

## **Doctoral Degree Regulations of the Doctoral Research Centre Public Health at Fulda University of Applied Sciences of 18 July 2024**

The Senate of Fulda University of Applied Sciences adopted the following Doctoral Degree Regulations in accordance with § 42(2) No. 2 of the Hesse Higher Education Act (Hessisches Hochschulgesetz, HessHG) in the currently valid version at its meeting on 17 July 2024. They were approved by the Presidential Board of Fulda University of Applied Sciences in accordance with § 43(5) sentence 1 HessHG on 18 July 2024:

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## **Part One**

### **§ 1 Right to award doctoral degrees**

- (1) Fulda University of Applied Sciences has the right to award doctoral degrees in the subject area of Public Health.
- (2) The Doctoral Research Centre Public Health (referred to in the following as Doctoral Research Centre) is a central scientific institution of Fulda University of Applied Sciences.
- (3) The right to award doctorates is exercised within the Doctoral Research Centre, where members have both the right and obligation to collaborate.

### **§ 2 Doctoral title**

- (1) In accordance with the provisions of these Doctoral Degree Regulations, Fulda University of Applied Sciences awards the academic title of  
**Doctor of Public Health (Dr P.H.)**  
upon successful completion of the doctoral examination process.
- (2) The components of the doctoral degree include an advanced academic treatise (thesis) and an oral examination in the form of a thesis defence. These components demonstrate the candidate's ability to conduct independent research and reflect a high level of academic achievement.

### **§ 3 Responsibilities and organisation**

- (1) The parties involved in the doctoral examination process are the Doctoral Committee in accordance with § 4, the supervisors in accordance with § 7, the examiners in accordance with § 12 and the Examination Committee in accordance with § 15.
- (2) A separate Examination Committee is constituted for each doctoral examination process.
- (3) Decisions during the doctoral examination process are made by the Doctoral Committee and the Examination Committee.
- (4) Professors authorised as supervisors under § 7 hold academic responsibility for the subject matter of the doctoral project.

### **§ 4 Doctoral Committee**

- (1) Only members of the Doctoral Research Centre may be members of the Doctoral Committee. Junior members are excluded from this group.
- (2) The Doctoral Committee is chaired by the head of the Doctoral Research Centre or their deputy.
- (3) The Doctoral Committee also includes
  - a. three representatives of the group of professors within the Doctoral Research Centre,
  - b. two members who are doctoral candidates,
  - c. one coordinating member.

- (4) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), the Doctoral Committee will also include an external professorial member who must be affiliated to
- a. a university
  - or
  - b. a doctoral research centre or comparable institution in another federal state. This external professorial member must prove that they have served as the primary supervisor for at least one successfully completed doctorate.

The external professorial member is appointed by the Centre Board and appointed by the head of the Centre.

- (5) The Doctoral Committee is responsible for all formal procedural decisions, in particular relating to the following:
- c. acceptance of a doctoral student according to § 5;
  - d. admission to the doctoral examination process according to § 11;
  - e. acceptance of the thesis according to § 14;
  - f. establishment of the Examination Committee according to § 15;
  - g. appointment of the Chair of the Examination Committee and the supervisors according to § 7 and examiners according to § 12;
  - h. completion of the doctoral examination process according to § 21.
- (6) The decisions of the Doctoral Committee are made in closed sessions in accordance with § 27.

## **§ 5 Criteria for admission to a doctoral degree programme**

To pursue a doctoral degree, candidates typically have a university degree completed within the standard time of at least eight semesters, a Master's degree in the field of Public Health or Public Health Nutrition following a university programme with a total of 300 ECTS credits and an overall grade of at least 2.0 or a B according to the ECTS grading scale. Alternatively, an equivalent qualification as defined in § 5b or a completed university degree combined with an aptitude assessment as outlined in § 5c is also accepted.

The Lisbon Convention must be taken into account in this context.

### **§ 5a Acceptance as a doctoral student**

- (1) Applications for acceptance as a doctoral student are made to the Chair of the Doctoral Committee. The application must include the following documents:
- a. certified copies of transcripts of records and certificates for the successfully completed university degree qualifying for a doctorate as outlined in paragraph (2); for degrees obtained in non-German-speaking countries, transcripts and certificates must be translated into German by a translator who is generally sworn, publicly appointed or generally authorised;
  - b. an overview of the applicant's personal and educational background;

- c. a copy of the applicant's ID card or passport;
- d. if requested by the Doctoral Committee, a current Certificate of Good Conduct issued for doctoral study purposes ("Promotion");
- e. a comprehensive written proposal for the independent research project; the research proposal should outline the thesis subject, the state of current research, the objectives and anticipated scientific contribution of the project and include a description of the methodological approach and resource planning. The research proposal must also be accompanied by a statement indicating in which the language the thesis will be written. The proposal must also demonstrate in an appropriate academic quality the public health relevance of the doctoral topic, initial approaches to the theoretical framework, a clear and logical derivation of the research questions, the suitability and appropriateness of the research design and methodology as well as the feasibility of the project. Furthermore, the independence of the project must be evident, particularly if the doctorate is conducted as part of a research project;
- f. the written Supervision Agreement between the applicant and the first and second supervisors based on the supervision standards set by the university of which the applicant is a member;
- g. a declaration stating whether and with what outcome an application for admission as a doctoral candidate has been submitted to another university, and whether the applicant has definitively failed a comparable aptitude assessment procedure or doctoral examination process at another university;
- h. declaration as to whether the thesis is to be written in German or English.

