



Guide for the  
doctorate

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# Principle

The doctorate introduces students to current research and represents one of the most essential parts of scientific work at ETH Zurich.

The doctoral degree is a verification of the ability to conduct scientific research of high quality and is awarded on the basis of an independent original thesis and an oral examination. The quality of doctoral theses is determined by the doctoral students and their supervisors as well as the project topic.

# Supervision

The relationship between the doctoral student and the supervisors is a partnership in which the doctoral thesis supervisor and the second advisor support the doctoral student in developing his or her scientific competitiveness and career. The two parties share and develop ideas in an atmosphere that is respectful in every sense and is in diligent compliance with the applicable rules on integrity in research.

## Expectations of supervisors

Doctoral thesis supervisors guide doctoral students on a task-related basis and actively support them in their personal and professional development. They foster a trusting and open dialogue, provide regular feedback and encourage independent action by doctoral students. They take responsibility for the joint definition of tasks based on the doctoral plan and their regular review. They clarify expectations regarding the project (number of publications, quality of work, volume of documents, archiving, etc.) and promote national and international networking. Especially in the last phase of the doctorate, they discuss openly and transparently the scientific competitiveness with the doctoral students. *Second advisors* support the doctoral students professionally. They are regular contact persons for questions regarding the research project and planning the next steps.

The supervisors also inform the doctoral student about the different main phases of a doctorate. Generally, more intensive phases of supervision are required at the beginning and towards the end of a doctorate. They thoroughly familiarise the doctoral student with the topic of the doctoral thesis and its interdisciplinary context. They ensure an adequate balance between guidance and personal responsibility and provide honest, precise, constructive and timely feedback on ideas, reports, drafts, etc. They also express concerns clearly and as early as possible if the performance of the doctoral student does not meet their expectations.

## Expectations of doctoral students

Doctoral students act with a high degree of personal responsibility and organise regular meetings and feedback sessions with their supervisors. In close cooperation with the supervisor and second advisor, they define tasks based on the doctoral plan, discuss the progress, reflect on their potential and continuously develop their career perspectives. Together with their supervisors, they are responsible for arranging regular meetings and annual progress reviews. Doctoral students act proactively and communicate any concerns and problems clearly to their supervisors at an early stage.

Within the professorship and its working groups, doctoral students also take on teaching activities and other tasks in addition to their work on the research project. However, at least 70% of the total working time must be available for the doctoral research work.

The basic and most important prerequisite for a successful doctorate is a shared commitment to a high-quality supervisory environment. To this end, doctoral students at ETH are supervised by at least two people: the doctoral thesis supervisor and the second advisor.

# Core elements of a doctorate

## Doctoral plan and aptitude colloquium

During the first year, doctoral students draw up a doctoral plan. This plan describes the research project and provides information on collaboration in teaching and other tasks. Doctoral students who are required to complete extended doctoral studies must also include an individual study plan.

Before the end of the first year, doctoral students defend their research project in an aptitude colloquium. In so doing, they demonstrate that they are able to assess the relevance of their research area and place it in the current context of scientific research.

## Progress report and annual status conversation

The doctoral thesis supervisor conducts an annual progress review with his or her doctoral student. This consists of two separate parts.

In preparation for **the first part** of the status conversation (scientific progress), doctoral students write a **progress report** that describes research results and further steps, as well as any significant deviations from the doctoral plan. It is recommended that second advisors participate in this part of the status conversation.

**The second part** of the status conversation (appraisal, career and personal development) is conducted in confidence between the doctoral students and their supervisors. This part is conducted in the sense of a development discussion and includes mutual feedback and further development of competencies.

## Doctoral studies

Doctoral students have the obligation and the right to continue their education within the framework of the doctoral studies. Doctoral studies include the consolidation of specialised knowledge, the expansion of transferable skills as well as the

integration into the scientific community. Doctoral students coordinate the details of their individual doctoral studies with their doctoral thesis supervisors.

Some doctoral students are required to complete extended doctoral studies. This is intended to close knowledge gaps in the research area. Upon admission, a recommendation will be made for this. The details of the extended doctoral studies are coordinated with the supervisor of their doctoral thesis.

## Doctoral examination

At the end of the doctorate, the doctoral diploma is awarded on the basis of the evaluation of the doctoral thesis and the doctoral examination.

Doctoral students write an independent, original thesis, which they must defend in an oral examination before an examination committee.



# Terms of contract for doctoral students with employment at ETH Zurich



The employment of doctoral students lasts from enrolment until at least the end of the month of the doctoral examination.

