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Regulations for Doctoral Researchers and Advisors at UFZ

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Preamble

The UFZ aims at providing doctoral researchers with at least three years of funding for conducting their doctoral theses at UFZ. The doctoral theses are intended to excel in terms of quality and originality, and to demonstrate the capacity to conducting independent scientific work. These aims have to be promoted by a stimulating environment, superb modern infrastructure and excellent supervision. The advisors are not only expected to provide subject-specific and personal competence, but also dedication and approachability for the concerns of doctoral researchers. The doctoral researchers are expected to work independently, proactively and in a highly motivated manner for their doctoral projects. Both doctoral researchers and advisors commit to follow the regulations of good scientific practice. The *Mission Statement on Structured Doctoral Programme at the UFZ* (see annex 1) and the *Helmholtz Association PhD Guidelines* (see annex 2) stand for the foundation of all regulations, instruments and measures regarding doctoral supervision.

1. Recruitment Process

In order to carry out a doctoral project successfully, the doctoral researcher has to fulfil the subject-related and interest-related requirements of the doctoral project in the best possible way since this may serve as the foundation of his or her entire work life. The **recruitment process** for doctoral projects is based on open competition. **Advertised PhD positions** require written applications (educational institution, academic degrees and references should be verified) and an extensive selection interview with the applicants in order to assess their qualification, motivation, inventiveness, independence, social competence and their oral and written English skills. Moreover, the professional and personal qualities of applicants with external funding should be examined.

In exceptional cases, given proper justification, it may be possible to refrain from advertising a position (e.g. the doctoral researcher contributed significantly to writing the project proposal for his or her position). Please see the company agreement on internal and external job advertisement (in German: [here](#)).

2. Phases of the Doctoral Degree

The doctoral degree can be subdivided into introductory, research, writing, and finishing phases. Each phase poses unique challenges for the manner and intensity of supervision. The responsibilities are further explained in chapter 3 and the rights and obligations are specified in chapters 4 and 5.

2.1 Introductory Phase

Naturally, the doctoral researcher can expect a friendly **welcome** on his or her first day (see induction concept [here](#)) and to be accompanied by his or her main advisor at the UFZ during the **first week** (e.g. provision of workplace, introduction to department(s)/UFZ infrastructure and administrative processes, see also [here](#)).

During the first three months, the advisory committee for the doctoral researcher has to be formed. The committee consists of the university advisor, one UFZ main advisor,

one UFZ co-advisor and one mentor/person of trust. This committee and the doctoral researcher must meet within the first three months to plan the project in more detail. The university and faculty for thesis submission will be selected, the supervision agreement will be signed and a PhD project proposal for the doctoral project will be drafted. The registration of the doctoral thesis (i.e. registration to the respective list of the faculty) has to be done as early as possible, especially for doctoral researchers with international degrees or degrees of an unrelated scientific field since the approval of these degrees may include time-consuming additional requirements.

A PhD project proposal for the doctoral thesis has to consist of the following elements that will continuously be updated, specified in more detail and modified:

- Exposé (project description including working title, problem background and scientific challenges, methods, mile stones, potential alternatives for risky sub-projects). The exposé should be in line with the UFZ portfolio, propose original science and allow a certain degree of freedom for the doctoral researcher
- Time plan for the entire duration of the doctoral thesis (including plan for publications, general plan for course participation of the graduate programme, if applicable stay abroad/exchange, career development measures)

According to this plan, the doctoral researcher should use the first three months for literature review but also for networking (people, methods, infrastructure for conducting the project) and organization (registration to the respective list of a faculty, selection of co-advisors with help of UFZ main advisor).

The **first five months** are also a trial period for the doctoral researcher and the advisors to decide whether to continue the project after the sixth-month probationary period. Negative and positive evaluations that become established have to be communicated by either side as early as possible.

After the first five months, the doctoral researcher will defend the PhD project proposal for his or her thesis in front of the advisory committee and for quality assurance also in the frame of a seminar or symposium (e.g. IP or department seminar). The PhD project proposal will be a central part of the supervision agreement.