Once the application has been reviewed and confirmed as complete and accurate, it is forwarded to the responsible Doctoral Committee.

- (2) Before the applicant submits the complete application documents, the Doctoral Committee may offer non-binding guidance on fulfilling the acceptance criteria.

### **§ 5b Equivalent degrees and degrees earned abroad, admission with conditions**

- (1) A relevant degree from a German university, recognised as equivalent under the provisions of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kultusministerkonferenz, KMK) may meet the requirements for acceptance as a doctoral candidate. If the Doctoral Committee determines that an alternative degree is not sufficiently comparable, it may impose additional conditions for acceptance, such as further academic achievements.
- (2) A degree obtained from a foreign programme that is comparable to the qualification outlined in § 5a(2) may also meet the requirements for acceptance as a doctoral candidate, provided it qualifies the holder for doctoral study in the country where it was obtained and is recognised as equivalent. If the Doctoral Committee determines that a foreign degree is not comparable, it may impose additional

requirements for acceptance as a doctoral candidate.

- (3) If acceptance is subject to conditions, these conditions must be fulfilled by a set deadline, which must be before the initiation of the doctoral examination process (submission of thesis). The conditions must guarantee the applicant's general ability to conduct research and consequently their eligibility to pursue doctoral studies. In particular, the conditions should include proof of successful participation in courses and the completion of specific examinations.

### § 5c Exceptions, aptitude assessment procedure

- (1) Applicants who have:
- a. a university degree in a field related to Public Health<sup>1</sup>;
  - b. a university degree after studying for fewer than eight semesters;
  - c. a Master's degree or an equivalent qualification with a grade of below 2.0 but at least or equal to 3.0;
  - d. a special *Diplom* qualification (from a university of applied sciences (FH))
- may be admitted if they have the necessary specialised knowledge for a doctorate in the field of Public Health as proven through an aptitude assessment procedure.
- (2) The Doctoral Committee may individually determine aptitude assessment procedures to evaluate the applicant's thematic suitability for independent research at doctoral level. These procedures will specify the type and scope of the required performance, as well as the duration and organisation of the procedure. The aptitude assessment procedure should last no longer than two semesters and conclude with an evaluation of "suitable" or "not suitable" by the Doctoral Committee.

As a rule,

- a. the procedure involves assessing thematic and methodological competence for the subject area;
- b. the procedure involves the examination of the thesis and a written paper on a topic relating to the subject area, conducted by two professors from the Doctoral Research Centre, who are appointed by the Doctoral Committee.
- c. In cases of doubt, these two members may request and conduct an interview lasting a maximum of one hour.

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<sup>1</sup> A degree programme is deemed relevant to the subject area if it includes specific content generally defined by the Doctoral Committee. The Committee will create a catalogue of eligible degree programmes to serve as a general guide.

The aptitude assessment requirement may be waived if the applicant's degree, along with additional academic knowledge and skills in the subject area, are deemed sufficient to qualify them for the proposed doctoral project. The Doctoral Committee makes the decision.

(3) Applicants have no entitlement to an aptitude assessment procedure.

### **§ 5d Decision, no entitlement to acceptance, reasoned rejection**

(1) The Doctoral Committee is responsible for deciding on the applicant's acceptance as a doctoral student.

(2) Acceptance can only be denied if reasons are provided. The application should be rejected if:

- a. sufficient specialist supervision of the thesis or availability of the necessary resources cannot be guaranteed, or
- b. the Doctoral Research Centre lacks the authority to award doctoral degrees in the discipline of the proposed doctoral research project, or
- c. there are circumstances that would justify revocation of the doctoral title under state (*Land*) law, or
- d. the criteria for preparing the research proposal under § 5a(1)e. are not met.

(3) There is no entitlement to acceptance.

### **§ 5e Consequences of acceptance and conclusion of the doctorate**

(1) If the Doctoral Committee approves the application for acceptance, the supervision, evaluation and subsequent completion of the process for the doctoral candidate is guaranteed in accordance with these Doctoral Degree Regulations. Access to the university resources outlined in the supervision agreement is also guaranteed. In exceptional cases, if a supervisor leaves and no replacement is available within the Centre, the head of the Centre will discuss the next steps with the doctoral candidate and the remaining supervisor.

(2) Accepted doctoral candidates may enrol as doctoral students at the university from the time of acceptance until the end or completion of the doctoral process.

