



GUIDE TO DOCTORAL STUDIES

HR GUIDE

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Only the German version is the official document and legally binding. This translation is provided for information purposes only.

1 Guiding principle

Doctorates make a significant and fundamental contribution to research by the WSL. They are based on research projects that are carried out independently, with the supervision of a professor. The core facet of a doctorate is the acquisition of in-depth scientific expertise by making a major contribution to research. The development of specialist, methodological and interdisciplinary knowledge and skills as well as scientific socialisation and networking form central objectives of a doctorate.

Doctoral studies are organised by the individual universities/higher education institutions, taking into account institutional and disciplinary arrangements. The WSL, in partnership with universities/higher education institutions, makes a significant contribution to teaching and research and is involved in the training and professional development of doctoral students. It makes its research facilities available free of charge.

The recommendations in this guide relate to quality aspects with across-the-board validity. Legally, the respective regulations, doctoral regulations and/or doctoral agreements of the universities/faculties apply.

2 Purpose and scope of this guide

This guide for doctoral students and supervisors serves as a source of information that covers the most important points to do with a doctorate at the WSL and is a tool intended to support successful doctorates.

It applies to all doctoral students at the Federal Research Institute WSL with an employment contract for doctoral students, as well as to visiting doctoral students whose principal supervision takes place at the WSL (entire doctorate at the WSL), and to their supervisors.

This guide is not binding for all other visiting doctoral students; the regulations of the respective university apply to them. However, the recommendations of this guide may of course also be applied where appropriate.

3 Supervision

A shared commitment to a high-quality supervisory environment is an important prerequisite for a successful doctorate. The relationship between the doctoral student and the supervisor is a partnership in which the supervisor supports the doctoral student in the development of their scientific competitiveness and career. The two parties share and develop ideas in an atmosphere of respect for intellectual property.

Doctoral students at the WSL are supervised by at least two independent persons (comprising supervisors from the university and the WSL). One person assumes the role of the principal supervisor. The supervising persons are not permitted to have a close personal relationship either with one another, or with the doctoral student. Supervisors are obliged to withdraw from their role if they could be biased for personal or other reasons. The WSL strives to ensure that a balanced representation of genders exists among persons who are supervisors. If the gender of the doctoral student is not adequately represented, an additional contact person can be appointed at the request of the doctoral student.

After the commencement of the employment contract, several conversations between the doctoral student and their supervisors will take place during the first three months in which the topics listed under Sections 3.1 and 3.2 will be discussed. A rough time schedule and the key points of the research plan will be defined and recorded in writing. If no research plan is forthcoming from the university/higher education institution, then a research plan must be drawn up within one year. Where possible, a doctoral agreement (see Section 1, Paragraph 3) is also to be provided to the supervisors at the WSL.

3.1 Expectations of supervisors

Supervisors will advise doctoral students on specific tasks and actively support them in their personal and professional development. They will foster a trusting and open dialogue, provide regular feedback and encourage independent behaviour by doctoral students. They will take responsibility for the joint definition of tasks based on the respective research plan/project and their regular review of this. Supervisors will explain the roles of the various posts (university professor, supervisors, line manager, mentor, peers, ombudspersons, etc.) and name the persons with whom the doctoral student should discuss relevant subjects.

Supervisors will also inform doctoral students about the different main phases of a doctorate. In general, more intensive phases of supervision will be required at the beginning and towards the end of a doctorate. They will thoroughly familiarise the

doctoral student with the topic of the PhD project and its interdisciplinary context. They will clarify expectations regarding the final outcome of the project (number of publications, quality of work, scope of PhD documents, archival, etc.) and promote national and international networking. They will uphold an appropriate balance between providing guidance and granting freedom, and give honest, accurate, constructive and timely feedback on ideas, reports, drafts, etc. They will also express their concerns clearly and as early as possible if the doctoral student's achievements do not meet their expectations (see Section 5.3). During the final phase of a PhD project, the supervisors will discuss scientific competitiveness candidly and clearly with the doctoral student.

