

Guidelines

for the structuring of doctoral programmes at the Graduate Academy

at Friedrich Schiller University Jena

of 18 June 2018

Preamble

“By establishing the Graduate Academy (GA), Friedrich Schiller University Jena (FSU) combines the objective of improving and securing top quality qualification of young researchers as well as the quality of scientific research contributions through dissertation projects. The GA is supporting this objective by promoting optimal doctorate and research conditions and by minimising bureaucratic demands on teachers and doctoral candidates alike, in particular on foreigners.” (GA Framework Concept p.1)

One particular challenge regarding designing doctorate conditions lies in creating freedom for and excellence in research through restrained structuring and reliable integration into the scientific community.

Doctorate programmes are intended to expand the options for high-quality research activities at FSU (e.g. through new and more intensive cooperation), while at the same time improving the individual conditions for obtaining doctorates for PhD candidates and supervisors alike (e.g. by taking into account teaching load, comprehensive supervision, improved status of doctoral candidates). They thus provide an instrument that will ensure relevance and visibility of research by young researchers at FSU and that is intended to create freedom for new research ideas and projects.

Objective

Specific **goals** have been derived from the GA's general objectives, which at the same time are intended to serve as guidelines for the doctoral programmes at the GA.

- a. High level of expertise of the involved persons and their research
- b. Transparent access and selection procedures
- c. Sharing of expert knowledge and methodological skills
- d. Instruction in good scientific practice
- e. Training of generic and vocational skills
- f. Excellent supervision
- g. Adequate time to degrees
- h. Training of teaching and supervision competences
- i. Integration in the scientific community and internationalisation
- j. Equal opportunities and compatibility of family and academia
- k. Alumni concept.

The concepts of doctoral programmes at the GA should include information regarding the attainment of the described general and specific goals.¹ **To that end, the GA explicitly acknowledges that the specific structure of and expedient emphasis on individual elements of a doctoral programme has to follow both the respective thematic objective and the scientific / academic conventions of involved disciplines.** Based on the idea of increasingly internationalised and interdisciplinary research, the GA at the same time is encouraging the conception of doctoral programmes as a space for initially unfamiliar methods and hence as a trigger for innovation.

A doctoral programme within the GA usually should be comprised of the following **pillars**, which at the same time constitute the main items of a programme description:²

1. Thematic frame concept (objective a.)
2. Concept of membership (admittance and formal requirements) (objective b.)
3. Qualification programme (research training programme) (objectives c.-e.)
4. Concept of supervision (objectives f.-g.)
5. Programme for conveying teaching and mentoring competences (objective h.)
6. Integration in the scientific community, internationalisation (objective i.)
7. Alumni (objective k.)
8. Diversity management (objective j.).

Pillars 6 – 8 are **cross-sectional tasks**, which need to be implemented through measures within all other pillars. Nevertheless, please provide a compact description as separate items in order to facilitate evaluation.

¹ This system is largely in line with the specifications of institutions for the promotion of research at graduate programmes and schools (esp. DFG and WR).

² In parentheses: objectives to be operationalised by the pillars.

1. Thematic frame concept

The concept of a graduate programme should provide information regarding the content of the programme, the (inter-) disciplinary context and, if applicable, its internal thematic structures. In addition, a description of the participating academics, their respective contribution to the programme, their experience in supervising young researchers and the programme's research context should be addressed.

Differently to DFG research training groups, the GA's doctoral programmes do not require a coherent research programme.

2. Admittance and formal requirements

Information about access requirements as well as about the admission procedure for doctoral candidates should be provided - for example with respect to formal requirements for admission to the programme (e.g. degrees, synopsis, reference letters, admission interview) and their desired quality; possible ways to access the programme; description of a recruitment strategy for the programme; responsibilities for selection and admission (e.g. admission committee) including a description of the role of the supervisors during this process.

3. Qualification programme, research training programme

The qualification and training offers of a doctoral programme should promote both the doctoral candidates' disciplinary qualifications as well as the academic exchange on a horizontal level (with other doctoral researchers) and on a vertical level (with senior academics as well as students).