### **§ 6 Thesis**

(1) As an independent research project that meets academic standards, the thesis (written component of the doctoral degree) must contribute to advancing scientific knowledge in the field of Public Health. It must be submitted in either German or English. If written in English, the thesis must include an abstract in German, which must be approved by both supervisors.

- (2) The following may be submitted as the written component:
- a. an unpublished or partially pre-published thesis (monograph), as outlined in paragraph (4).
  - b. a cumulative thesis, as outlined in paragraph (3).
- (3) A cumulative thesis must meet the following requirements:
- a. It should generally possess the academic status of a monograph.
  - b. The publications must be thematically related and concern a common scientific question.
  - c. The cumulative thesis must include at least three publications in recognised peer-reviewed journals. By the time the doctoral examination process is initiated, at least three publications must have undergone peer review and either been published or accepted for publication.
  - d. At least one of these publications must be written in English.
  - e. The publications may have co-authors. The doctoral candidate must be the first author of at least three publications. If a publication is co-authored, the doctoral candidate must declare their substantial contribution to the work. Co-authors must confirm their contributions unless stated in the publication.
  - f. Before the doctoral procedure is initiated, the doctoral candidate must obtain written consent from all co-authors to include the publications in the thesis and to allow secondary publication.
  - g. The cumulative thesis must include at least three publications as outlined in § 6(3) lit. a.-f. together with an independent scientific paper of at least 30 pages. This paper must outline the thematic, theoretical and methodological context of the publications, offer a deeper exploration of the subject matter and critically reflect on the further development of the field.
- (4) A monograph thesis must meet the following requirements:
- a. The monograph thesis must provide a self-contained presentation of the research project and its findings.
  - b. Parts of the monograph thesis may have been previously published. Any publication to be subsequently included in the thesis should generally be no older than five years at the time the thesis is published.
  - c. If individual or selected parts of the monograph thesis have already been published, this must be clearly indicated within the thesis. The submitted thesis must include a declaration in the preface, specifying the previously published sections along with details of year of publication, place of publication and authorship, in accordance with established scientific practice.

- d. The monograph thesis should represent a new and independent scholarly project, distinct from any prior publications in both quantity and quality. Supervisors are expected to advise the doctoral candidate in this respect.
- (5) The thesis must be submitted along with the relevant, anonymised research data that supports the scientific findings, provided no data privacy regulations prohibit this. The supervisors are responsible for determining which research data should be included and in which form within the appendix. The doctoral candidate is required to retain any research data not included so that it can be made available to the examiners and the Examination Committee upon request. If certain research data needs to be withheld from publication, a blocking notice must be submitted to the Doctoral Committee for such data. The submission and publication of research data must also comply with the University's Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice, particularly regulations concerning data privacy.
- (6) The thesis must include a list of all sources used and a declaration by the doctoral candidate that they have produced the thesis independently, except for the explicitly mentioned assistance.
- (7) Any work that has already been used for examination purposes will not be accepted as a thesis. However, results from such work may be incorporated into the thesis, provided work of this kind is cited in the bibliography.

## **§ 7 Appointment of supervisors**

- (1) The Doctoral Committee appoints at least one first and (if necessary) one second supervisor to supervise the thesis. These persons must hold a doctoral degree.
- (2) At least the first supervisor must be a professor with a doctorate, a member of the Doctoral Research Centre and have supervision experience. In exceptional, thematically justified cases, the first supervisor may also be a member of other doctoral research centres in the federal state of Hesse.  
If they meet one of the following requirements, a second supervisor can also be:
  - a. a professor with a doctorate or a researcher who holds a doctorate in the same or a different subject area at the university according to § 1(2);
  - b. an emeritus or retired professor who holds a doctorate, a part-time professor, honorary professor, adjunct professor or visiting professor or associate lecturer;
  - c. a professor or researcher with a doctorate at an institution of higher education or university other than those named in § 1(2);
  - d. researchers at a non-university research institution with a doctorate and correspondingly proven scientific qualifications in Public Health.
- (3) When appointing supervisors, it must be ensured that they possess the necessary expertise to oversee the thesis and can provide supervision through to its anticipated completion.

- (4) If a supervisor retires before the doctoral examination process is completed, supervision may continue, provided the supervisor submits a written commitment to the Doctoral Research Committee confirming their participation in the doctoral examination process. Specific provisions apply to the first supervisor in cases where a supervisor leaves their position due to departure from or loss of membership in the Doctoral Research Centre.
- (5) In justified cases, the Doctoral Committee may appoint other supervisors in the course of the doctoral examination process, especially if a supervisor is no longer able to fulfil their role.

## **§ 8 Thesis supervision**

- (1) The supervision relationship begins with the signing of the Supervision Agreement, unless otherwise specified within the Agreement.
- (2) The supervisors are responsible for the academic supervision of the thesis

## **§ 9 Doctoral training programme**

- (1) The Doctoral Research Centre offers a doctoral training programme for doctoral students designed to promote good scientific practice. All doctoral candidates are required to attend a course on scientific integrity.
- (2) Each doctoral candidate must actively contribute to the advancement of their own doctoral project at least three times during the doctoral period by presenting their work for discussion at the regular doctoral training events organised by the Doctoral Research Centre Public Health.

