Activities within the school, subject area, working group and/or in committees not associated with the doctorate
3. Teaching responsibilities
4. Work outside the university
5. Family responsibilities (children or caring for family members)
6. Personal restrictions

Acknowledging these various factors, aspects of these Quality Standards, which refer to process aspects and timescales, should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the doctoral student's individual situation. It should be assumed that the expectations placed on doctoral students (e.g., deadlines for completing the doctorate, meetings with supervisors, professional skills) may differ considerably depending on the time available and the student's personal background.

## **1 Before embarking on a doctorate**

### **1.1 Contextual Prerequisites**

Before embarking on a doctorate, the doctoral student and their supervisors should discuss the motivation behind the intended doctorate. The supervisor should only accept the doctoral student if the demands and scope of the doctorate subject can be managed by the doctoral student within the scheduled period (i.e., if they have the knowledge required or can acquire it in time) and the supervisor has the expertise required to supervise the topic. Before starting, it should also be clarified whether the necessary equipment and software are available and whether access can be granted to archives and documents. If the topic for the dissertation has not yet been defined, the student and supervisor should draw up a roadmap to identify a topic.

Sufficient funding is essential when studying for a doctorate. Before starting work, the student and their supervisors should agree on the financial basis for the specific project; if necessary, supervisors should inform their students about the possibility of external funding and refer them

to relevant sources (e.g., Scholarship Guide issued by the Research Support Office). If funding is not secured or if the doctoral student has to spend too much time in a job to support themselves that is not related to the dissertation, there should be careful consideration of whether the doctorate is a realistic proposition. It is also essential to discuss beforehand how any "additional expenses" incurred within the doctorate (visits to archives, consumables, attending conferences, publication costs, study abroad, etc.) will be financed.

## **1.2 Acceptance formalities**

The formal acceptance procedures and the criteria for acceptance into doctoral studies should be clearly defined and communicated transparently. In the interests of the prospective student, checks should be made to ensure that the formal prerequisites for a doctorate have been satisfied before the letter confirming supervision is sent. When reviewing the equivalence of degrees obtained abroad, the assessment proposals put forward by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Central Office for Foreign Education) shall apply. A school letter confirming supervision is the basis for formal enrollment. It is important to specify at the earliest opportunity which doctoral regulations will apply, particularly in the case of interdisciplinary doctorates. Here, recognizing the scope of subject areas, there should be prompt establishment of a team of supervisors by the doctoral student and their supervisor.

## **1.3 Supervisors**

At the start of the doctorate, the doctoral student and their supervisor should decide together who may also be involved in the doctoral proceedings (e.g., co-supervisor, mentor). It is often sensible for a doctorate to be supported by a co-supervisor as well as a supervisor. This may be important because of the topic chosen (e.g., in the case of interdisciplinary subjects), and because it offers contingency for the doctoral student in the event of the loss of a supervisor (e.g., relocation to another university or illness). It can often also benefit the student's research.

## **1.4 Clarifying mutual expectations**

At the start of the doctorate, mutual expectations should be clarified. This could include the intended timescales, the extent to which the project can be incorporated into the school's research activities, or the need for publications during the doctorate, internships, participation in conferences, or periods spent abroad. The following generally applies:

Doctoral students can expect supervisors to support the doctoral project in compliance with any agreements made and in line with the work schedule, and to feel committed to this project. The doctoral student will devote themselves fully to their research endeavor, which is expected by both the institution and the supervisors. Therefore, it is required of the doctorate student to devote enough time to their research topic and to complete the assigned work.

## **1.5 The work schedule**

The doctoral student and their supervisor agree upon a work schedule together. This work schedule should be sufficiently precise to enable the doctoral student to work on the project at least for the first year. The work schedule should include a clear formulation of the main research issue or the roadmap for identifying a topic, as well as the methods to be applied and procedures to be followed. Various stages of the work can be designated as milestones. The work schedule should be updated during the course of the doctorate.

## **1.6 Inclusion in related research activities**

The doctoral student should be included in any school work that is related to their area of study, ensuring consistency with the doctoral project. Doctoral students would be expected, where possible, to at least participate regularly in colloquia.

## **1.7 Rules of Good Scientific Practice**

Doctoral students and their supervisors undertake to comply with the rules of Good Scientific Practice (DFG Standard; Richtlinien zur Sicherung guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis und zum Umgang mit wissenschaftlichem Fehlverhalten an der Universität Osnabrück). For supervisors, this also means having to acknowledge and cite the authorship of doctoral students concerning texts, data, or knowledge. Osnabrück University has an ombudsman to ensure Good Scientific Practice and to deal with scientific malpractice.

# **2 During the doctorate**

## **2.1 Supervisory meetings / progress reviews**

The central element of supervision comprises meetings between the supervisor and the doctoral student. The aim of such meetings is to discuss the progress of the doctoral thesis. Progress should be critically assessed in these discussions (What results have been achieved and which milestones have been reached? Have the work schedule and time schedule been met? If not, why not?). It is often advisable to arrange these meetings at set intervals, which should be observed by both parties. In many cases, summary minutes of these sessions, signed by both parties, have proved useful. Sections of the dissertation/results submitted in consultation should be read promptly by supervisors, and timely feedback should be given.

Supervisors should encourage doctoral students to complete the work within the agreed timeframe. If the doctoral student repeatedly fails to honor agreements or the work schedule, then the supervisor may end the supervisory relationship. In the event of a supervisor and student being unable to resolve a conflict between them, suitable mediators should be available for both the supervisor and the student.

## **2.2 Presentation of work to the scientific community**

Both the doctoral student and his or her supervisors should seek to present the project within scientific debates and to discuss it with the scientific community. This may include presenting the work steps and results in subject area colloquia or to other work groups, publishing (interim) results, delivering lectures at conferences or to specialist associations and industrial representatives or practitioners.

## **2.3 Events and institutions to support doctoral studies**

The doctoral student and their supervisor should jointly consider which specialist and cross-disciplinary events could successfully complement the work on the dissertation and prepare the candidate for their subsequent career, and which institutions can provide support during the doctorate. The PhD Career Center at Osnabrück University (ZePrOs) is one of a number of institutions that offers courses to develop professional skills. ZePrOs and Promos, the representative body for doctoral students, also encourage doctoral students to engage in networking with one another.

## **2.4 Prospects beyond the doctorate**

If required, supervisors should advise their doctoral students on their career prospects in academia. If doctoral students fail to complete their doctorate, they should be advised on suitable alternatives.

## **2.5 Loss of supervision**

According to its capacities, the school should ensure that in the event of the loss of a supervisor (departure, illness or death), the student is offered an alternative that will enable them to successfully complete their doctorate. In such cases, it is advisable to appoint a second supervisor from a related subject area, or possibly an external supervisor.

## **3 Completion of the doctorate**

### **3.1 Formal procedures, assessors**

The work is completed in accordance with the respective doctoral regulations. It is advisable for at least one of the assessors not to be a co-author of the doctoral student; if necessary, a third assessor shall be engaged. It is recommended that schools have in place suitable procedural steps for awarding the grade summa cum laude.

### **3.2 Suitable assessment periods**

The maximum assessment period should be three months.

### **3.3 Publication of the dissertation**

Supervisors should help doctoral students seek or choose suitable publication options.

- The "Quality Standards for Doctorates" were passed by resolution by the Senate on November 30, 2011 and by the President's Cabinet of Osnabrück University on January 19, 2012.