The contents of courses should be sufficiently attractive to support both directly and indirectly the research activities of doctoral candidates, to function as a magnet bringing together doctoral researchers and hence to serve the objective of enhancing disciplinary and interdisciplinary communication.

It needs a restrained scope of courses that may not prolong the time to degree under any circumstances.

The GA at FSU does not provide for a formal accreditation of qualification programmes. The programmes decide autonomously about awarding credit units (e.g. performance points, credit points). However, in order to enhance transparency and comparability it is recommended to use the ECTS for clarifying the scope of qualification offers. Additionally, it should be addressed whether participation of doctoral candidates from other disciplines and programmes is possible and which requirements need to be fulfilled.

The GA at FSU generally recommends that the following areas of competence should be specified through qualification offers:

3a) Core research competences. They include mainly disciplinary-related / thematic and methodological courses. Examples for specific formats are workshops, (departmental) seminars, (research) colloquia, method seminars, summer schools, thematic seminars or consultation seminars.

3b) Interdisciplinary competences. They play particularly a role in interdisciplinary programmes, but to a reasonable extent they should also be part of other programmes in order to promote a fundamental academic qualification. The GA regards it as one of its tasks to offer activities in this area; however, the programme may also directly organise interdisciplinary actions.

3c) Transferable skills. They are “obtainable general skills, attitudes and strategies, which are useful for solving problems and for acquiring new competences in the largest possible range of subject matters” (Education Commission NRW, 1995, p. 113). Transferable skills support both the research of doctoral candidates during the doctoral training phase, while at the same time preparing doctoral candidates for the time after completion of the degree. Transferable skill training is offered centrally by the GA. However, it may also be offered by the programmes. Possible areas are EDP and media, presenting and publishing, communication/leadership/management, career planning and job application, as well as languages. A variety of formats is possible.

4. Concept of supervision

The concept of supervision includes information regarding the number and allocation of disciplinary supervisors (usually two supervisors, with one being the main supervisor and the second acting as an additional supervisor), contact frequency, and forms of supervision (e.g. supervision agreement, status talks, progress reports) as well as additional supervision elements such as a coach (usually from outside the subject area).

Good supervision ensures under normal circumstances a time to completion of 36 months. Discipline-specific characteristics and requirements of the PhD candidates’ individual situation should be taken into account.

5. Programme for conveying teaching and mentoring competences

Teaching activities and providing guidance for less qualified persons is part of the qualification profile of any academic both within and outside universities.

This qualification objective is substantiated during the doctorate phase in multiple ways. Expedient measures are for example involvement in undergraduate teaching, guidance of research students and trainees, and supervision of seminar papers and BA-/MA-theses.

A doctoral programme concept should show which qualifications for conveying teaching and mentoring competences are relevant for the admitted PhD candidates and how this objective is supported by the doctoral programme management.

Structure

Additional information regarding the formal structure of the doctoral programme is recommended. Each programme should provide for a decision-making panel, headed by a spokesperson. Usually, the plenary meeting of the faculty (professors involved in the programme) constitutes such a panel. In case of large programmes, this function may also be assumed by a smaller elected panel.

Programmes with more than 15 doctoral candidates should consider establishing a doctoral representation. If there is no such representation planned, then there should at least be appointed a doctoral spokesperson for evaluation purposes.

A body which is acting in a mediating and arbitrating way in cases of conflict is regarded as indispensable. This may, for example, be an ombudsperson distinguished by outstanding reputation, which is able to act with reasonable objectivity. In any case, the ombudsperson of the GA may also act as such body.

Postscript

On 20 November 2007, the GA's Vice-Rector submitted an initial draft "Guidelines for the structuring of doctoral programmes at the Graduate Academy" to the Advisory Board. The draft was discussed and revised during Advisory Board meetings on 20 November 2007 and 16 January 2008. The subsequently revised version was discussed and approved by the Extended Rectorate on 29 January 2008. The current version was updated and approved by the Board of the Academy on 18 June 2018.