3.2 Expectations of the doctoral student

Doctoral students will act with a high degree of personal responsibility and organise regular meetings and feedback discussions with their supervisors. Based on their research plan/project, they will define tasks in close cooperation with their supervisors, discuss progress, reflect on their potential and continuously develop their career perspectives. Together with their supervisors, they are responsible for the arrangement of regular meetings and annual progress reviews. Doctoral students should act pro-actively and clearly communicate any concerns or problems to their supervisors at an early stage.

Where doctoral students do not submit their planned publications within a maximum of 18 months after successfully defending their dissertation, the supervisor may use the research results for publication purposes after this period has expired – naturally fully acknowledging the contributions of all parties to the publication. A new deadline may also be optionally agreed before the end of a dissertation.

Doctoral students shall undertake approximately 10–15 % of their work for the research units, the WSL or the university/higher education institution. This work may include teaching, general support, contributions to other research projects, laboratory maintenance, public relations work such as guided tours and media work, etc.

3.3 Expectations of line managers

Line managers who are not themselves acting as supervisors are jointly responsible for the quality of the supervision. Where necessary, they will act in a supportive capacity and make themselves available as contact persons for both the doctoral students and their supervisors.

3.4 PhD Coach

Doctoral students can contact the WSL PhD Coach for additional support. The uptake of this offer rests on the judgement and initiative of the doctoral student. The PhD Coach is the point of contact for general questions concerning a doctorate, or in the event of uncertainties or difficulties during a PhD project (however any specific scientific advice relating to the PhD project is excluded). Where necessary, he will help to find other suitable help or support (see Intranet [PhD Coach](#)).

4 Training and professional development

Together with the doctoral student, the supervisors will determine whether training or professional development measures are necessary for professional and personal development. Such measures may be language courses, courses in presentation techniques, diversity and integration courses, or similar. The range of available courses can include both internal and external training sessions. Where necessary, the initiative to instigate training can be taken by either party. Possible cost sharing by the WSL can be assessed by means of an [Application for Training and Professional Development](#).

5 Contractual conditions for doctoral students

Doctoral students with a PhD contract at the WSL are employees of the WSL and are employed under identical conditions. They are subject to the ETH Domain Personnel Regulations (PVO) and the generally applicable regulations of the WSL.

Guest doctoral students who are mainly supervised by the WSL will receive a guest agreement with integral regulations covering data policy and the universally applicable directives of the WSL. In all other matters, they are subject to the contractual provisions of their respective university.

5.1 Salary

Salaries are set as a lump-sum amount (please refer to the Lump-Sum Salaries information sheet). Statutory social security contributions and mandatory employer insurance contributions will be deducted from the salary.

5.2 Funding

A doctorate is usually funded by third-party funds, funds from the professorship of the respective university/higher education institution or by the doctoral student's own funds (scholarships). The WSL can contribute additional funds (i.e. to bolster Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) wages to WSL levels).

5.3 Contract duration

Doctoral students are initially employed on an annual contract. This contract can be renewed for one or two years. The following requirements must be met:

- a) Fulfilment of the specific admission criteria as per the guidelines for doctoral studies of the respective university/higher education institution
- b) If entrance examinations are required at universities/higher education institutions, these must be passed within the first year of employment
- c) A positive performance assessment (internally at the WSL and by the external PhD or examination board, if required by the respective university faculty)
- d) Principal supervision of doctoral students by supervisors is guaranteed
- e) Funding has been secured

As funding for a doctorate at the WSL is across a four-year period as per the rules of the SNSF, supervisors will generally guarantee funding for four years. Please note that the EU, cantons, foundations and universities, for example, may also stipulate shorter or different funding arrangements. If this is the case, then the duration of the doctorate must be jointly agreed upon at the outset and confirmed in writing (see Section 3, Paragraph 3).

In the event of maternity during the doctorate, the period of employment will become extended by the length of the maternity leave.