2.2 Research Phases

During the research phases, the doctoral researcher will be supervised as stated in the supervision agreement. Work progress will be discussed on a regular basis, involving the advisory committee at least twice a year. Meetings with the advisory committee will provide the possibility of assessing the extent and quality of the work conducted in relation to the time plan and of making necessary adjustments to the PhD project proposal with the doctoral researcher. Moreover, an annual progress report in the form of a presentation should be held in the frame of a department seminar or IP colloquium. The doctoral researcher participates in the programme of the graduate school HIGRADE. If the doctoral researcher is also part of another graduate programme (e.g. EU ITNs, other Helmholtz/MPI/DFG programmes), their activities can usually be recognised in HIGRADE in order to avoid overlap and extra effort. The doctoral researcher takes care of the knowledge/prerequisites required by the doctoral regulations for his or her thesis.

2.3 Writing Phases

There are two forms of dissertation, namely a monography or a cumulative dissertation. The decision on which form is chosen will be made by the doctoral researcher and the advisory committee, with regard to the doctoral regulations of the respective faculty. The capability of writing high-quality, comprehensible publications is a key competence for scientists that should be acquired during the doctoral thesis. Manuscripts should circulate between doctoral researcher and advisors within a reasonable time span (max. 3 work weeks) until they can be submitted. The aim should be to find a reasonable compromise between the interest in elaborating high-quality publications and finishing the doctoral thesis in time.

2.4 Finishing Phase

At least one year before finishing the doctoral thesis the feasibility of writing a monogram/cumulative dissertation has to be evaluated. At the start of the last year of funding, the advisory committee and the doctoral researcher have to evaluate whether any changes to the original PhD project proposal of the thesis are necessary, possible and acceptable in order to ensure thesis submission in due time. Specifically, the career plans of the doctoral researcher (e.g. future career in science or industry), the individual personal circumstances (e.g. financial situation, family situation, visa), and the criteria with regards to the doctoral regulations of the faculty should be part of the discussion. The supervision is meant to last until the doctoral thesis is finished, going also beyond the time span specified for funding.

3. Responsibilities

The advisory committee has to support the doctoral researcher during the entire time of the doctoral degree and has the main responsibility for general conditions regarding infrastructure and research. If the doctoral position is financed by a project, the project leaders bear main responsibility for successful project execution.

The UFZ advisors bear main responsibility for the selection of the topic for the doctoral thesis and the selection of the doctoral researcher. In addition, they will be held responsible for the introductory phase in the form of consultation and establishing contacts. In the course of the dissertation, they have to enable the doctoral researcher to work more and more independently, they have to be approachable (especially in difficult situations) and give feedback in a timely and constructive manner.

The doctoral researcher bears main responsibility for the progress of the dissertation during the research and writing phases as well as for the finalization of the thesis in the finishing phase. Moreover, he or she is responsible for informing the advisory committee as soon as possible if the PhD project proposal has to be modified.

4. Rights and Obligations of the Doctoral Researchers

Doctoral researchers at the UFZ have various **rights** in relation to the department head and the advisors. These rights should ensure that the doctoral researcher can concentrate on his or her doctoral thesis and scientific progress.

- **Consultation** by the advisory committee, including feedback on research questions, within a reasonable timeframe

- Constructive and detailed **feedback on manuscripts** by co-authors within max. three work weeks
- **Introduction into networks** and support by advisors when establishing their own networks
- **Participation in research conferences** to present their own work and to establish scientific networks
- The doctoral researcher has the right of first publication for the data collected within the frame of the doctoral project. If the doctoral researcher finishes the doctoral project without having finished the thesis and further publication of the data is not intended by the doctoral researcher, other authors or the advisors are allowed to publish the data. In this case, co-authorship of the doctoral researcher has to be ensured according to the guidelines of good scientific practice.
- The doctoral researcher has the right to participate in measures for **career development**, e.g. in the context of the graduate school HIGRADE or at university.

The rights of doctoral researchers are also related to **obligations** to ensure a good working environment at the UFZ and a smooth progress of the doctoral project.