## **§ 10 Amendments, termination of doctoral relationship**

- (1) Before submitting their thesis, doctoral students may request a change of supervisor by submitting a written application to the Doctoral Committee, along with their reasons. If supervision becomes impossible before the thesis is completed, the Doctoral Committee is required, upon the student's request, to make every effort to appoint a new supervisor in accordance with § 7. In the event of a dispute, all parties involved must first be given the opportunity to present their case.
- (2) If another member of the group of professors takes over as supervisor, a renewed application for acceptance in accordance with § 5 of these Doctoral Degree Regulations is not necessary. A new supervision agreement must be presented.
- (3) Before submitting their thesis, doctoral students may submit a written application to the Doctoral Committee to suspend or terminate their doctoral relationship, providing reasons for their application. They must also include a detailed interim or final report, as applicable. This process ensures that they are not considered to have failed the doctorate, and re-application to resume doctoral studies remains possible.

- (4) No more than five years should elapse between acceptance as a doctoral student and initiation of the doctoral examination process. The Doctoral Committee may withdraw acceptance after five years, if applicable after the doctoral candidate has presented their case. In such instances, the attempt to obtain a doctorate is deemed unsuccessful and the candidate is not allowed to make another attempt.
- (5) Acceptance as a doctoral student cannot be withdrawn if the reason for the delay is beyond the student's control.

This applies, in particular, in the case of

- a. maternity leave in accordance with Sections 3, 4, 6 of the German Maternity Protection Act (MuSchG);
- b. parental leave in accordance with Section 15 of the German Act on Parental Allowance and Parental Leave (BEEG);
- c. a chronic illness or disability within the meaning of Section 2(1) of German Social Code Book IX (SGB);
- d. illness of dependent children and dependent relatives;
- e. periods of service pursuant to Article 12a(1) or (2) of the German Basic Law or corresponding temporary voluntary service for a period of up to two years.

During the withdrawal procedure, the doctoral student must provide the Doctoral Committee with evidence of the reasons for and duration of any delay in the form of suitable documents or certificates.

## **§ 11 Admission to and initiation of the doctoral examination process**

- (1) The doctoral examination process is initiated by a written application from the doctoral candidate, which must be submitted to the Chair of the Doctoral Committee. The application for admission as a doctoral candidate must be submitted with the following documents:
- a. an updated overview of the applicant's personal and educational background;
  - b. evidence that any conditions have been met;
  - c. certificate of participation in a course on scientific integrity;
  - d. proof of active participation in at least three doctoral training courses as outlined in § 9(2);
  - e. three printed copies of the thesis. The Doctoral Committee may request additional copies before the application for admission as a doctoral candidate is submitted. In addition to the printed versions, the thesis must also be submitted electronically. The electronic version must be anonymised (it should not include a cover page or any sections containing the doctoral candidate's personal data) for plagiarism screening as specified by the university. Third parties may be called in to assist with the plagiarism check;

- f. a declaration stating whether the submitted thesis has already been submitted for another doctoral degree.
- (2) An affidavit must be submitted with the thesis, stating that
- a. the thesis was completed independently and without unauthorised outside assistance and only with the assistance stated,
  - b. all text passages that have been taken word for word or paraphrased from published writing and all details that are based on verbal information are identified as such,
  - c. the principles of good scientific practice have been observed.
- (3) The Doctoral Committee is responsible for deciding on admission to the doctoral examination process.
- (4) Admission will be denied if the supporting documents required in accordance with paragraphs (1) and (2) are not submitted or are not submitted in full.
- (5) Admission will be denied if, at the time of the decision,
- a) the applicant has been or still is admitted with the thesis to a doctoral examination process at another higher education institution,
  - b) the thesis has previously been assessed as unsuitable at another higher education institution or the candidate failed the examination or
  - c) there are circumstances that would justify revocation of the doctoral title under state (*Land*) law.
- (6) Withdrawal of the doctoral application after admission to the doctoral examination process is permitted only if the doctoral candidate provides justified reasons and the Doctoral Committee acknowledges these. This is possible as long as the doctoral examination process has not been concluded by a negative decision on the thesis or the thesis defence has not yet begun. In all cases, one copy of the submitted thesis remains in the doctoral records.

## **§ 12 Appointment of examiners**

- (1) On admission of the doctoral candidate in accordance with § 11, the Doctoral Committee appoints at least two examiners who hold doctorates to review the thesis. These examiners must possess the necessary expertise to conduct a thorough assessment of the thesis in its specialised subject area, if required in collaboration.
- (2) The examiners may not be the supervisors of the doctorate.
- (3) The first examiner must always be a professor and a member of the Doctoral Research Centre.
- (4) As a rule, the (second) examiner should be a university instructor who is not a member of the universities participating in the Doctoral Research Centre. This external participation may be waived for the subject areas specified in § 1(1) lit. a. and e. if one of the examining persons

- a. has a habilitation,
- b. was positively evaluated as a junior professor or
- c. was co-opted from a university department.

