

Excellence through Research

Joint Position Paper by the Swiss Universities on the Doctorate

Version from 17 January 2014

Swiss universities identify and discuss challenges they face regarding the doctorate and seek solutions either individually or collectively. In this joint position paper, the universities define the common objectives of the doctorate, demonstrate how they structure doctoral studies, and set guidelines for admission, degree conferral and the recruitment of doctoral candidates.

1 Objectives of the Doctorate

Doctoral studies at all Swiss universities are structured according to shared principles and objectives. These objectives are in line with the position of European countries within the framework of the Bologna Process. They reflect the significance of the doctorate with regard to research, development and innovation, and acknowledge the high standing of the doctorate in the European knowledge society.¹

The doctorate is situated at the intersection between education and research, and therefore differs from Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes where the focus lies primarily on teaching. The purpose of the doctorate is to:

- develop academic skills, especially the ability to carry out independent scholarly research;
- acquire subject-specific (disciplinary and interdisciplinary), methodological and transferable knowledge and skills;
- promote academic collaboration and networks with other doctoral candidates as well as with researchers and specialists in Switzerland and abroad.

The doctorate qualifies candidates for research-based professions at universities or other institutions (public sector, private enterprise, administration) and enables them to take on diverse high-level responsibilities and functions.

2 Structuring the Doctorate

The doctorate is a specific task of university-level education and research. Gaining academic competence by means of a personal and original contribution to research is the main objective of a doctoral degree programme. Doctoral studies are rooted in scientific research and take place in a research setting.

In order to attain their common objectives, **each Swiss university structures, designs and confers the doctorate** in keeping with the institution's profile and under consideration of the particularities within a given discipline. By creating the necessary conditions for successful doctoral studies, the universities guarantee that all doctoral degree programmes achieve the same high quality.

¹ The corresponding agreements on objectives are set down in the Swiss University Conference *Guidelines to Renew Education*. Swiss universities take into account international standards when structuring doctoral programmes.

Swiss universities **support collaboration with other types of higher education and research institutions** depending on the research areas and specialisations of the institutions concerned. The universities organise and conduct joint doctoral programmes and facilitate the participation of the teaching staff/researchers from universities of applied sciences and from universities of teacher education in the supervision of doctoral candidates.

Swiss universities promote excellence through research and encourage the diversity resulting from scholarship. They reject extending the Bologna Model – understood as a harmonisation of the doctorate – to the doctoral level.

3 The Doctorate: Degree and Title

Swiss universities grant a uniform doctoral degree, thus attesting that a candidate has achieved the common objectives in accordance with the conditions set by the universities. In doing so, the universities guarantee the quality of their doctoral degrees, including degrees granted within the framework of doctoral programmes conducted jointly with universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education.

The doctoral degree grants candidates the right to use the title *Dr [...]*, which corresponds to the English usage *PhD*.² The universities take into consideration the various traditions of the individual disciplines when deciding on the title.³

4 Recruiting Students for the Doctorate

Swiss universities endeavour to engage promising students from Switzerland and abroad for the doctorate. Future doctoral candidates are identified already at the Bachelor's and Master's level and qualified students are recruited from other Swiss and foreign universities. Recruiting students from abroad remains a particularly challenging task.

Deciding on marketing strategies and admission requirements for the doctoral degree lies within the jurisdiction of the individual universities. Swiss universities do, however, have a shared interest in the high visibility and appeal of Swiss institutions of higher learning and research. Swiss universities must furthermore guarantee the quality of recruiting methods in order to properly evaluate and compare students, particularly those who are not from partner institutions.

Admission to a doctoral programme lies in the responsibility of the individual universities and is decided case-by-case on the basis of individual qualifications. There is no general right to be admitted to doctoral studies.

The doctorate is designed on the basis of university Master's studies. In case of proven academic qualifications, acceptance to a programme is also possible with a Master's degree from other types of higher education institutions.

² In addition to the medical research doctorate (*Dr. sc. med.* or *PhD*), the field of medicine recognizes the following degree titles:

- The traditional title of *Dr. med.* may be granted to holders of a Master of Medicine who have submitted a written thesis based on the equivalent of at least one year of research, in accordance with the modalities determined by the universities. The term *Dr. med.* is a professional degree and does not correspond to the level of qualification required for a PhD. If the holder of a *Dr. med.* completes an additional research doctorate, the two titles are combined as follows: *MD, PhD*.
- The title *MD-PhD* (used in English only and not translated) is conferred to physicians who have successfully completed their doctorate within the framework of a MD-PhD programme at a Swiss university. The previous attainment of the title *Dr. med.* is not a condition for admission to a MD-PhD programme.

³ A possible harmonisation of the doctoral title would not necessarily go as far as the harmonisation at the Bachelor's and Master's levels. Traditional designations may be retained.