The basis for the *contract* is the confirmation of admission as well as the definitive admission (passing of the aptitude colloquium). If this is not granted or if the doctorate is discontinued, the fixed-term contract ends early or at the end of the contract by mutual agreement. As soon as confirmation of admission has been received, the initial contract is issued for 18 months. Subsequent contracts last 12 months each. In the final phase, these may also be shorter with corresponding written justification.

If a contract is not extended, the doctoral students will be informed in a timely manner. Any non-renewal must be justified in writing.

Part-time employment is also possible under special circumstances but must be justified in writing. Continued employment after the doctoral examination is possible within the legal maximum employment period of six years but must be adequately remunerated.

## Absences / Holiday

In the event of illness or accident, doctoral students must report their absence to their supervisors as soon as possible. If a doctoral student is unable to work for more than three working days, he or she must present a medical certificate without being requested to do so ([see information sheet](#)).

Annual holiday entitlement for doctoral students is based on the Personnel Ordinance for the ETH Domain (ETH PO). In general, holiday must be taken in the calendar year in which the holiday entitlement arises. Holiday planning and the determination of holiday dates takes place in consultation with the doctoral thesis supervisor. Arrangement and control of absences for doctoral students is the responsibility of the superior.

Doctoral students who are employed in the ETH Domain or externally are subject to the employment conditions of their respective employer.

# General conditions

## Infrastructure

The research unit where the doctorate is carried out provides a workplace for the doctoral student. Doctoral students are entitled to shared use of the infrastructure of ETH Zurich (rooms, equipment and facilities, IT, library, etc.). They use these in accordance with the instructions of the relevant departments.

## Scientific integrity

ETH Zurich is committed to scientific excellence. Trust in research is largely dependent on the responsible actions of researchers. In order to ensure enduring, high-quality research, every employee is called upon to act responsibly and to follow the guidelines on scientific integrity. The supervisors will inform the doctoral student about the guidelines applicable at ETH Zurich. All parties involved are required to comply with these at all times.

## Protection of privacy and advice centres

ETH Zurich offers its employees a *respectful and professional environment*. Superiors, employees, students as well as visitors cultivate a respectful and supportive relationship with each other. Bullying, discrimination, harassment, threats and violence are not tolerated at ETH Zurich.

### Legal basis

- Ordinance on the Doctorate at ETH Zurich
- Ordinance governing scientific employees of the ETH Zurich

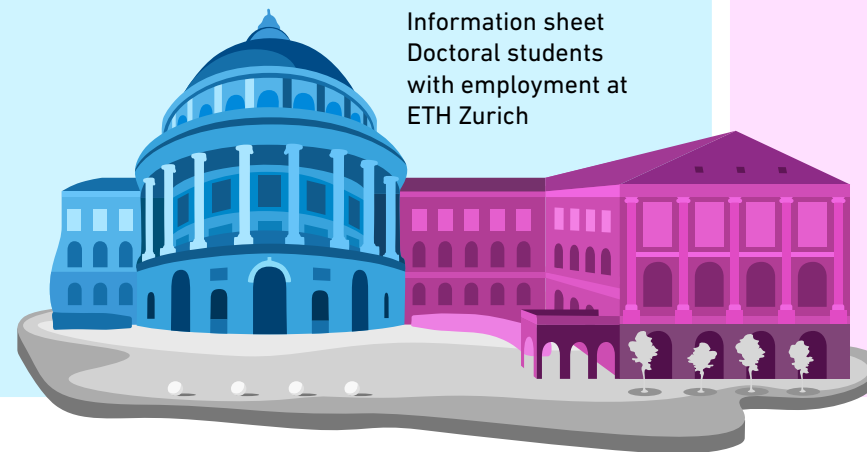
### Detailed explanations and administrative regulations

- Rector's Implementation Provisions
- Directives for doctoral students with employment at ETH Zurich
- Information sheet Doctoral students with employment at ETH Zurich

### Specifications of the departments about implementation of the ordinances and their implementing regulations

- Detailed stipulations regarding the doctorate

ETH Layer



Departments

ETH Zurich welcomes all doctoral students at regular *orientation events*. Various service and advice centres also introduce themselves within this framework.

For further information, please contact:

- *Vice-Rector for Doctoral Studies / Doctoral Administration* of ETH Zurich
- *Contact points of the departments*
- *Personnel managers of the departments*
- *AVETH* (Association of Scientific Staff at ETH Zurich)

If necessary, the contact persons of the respective advice centres will refer the person concerned to another suitable advice centre.

This guide only provides an overview of the doctorate at ETH Zurich. Specific regulations can be found in the *Ordinance on the Doctorate*, the *Rector's implementation provisions* and the *detailed stipulations of the respective department*.

Doctoral students with employment at ETH Zurich inform themselves as well through the *Ordinance governing scientific employees* and the *Directives for doctoral students with employment at ETH Zurich*.

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