If none of these options is possible, an exemption must be obtained from the Hesse Ministry of Science and Research, Art and Culture (HMWK), which may nominate an examiner.

(5) Additional examiners may be appointed from the following groups:

- a. professors from the same discipline who hold a doctorate;
- b. professors from a different discipline who hold a doctorate
- c. emeritus and retired professors who hold a doctorate, part-time professors, honorary professors, adjunct professors, visiting professors or associate lecturers;
- d. professors from another institute of higher education who hold a doctorate or
- e. researchers from a non-university research institution who hold a doctorate and have proven academic qualifications.

(6) The doctoral candidate may nominate examiners to the Doctoral Committee.

(7) The Doctoral Committee can appoint further examiners after consultation with the supervisors.

## § 13 Assessment

(1) Each examiner produces a report on the thesis, which is forwarded to the Chair of the Doctoral Committee. In their report, the examiner may recommend approval, rejection, or, in exceptional cases, revision or amendment of the thesis. If approval is recommended, the thesis is awarded one of the following classifications:

- a. summa cum laude – outstanding, exceptional achievement (0),
- b. magna cum laude – very good achievement (1),
- c. cum laude – good achievement (2),
- d. rite – sufficient achievement (3).

If the thesis is classified as “non rite – insufficient achievement (4)”, approval of the thesis is rejected.

(2) If the examiners recommend returning the thesis for revision or amendment, the Doctoral Committee sets a deadline for the doctoral candidate to complete the revisions. Once the thesis is revised, the examiners have four weeks to submit another assessment.

(3) The reports must be written separately. In each report, the outcome of the assessment must be transparently justified. If conditions are set for the publication of the thesis, they must be specific and substantiated. Conditions may include corrections, refinements or revisions.

- (4) If a report is not submitted within eight weeks of the examiners' appointment, the Chair of the Doctoral Committee is required to seek clarification. If no report is received after an additional eight weeks, the Doctoral Committee must appoint a new examiner.
- (5) If the examiners fail to reach an agreement on approval, rejection or return of the thesis, or if their assessments differ by more than one classification level, the Chair of the Doctoral Committee must attempt to resolve the discrepancy. If no resolution is possible, an additional report, preferably from a professor or associate lecturer from another university in the relevant discipline, must be obtained within a reasonable timeframe.
- (6) The Chair immediately forwards all reports to the members of the Doctoral Committee, the Examination Committee and the doctoral candidates upon receipt and makes the thesis and reports available for inspection at the university. The head of the Doctoral Research Centre determines who may access the documents. In justified cases, other university professors who hold a doctorate may also be entitled to inspect the thesis. The inspection period should be two weeks; however, the Doctoral Research Centre may set different deadlines. The thesis is made available electronically or in printed form in a securely accessible location. The university establishes security precautions and a legally sound framework to ensure accountability in the event of legal violations.
- (7) After reviewing the reports, these professors and members of the Doctoral Committee who hold a doctorate may notify the Doctoral Committee in writing within the inspection period that they wish to submit a statement. The statement must be submitted to the Doctoral Committee within two weeks.
- (8) Once all reports have been submitted, the Doctoral Committee determines the final grade of the thesis. This is calculated as the arithmetic mean of the individual grades. If the calculated average is not a whole number, the lower grade is rounded if the decimal is 0.6 or lower. A minimum grade of "rite" (3) is required for admission to the thesis defence.

## **§ 14 Decision on the thesis approval**

- (1) After expiry of the inspection period according to § 13(6), the Doctoral Committee decides on approval of the thesis based on the examiners' recommendations and any statements as outlined in § 13(7). Once reports recommending acceptance have been submitted, an overall grade for the thesis is determined according to § 13(8). If the examiners' recommendations regarding approval of the thesis differ, or in other cases of doubt, additional examiners may be appointed to reach a final decision. The candidate may be consulted during this process; the final decision rests with the Doctoral Committee.

- (2) After approval of the thesis, the Chair of the Doctoral Committee sets the date for the thesis defence. This should take place no later than eight weeks after the thesis is approved. The doctoral candidate is informed of the date as soon as it has been set.
- (3) The thesis is considered rejected if the majority of the Doctoral Committee members or all of the examiners reject it. The doctoral examination process is then deemed to have been unsuccessful. The doctoral candidate must be informed of the rejection in writing, with reasons provided. Should the thesis be rejected, the doctoral candidate may submit a new or revised thesis according to § 18(1). Further repetition is not permitted.
- (4) The thesis, along with the research data pursuant to § 6(5), all reports, additional reports and statements, will remain in the files of the Doctoral Committee, unless data protection regulations dictate otherwise. Ten years after the conclusion of the doctoral examination process, a review is carried out to determine which documents should remain on file.