- Within the first three months the doctoral project has to be specified in more detail in cooperation with the advisory committee and a **PhD project proposal** has to be established. The results of this process have to be presented to the department/IP colloquium in the form of a **defence**.
- Then the doctoral researcher will present the current status of his or her research project **at least once a year** in a department / IP colloquium.
- The doctoral researcher has to **inform the advisory committee** on a regular basis about the progress of his or her project *and about problematic developments at an early stage*.
- The doctoral researcher has to choose a university/faculty and a university advisor in agreement with his or her advisory committee at the start of the thesis. He or she has to ensure that all **requirements of the university** (doctoral regulations of the faculty) regarding deadlines, required achievements etc. are met.
- The doctoral researcher has to take part in the **UFZ graduate school HIGRADE** and complete the programme of courses and further training activities (activities of other graduate programmes can usually be recognised).
- Responsibility in the department: The doctoral researcher employed at the UFZ (according to "TVöD" regulations) has to take over **department-internal tasks** according to common practice in the department, e.g. responsibility for certain technical equipment or supervision of junior researchers. These tasks should **not exceed a reasonable scope**, on average no more than 10 % work time.
- All publications, including the dissertation, have to include the UFZ affiliation according to the publication guidelines (available in German [LINK](#)) and one copy has to be submitted to the UFZ library.

5. Rights and Obligations of the Advisors

The **rights** of the advisors at UFZ towards doctoral researchers and the institution are the foundation that is necessary to provide effective supervision for the doctoral researchers working with them.

- Information flow and progress reporting by the doctoral researchers during the entire duration of the doctoral project (reconciliation of expectations at the beginning of the project; frequency and minimum duration according to agreement)

- Early-stage information on problematic developments and potentially providing solutions by the doctoral researcher (reconciliation of expectations at the beginning of the project)
- Ending the doctoral project after the first six months if feasibility is not given (after examination of alternative options)
- Access to information and regulations regarding doctoral supervision and related further training measures

At the same time, advisors have **obligations** intended to create the optimal conditions for excellent scientific achievements of their doctoral researchers.

- Responsibility for the infrastructural and scientific prerequisites and conditions for conduction of the doctoral project
- Regular consultation regarding scientific questions and quality assurance until the doctoral thesis is finished – regardless of duration of funding (time plan and plan for publications, methods, risk assessment and alternative options, publications, unforeseen problems etc.)
- Approachability and feedback for the duration of the doctoral project (reconciliation of expectations at the beginning of the project; frequency and minimum duration according to agreement)
- Support regarding formalities required by the university (doctoral researcher list & faculty, selection of examiners etc.) and regarding selection of university advisor(s) and faculty where the doctoral thesis should be registered when starting the doctoral project
- Support regarding networking, career development and (early) development of independence (introduction into networks, showing different career options, delegating responsibility)
- Evaluation of feasibility of the doctoral project after the first 5 months (Is the project feasible given the existing conditions? Is the doctoral researcher capable of carrying out the doctoral project?)
- Reflecting on the role as advisor of a doctoral thesis (Am I suitable for fulfilling this role? Do I have the competencies and time required? Am I capable of being an advisor for all my doctoral researchers to an adequate extent? If applicable, taking further training measures)
- Respecting the work-life balance and providing a family-friendly working environment

6. Conflict Management

In general, working together in an honest and friendly way and giving regular, constructive feedback should be the basis to prevent conflict between the doctoral researcher and advisors. Should serious conflicts occur, the first step should be to try solving them within the advisory committee, e.g. with the confidant functioning as mediator. Moreover, if it is not possible to find solutions, ombudspeople, the UFZ work council, the UFZ equal opportunities officer or the HIGRADE Office can be involved in confidential consultation and in finding solutions.

7. Recommendations for Incentives and Sanction Measures

The UFZ reserves the right to reward outstanding achievements for excellent doctoral theses or doctoral supervision and also to sanction repeated disregard of regulations. Potential examples are:

For doctoral researchers:

- Providing financial incentives, support when applying for various prizes, rewarding new inventions

- Funding/organisation of short research stays (4-8 weeks) on national level or abroad that may significantly help achieving the goal to finalize the thesis, e.g. visiting research groups working on similar/same topics, methodologies etc.
- (no) funding of trips to conferences and other business trips
- (limitation of) access to resources (e.g. technical equipment or staff)
- (no) supervision of master and bachelor theses
- Termination of employment contract

For advisors:

- UFZ supervision award
- Financial incentives (e.g. boni)
- Withdrawal of current responsibility for supervision
- No provision of new PhD positions for the department
- Cuts in (household) budget
- No permission for new third-party project proposals including PhD positions