

Guidelines for the supervision of doctoral projects at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin

By resolution at its meeting on September 4th, 2017, the faculty council of the Faculty of Medicine at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin has issued the following guidelines for the supervision of doctoral projects.

Preamble

A doctorate is a standard requirement for a career as a scientist or as a university teacher. It provides evidence of intense, independent scientific work, which contributes to the increase of knowledge in a specialist field. It thereby constitutes a central element of the training and advancement of young scientists and is one of the core tasks of a university. The right to award doctorates is accompanied by the responsibility to offer doctoral students the best possible conditions for the successful completion of their doctoral projects. A substantial part of this is a guarantee of appropriate supervision.

The Faculty of Medicine at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin is conscious of the responsibility conferred on it by the right to award doctorates and has therefore – irrespective of the faculty's other regulations relating to doctorates – issued the following guidelines for the supervision of doctoral projects.

I. Principles

An important requirement for the successful completion of a doctoral project is a trust-based relationship between the doctoral candidate and their supervisor. A culture of transparency regarding mutual expectations, openness identifying difficulties and appreciation of successes, clarity regarding tasks, goals and methods of the research project, as well as mutual respect and fairness shaping the supervisory relationship, form a basis for successful doctoral projects and must be mutually established by all parties from the beginning. Part of this is also appropriate sensitivity regarding cultural backgrounds and equal opportunities, in particular between genders, as well as special attention regarding the compatibility of family and working life.

The supervisor also bears significant shared responsibility for the achievement of doctoral goals. This remains the case when parts of the supervisory work are delegated to third parties. Due to the special responsibility which accompanies the acceptance of a doctoral supervision, outright delegation of supervisory work is impossible. In addition, the obligation to supervise the project remains until the doctorate is complete, regardless of the duration of possible funding for the doctoral project.

In order to achieve the doctoral goal and to improve the work's scientific quality, the supervisors work together cooperatively and perform their duties in accordance with the principles of good scientific practice and the compliance regulations laid down in the Charité's code of conduct. They ensure that they do not accept more doctoral supervisions (as a primary, secondary or tertiary supervisor) than are reconcilable with appropriate supervision of each individual project. In the event of the supervisor's departure or withdrawal from the supervisory relationship for other reasons, they will independently ensure that supervision continues via a substitute supervisor until the doctoral project has been successfully completed.

II. Obligations and duties

By accepting the supervision of a doctoral project in the Faculty of Medicine at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin as a primary supervisor, the supervisor also, in consultation with the other supervisors of the project, takes on the following obligations and duties in particular, whereby they may delegate parts of the supervisory work to a representative:

1. He/she offers advice on the choice of an appropriate topic, ensuring that the demands and scope of the project allow for a successful conclusion within three years. As far as possible, publishable results should be expected. In the case of interdisciplinary topics, he/she bears responsibility for subject-appropriate supervision, e.g. by suggesting suitable further supervisors.

2. In the case of an advanced track doctorate, he/she supports the doctoral candidate to create a course plan for the attendance of events which have a meaningful relationship to the doctoral topic.
3. He/she is responsible for the doctoral student's training, insofar as it is required for the chosen topic or the necessary methods and investigative techniques.
4. He/she is responsible for regular meetings with the doctoral student, according to the regular cycle defined by the doctoral agreement, wherein he/she is informed about achieved results and any difficulties which may have arisen. He/she thereby regularly reviews the progress of work on the project and any adjustments to the timetable which may be necessary. He/she will promptly inform the doctoral candidate if any major implementation problems are foreseen. The aim is to avoid the need to retrospectively fundamentally revise discussed and completed sections of the dissertation, which would excessively delay successful completion of the doctoral project. During supervision, he/she ensures that the character of the dissertation as an independently completed piece of work is not jeopardised.
5. He/she is responsible for informing the doctoral candidate regarding the principles of good scientific practice and compliance with the relevant guidelines for citing authors and publications.
6. He/she is responsible for ensuring that any authorisations, ethics approvals or the like are obtained in good time and available.
7. He/she is responsible for appropriate statistical and biometrical supervision of the research project, where this is necessary with a view to the research project's topic.
8. He/she is responsible for ensuring that the doctoral candidate has access to the equipment required for successful implementation of their research project.
9. He/she is responsible for ensuring that, if the doctoral candidate is employed by him/her, they are, whenever possible, only given tasks which have a meaningful relationship to the doctoral project.
10. He/she is responsible for ensuring that, if the doctoral candidate is employed by him/her, they have sufficient opportunities to work on their doctoral project as well as scope for independent research.
11. He/she continually supports and advises the doctoral candidate with regards to their doctoral project. Among other aspects, this includes information on suitable means of discourse (conferences, congresses etc), publication, financing and idealistic and objective support, or on competitions and scientific awards.
12. He/she undertakes to suggest exclusively independent and neutral assessors for the assessment of the written doctoral thesis.
13. Together with the doctoral student, he/she is responsible for proper storage of the primary data for a period of ten years.
14. In the event of an appeal to the representative for matters relating to doctoral studies, he/she undertakes to work cooperatively and in a solution-oriented manner towards settlement of the conflict.

Secondary and tertiary supervisors contribute in an advisory function and should, in consultation with the primary supervisor, participate in supervisory tasks where it is reasonable and expedient with regards to successful completion of the doctoral project. The supervisors continually inform each other on all matters relevant to the facilitation and successful completion of the doctoral project.

III. Contact persons

For the purposes of advice relating to questions on the supervision of doctoral projects, a supervisor can call upon the representative named by the faculty council for matters relating to doctoral studies, the staff of the doctoral studies office or the coordinator of doctoral studies. This does not effect a release from any duty of confidentiality. The possibility of calling upon the ombudsmen according to the Charité's statute to ensure good scientific practice remains unaffected.

Berlin, 4th September 2017

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DEAN