## **§ 15 Examination Committee**

- (1) The Doctoral Committee sets up the Examination Committee as soon as the reports are available.
- (2) The Doctoral Committee sets up the Examination Committee and appoints a chairperson, who must be a member of the Doctoral Research Centre but is not one of the supervisors or examiners.
- (3) The Examination Committee is made up of the following:
  - a. the Chair,
  - b. the examiners of the thesis
  - c. the supervisors of the thesis
  - d. an additional professor with a doctorate from the Doctoral Research Centre.
- (4) The Examination Committee conducts and assesses the defence. It decides whether the defence needs to be repeated and establishes the requirements for publication of the thesis, including the deadline by which these requirements must be met.
- (5) The doctoral candidate is notified of the composition of the examination committee.

## **§ 16 Thesis defence**

- (1) The oral examination for each doctoral candidate is conducted individually by the Examination Committee in the form of a thesis defence.
- (2) The Chair of the Examination Committee personally invites the doctoral candidate, supervisors, members of the Examination Committee and researchers who have written a statement (§ 13(7)) to attend the thesis defence.

- (3) The defence is open to the public; however, film and sound recordings are not permitted. In the event of disruptions, the Chair of the Examination Committee may exclude the public. At the justified request of the doctoral candidate or supervisor, the Doctoral Committee may decide to exclude the public. The defence is presided over by the Chair of the Examination Committee.
- (4) If an appointed member of the Examination Committee is unable to conduct the thesis defence at short notice (e.g. due to illness), the Chair of the Doctoral Committee shall appoint a replacement. Members of the Examination Committee can participate in the thesis defence remotely via real-time audio and video communication, provided the Chair of the Doctoral Committee decides on this ahead of the examination.
- (5) The Chair of the Examination Committee prepares and signs a report documenting the most important contents and outcome of the examination. The report is retained with the records of the Doctoral Committee.
- (6) On the day of the examination, before the defence begins, the doctoral candidate gives a public presentation on their thesis or on a topic of their choice from the area of the thesis. The presentation should be no longer than 30 minutes.
- (7) In the examination, the doctoral candidate publicly defends their thesis before the Examination Committee. The defence will cover the content of the thesis, incorporate the examiners' reports and address issues related to the field of study of the Doctoral Research Centre. The members of the Examination Committee are required to participate actively in the discussion with the doctoral candidate. The individuals personally invited as per (2) also have a right to ask questions and provide commentary. The defence typically lasts between 60 and 90 minutes.
- (8) If the thesis is submitted in English, the public presentation and defence may be held in English, subject to the approval of the Doctoral Committee.
- (9) The classifications described in § 13(1) are used to grade the defence. Each member of the Examination Committee awards a grade. The final grade of the defence is calculated from the arithmetic mean of the individual grades awarded by the members of the Examination Committee. If the calculated average is not a whole number, the lower grade is rounded down for 0.6 or below. The candidate must achieve a final grade of at least 3 to pass the defence. The Examination Committee discusses the grade of the thesis defence in closed session.
- (10) If the doctoral candidate is unable to conduct the defence for reasons within their control, or if they choose not to defend their thesis, the defence is considered failed and the doctoral examination process will be deemed unsuccessful.

- (11) If the candidate only fails the defence, this examination may be repeated at the request of the doctoral candidate. The repeat defence may only be attempted once, at the earliest three months and at the latest one year after the failed defence. In special cases, the deadline may be extended at the request of the doctoral candidate. The Doctoral Committee either confirms the Examination Committee for the repeat examination or appoints a new committee in accordance with § 14. If the candidate fails the repeat defence, the doctoral examination process is considered definitively unsuccessful.

## **§ 17 Overall result**

- (1) Immediately after the defence, the Examination Committee decides in closed session on the outcome of the defence and, if the candidate has passed, determines the overall result of the doctoral degree based on the reports and the candidate's performance in the defence.
- (2) To pass, the candidate must achieve a grade of at least 3 for both the thesis and the defence.
- (3) The overall result is made up of the grade for the thesis (accounting for 75%) and the grade for the defence (accounting for 25%). If the calculated average is not a whole number, the lower grade is rounded down for 0.6 or below. The distinction summa cum laude is awarded only if the thesis and defence receive summa cum laude. The overall performance is considered passed if the overall grade of at least 3 is achieved. The classifications are as follows:
- a. summa cum laude = outstanding, exceptional achievement (0),
  - b. magna cum laude = very good achievement (1),
  - c. cum laude = good achievement (2),
  - d. rite = sufficient achievement (3).
- (4) Based on the reports, the Examination Committee documents in writing whether any conditions apply to the publication of the thesis, and if so, specifies what these conditions are.
- (5) Following the defence, the Chair informs the doctoral candidate of both the defence outcome and the overall result. If applicable, it also specifies any publication requirements. The candidate is reminded that they may not use the doctoral title until the doctorate is officially completed in accordance with § 21. This marks the conclusion of the doctoral procedure.
- (6) Enrolled doctoral candidates are exmatriculated at the end of the semester in which the overall assessment is announced and their acceptance as a doctoral candidate in accordance with § 5 is deemed to have terminated.