After the first year of the doctorate in particular, the continuation or, if need be, the termination of the doctorate will be carefully evaluated on the basis of a progress assessment between the supervisors and the doctoral student. The decision concerning the extension or, if applicable, the termination of the doctorate will be communicated to the doctoral student in good time before the end of the contract by the principal supervisor and, if applicable, the direct superior in a personal interview, and confirmed in writing. If the doctoral student decides not to continue their doctoral studies, he or she must inform the principal supervisor and, if applicable, their direct superior in good time before the end of the contract.

5.4 Contract termination

The doctorate will end automatically and without notice when the employment contract for doctoral students comes to an end. An early termination of a doctorate is also possible by mutual agreement. Funding issues that may arise for the supervising research unit as a result of this can be resolved with the WSL management.

Any further employment after the completion of a dissertation is usually ruled out. A subsequent phase of knowledge consolidation, or the targeted continuation of an academic career should take place outside of the WSL and where possible, abroad. In exceptional cases – for example, to finish off publications – the management may approve continued employment (usually as a postdoctoral researcher) for up to 18 months. The research unit must ensure that funding is present.

5.5 Work and residence permits

Doctoral students with a foreign nationality will require a valid work and residence permit for their stay in Switzerland and at the WSL. A doctorate at the WSL may not be commenced without a valid permit.

6 Scientific integrity

The WSL is committed to scientific excellence. Trust in research is largely dependent on the responsible actions of researchers. In order to ensure enduring high-quality research, every member of staff is obliged to act responsibly and to follow the guidelines governing scientific integrity (please refer to the [Guidelines Research Integrity at the WSL](#)). The supervisors will inform the doctoral student about the applicable guidelines at the WSL. Both parties are obliged to comply with these at all times.

7 Privacy protection and advisory bodies

WSL offers its employees a respectful and professional environment. Direct superiors, employees, students and visitors from all research and specialist units should cultivate a respectful and supportive relationship with one another. Harassment, discrimination, bullying, threats or violence will not be tolerated at the WSL.

Doctoral students are always entitled to receive confidential advice and support if they have been affected by inappropriate behaviour (please see the [Respect Code of Conduct](#)). The following advisory bodies are available:

- a. Supervisors
- b. All line managers
- c. PhD Coach
- d. Representative for equal opportunities, diversity and personnel and organisational development (POD)
- e. Social counselling
- f. Ombudsmen
- g. Human Resources

Where necessary, the advisory bodies will refer the person concerned to another appropriate advisory body.

8 Absences / holidays

In the event of illness or accident, doctoral students must report their absence to their supervisors as soon as possible. A medical certificate must be forwarded to Human Resources for instances where the inability to work exceeds 3 working days (please see the leaflet [Sickness / Accident](#)).

The annual holiday entitlement for doctoral students is based on the stipulations of the ETH Domain Personnel Regulations (PVO). Holidays are generally to be taken in the calendar year in which the holiday entitlement arises. Supervisors shall fix the time of the holiday with the doctoral student. The supervisor is responsible for agreeing upon and monitoring the absences of doctoral students.

9 Infrastructure

The research unit where the doctorate is carried out will provide the doctoral student with a workplace. Doctoral students are entitled to the shared use of the WSL's infrastructure (rooms, equipment and facilities, IT, library, etc.). They will use these in accordance with the instructions of the respective departments and units.

10 Offers and activities for doctoral students

The PhD Club regularly organises events and courses for doctoral students. Further helpful information can be found under the following links:

[Living and working in Switzerland \(HR Welcome Desk\)](#)

[Aveth Survival Guide \(for general information\)](#)

This is only a brief selection of the helpful information that is available. The respective universities will generally provide further offers and activities for doctoral students.

11 Effective validity

This guide will enter into force on 1 November 2020.

Swiss Federal Research Institute WSL

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Hegg".

Christoph Hegg
Acting Director

This guide has been received and read:

Supervisor(s)

Name: _____

Place, Date: _____

(Signature)

Doctoral student

Name: _____

Place, Date: _____

(Signature)

Name: _____

Place, Date: _____

(Signature)

Guide routing

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