## **§ 18 Repeat attempt**

- (1) If the first attempt at a doctorate fails due to rejection of the thesis, the candidate may reapply once only by submitting a thesis with a new thematic focus, at the earliest after one year calculated from the date of rejection.
- (2) If the doctoral components are deemed invalid due to non-compliance with submission requirements or other violations of these doctoral regulations, the Doctoral Committee shall decide whether and under what conditions the doctorate may be repeated. A repeat attempt is not permitted if the doctorate has been formally denied or the doctoral title has been revoked.

## **§ 19 Examination records**

- (1) The examination records are confidential and retained by the Doctoral Research Centre. Throughout the doctoral examination process, access to these records is restricted to members of the Examination Committee and the Doctoral Committee.
- (2) After completion of the doctoral examination process, however no longer than one year after the doctorate has been awarded, the candidate may request access to the thesis, the reports and the thesis defence report.

## **§ 20 Publication of thesis defence and submission of deposit copies**

- (1) After passing the examination, the doctoral candidate is required to publish the thesis within one year of the defence, in accordance with the conditions set by the Examination Committee. The version to be published must be approved by the Chair of the Doctoral Committee. In justified cases, the Doctoral Committee may grant an extension to the publication deadline provided the doctoral candidate submits a timely request.
- (2) If the requirements set by the Examination Committee are not met, the doctorate will be considered failed.
- (3) If the doctoral candidate fails to fulfil the publication requirement as outlined above, the doctorate will be considered failed.
- (4) The publication must be clearly identified as a thesis of the university awarding the doctorate and of the Doctoral Research Centre.
- (5) If the thesis is published in an extended or abridged version or only in extracts, as agreed with the Doctoral Committee, this must be explicitly stated.
- (6) The doctoral candidate is required to provide the library of the university of which they are a member with the required number of deposit copies of the thesis according to paragraph (8) within one month after its publication. The library will confirm receipt of the deposit copies, and the doctoral candidate must submit this confirmation to the Chair of the Doctoral Committee.

- (7) In justified cases, the Doctoral Committee may grant an extension for submission of the deposit copies by timely request. Failure to meet the submission deadline as stipulated above will result in the failure of the doctorate.
- (8) The deposit copies may be published and submitted in the following form:
- a. submission of an electronic version for publication and two bound copies on age-resistant paper. The electronic version is published on the university's publication server and must contain an abstract in German and English. The doctoral candidate must confirm that the electronic version corresponds to the version approved according to paragraph (1). The file format must be coordinated with the library, which verifies its legibility. Within the scope of its legal duties, the library is granted the right to produce and distribute additional copies of the thesis or to make the thesis available in data networks. It is also granted the right to disseminate the abstract in bibliographic databases. Legal deposit copies for the German National Library are provided by the library.
  - b. submission of one copy plus one additional copy if the publication is published by a commercial publisher, provided that a minimum print run of 150 copies is confirmed, or if the thesis is published according to the on-demand procedure.  
In case b), the library should be granted the right to simultaneously publish the thesis on its university server, where possible.
- (9) The published thesis must be identified as such on an appropriate title page. The title page must contain the following information:
- a. the thesis topic,
  - b. the discipline
  - c. the name of the doctoral research centre,
  - d. the name of the university,
  - e. the doctoral candidate's full name,
  - f. the doctoral candidate's previous academic degree,
  - g. the title, name and affiliation of the supervisors,
  - h. the title, name and affiliation of the examiners,
  - i. submission and examination dates,
  - j. place and year of publication.
- (10) In the case of paragraph (8) b., it is sufficient for the copies to include an imprint or clear statement indicating that the work is a doctoral thesis completed at the university. If the title of the published version changes, reference must also be made to the title of the thesis when it was submitted.

## § 21 Completion of doctorate and conferral of doctoral title

- (1) Once the deposit copies of the thesis have been submitted, the university formally confers the doctorate by presenting or delivering the doctoral degree certificate to the doctoral candidate. From this point, the candidate becomes the holder of a doctorate and is entitled to use the doctoral title.
- (2) The doctoral degree certificate bears the date of the thesis defence and is issued in triplicate. It is signed by the Chair of the Examination Committee and the President of the university and carries the official seal of this university. As a rule, the wording of the certificate is as follows:
  - (3) The [name of university] hereby confers, during the term of office of [President Prof. Dr [name]] and under the supervision of the Doctoral Committee chaired by [Prof. Dr [name]], the academic degree of [Doctor] [name of discipline] upon [name], born on [date] in [place]. This is awarded following the completion of a duly conducted doctoral examination process, under the supervision of [Prof. Dr [name of first supervisor] and [Prof. Dr [name of second supervisor]], where the candidate demonstrated their academic competence through the independently conducted thesis titled “[title of thesis],” and the defence.  
The overall result is [grade].  
[place], [date]  
[signature of President], [signature of chairperson],  
[university seal]
- (4) The doctoral candidate may apply to the Presidential Board for a provisional, temporarily valid document regarding progress in the doctoral process. This does not entitle the candidate to use the doctoral title.

## § 22 Denial and revocation of doctoral title

- (1) If it is determined before issuance of the doctoral degree certificate that essential admission requirements for the doctoral examination process were incorrectly assumed to have been met, or that the candidate attempted to cheat in the course of their doctoral studies or contravened good scientific practice, the awarding of the doctoral degree will be denied. The final decision is made by the Doctoral Committee.
- (2) Once the doctoral degree certificate has been issued, revocation of the doctoral title is subject to state (*Land*) law. Return of the doctoral degree certificate is governed by the provisions of the Hesse Administrative Procedure Act (Hessisches Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz) in its current version.
- (3) Before a decision is made to deny the doctorate or revoke the doctoral title, the individual concerned must be given the opportunity to respond to the allegations within an appropriate period.

## **Part Two**

### **§ 23 Continuation regulation**

In the event of the dissolution of the Doctoral Research Centre, ongoing doctoral examination processes may be brought to a conclusion according to the terms of these doctoral degree regulations.

### **§ 24 Appeal procedure**

The person concerned may appeal against decisions made by the Doctoral Committee regarding ongoing processes to the Doctoral Committee or the President of the university of which the doctoral candidate is a member. If the Doctoral Committee of the Doctoral Research Centre does not resolve the appeal, it immediately passes the case to the President of the university, including a statement of the relevant facts, the reasons for the rejection and a proposed course of action. The President of this university is responsible for issuing the formal decision on the appeal.

### **§ 25 Status and status groups**

- (1) The members of the Doctoral Research Centre are divided into four “status groups”
  - a. professors who hold a doctorate
  - b. junior members,
  - c. doctoral candidates and
  - d. coordinators
- (2) Affiliates and members have different statuses.

### **§ 26 Election of Doctoral Committee**

- (1) All members of a status group elect their representatives for the Doctoral Committee. If more than one member of a status group belongs to the Doctoral Research Centre, they also elect a designated representative from among their ranks to serve as a representative in the absence of the elected committee member.
- (2) The term of office for professorial and coordinating members is three years, for members who are doctoral candidates two years. Re-election is possible.
- (3) Terms of office must transition seamlessly. A term continues until a successor takes office.
- (4) The coordinating members are responsible for organising and overseeing elections.
- (5) Upon request by an eligible voter, the vote must be conducted as a secret ballot. A vote is considered secret if conducted via postal or ballot voting, either digitally or in person.

## **§ 27 Votes**

- (1) Unless otherwise specified elsewhere, the following provisions apply:
  - a. Elections, resolutions and decisions (votes) may be conducted in person, via video conference, in hybrid format, electronically or by circular resolution.
  - b. The notice period for meetings in which votes are to take place must be at least 14 calendar days.
  - c. The Chair presides over the voting process.
  - d. Votes are conducted openly, except as specified in § 26(5). Voting after the conclusion of the voting process is not permitted.
  - e. Meetings must be documented. The minutes or records of votes must be made available to the members of the Doctoral Research Centre as soon as possible.
- (2) Voters must agree on the voting method in advance. The Chair shall ensure an agreement is reached. A voting session meets the minimum quorum requirement if at least half of all members with voting power are present. However, for the election of the Doctoral Committee, a reduced quorum of at least one quarter of eligible voters is sufficient for the process to be valid. Each eligible voter may cast either one “yes” vote or one “no” vote or abstain per candidate or proposal. Abstentions are counted as “no” votes. A candidate is elected or a proposal approved if at least half of the votes are cast in their favour (simple majority). If fewer votes are cast in their favour, the candidate or proposal is rejected.
- (3) If multiple candidates or proposals are competing, each shall be voted on individually. If several candidates or proposals receive a simple majority as outlined in paragraph (2), the candidate or proposal with the highest number of “yes” votes shall win the election. In the event of a tie for the highest number of “yes” votes, a run-off will take place between the tied candidates or proposals. In the event of another tie, the Chair casts the deciding vote.

## **§ 28 Duty to inform**

The Doctoral Committee is required to inform doctoral candidates of any significant decisions that affect them, particularly those related to their application for acceptance, initiation and completion of the doctoral examination process, in accordance with these regulations.

## **§ 29 Entry into force**

- (1) These Doctoral Regulations enter into force the day after their publication.
- (2) These Doctoral Degree Regulations shall apply to all those individuals who begin their doctoral project after the date on which they come into force. Doctoral candidates who began their doctoral project under the previous version of the regulations must declare in writing which version they wish to follow for the continuation of their procedure.
- (3) Terms of office remain unaffected; the new regulation shall apply only to the new term of office.
- (4) Upon expiry of the transitional period as outlined in paragraphs (2) and (3), the version of 14 December 2016 shall no longer be valid.