

UniWiND

GUAT

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Issue 4



Doctoral Supervision

Recommendations and good practice
for universities and doctoral supervisors

Berit Carmesin, Dr. Uta Hoffmann, Dr. Gunda Huskobra, Dr. Sebastian Huster,
Jo-Anna Küster, Dr. Jörg Neumann, Dr. Sigrun Wegener-Feldbrügge (eds.)

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Preface

The German University Association of Advanced Graduate Training (UniWiND/GUAT) was established in 2009 as an organisation that brings together German universities for an exchange on opportunities, challenges and reforms in the advancement of post-graduate training and education. The network currently has 45 member universities. One of UniWiND's main goals is professionalising institutional support for early-stage researchers in Germany. To this end, it has established working groups in which representatives of the member universities discuss essential issues related to the promotion of young talent and the existing offers at member universities.

The substantive cooperation among Graduate Centres at UniWiND's member universities has both led to the development of concepts that span across disciplines and individual universities as well as to a mutual exchange of best practices. The series of publications to which this issue belongs is intended to make this concentrated expert knowledge widely available.

As the Executive Board of UniWiND, we hope that this series will contribute to

- inciting a broad debate on the main challenges in promoting young researchers,
- continued exchange of good practices,
- the development of models and concepts for the sustainable advancement of young researchers at German universities and
- the formulation of specific recommendations for the responsible executives at universities and in higher education politics:

The authors of each volume are responsible for its contents. Consequently, volumes may differ in terms of character and emphasis.

This fourth issue presents the results of the „Concepts of Supervision“ working group, which worked actively between 2011 and 2012, investigating matters related to the supervision of doctoral candidates.

Doctoral supervision is a term that describes the mentoring of a doctoral candidate who otherwise conducts independent, original research. The scope and quality of supervision have an impact on the success of the doctorate. This means that both the PhD awarding institutions and the individual supervisors are responsible for ensuring their candidates receive the right support. Setting up guidelines for adequate support, acknowledging supervision achievements as well as providing qualification for and networking between supervisors are helpful measures that institutions can take.

The „Concepts of Supervision“ working group has put together a set of recommendations for ensuring adequate support and has collected good-practice examples. Their results were published in the fourth issue of our publication series „Betreuung Promovierender. Empfehlungen und Good Practice für Universitäten und Betreuende“. We are pleased to present the English version now.

The Executive Board of UniWiND would like to use this opportunity to thank all the employees at the member universities for their extraordinarily dedicated involvement in the working groups, without which this series of publications would not have been possible.

The UniWiND Executive Board

Prof. Dr. Frank Bremmer,
Prof. Dr. Rolf Drechsler,
Prof. Dr. Thomas Hofmann,
Prof. Dr. Erika Kothe (Chair),
Prof. Dr. Enrico Schleiff (Vice Chair)

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Table of Contents

1. Doctoral Supervision - Recommendations for universities and supervisors **8**

*(by Berit Carmesin, Uta Hoffmann, Gunda Huskobra, Sebastian Huster, Jo-Anna Küster,
Jörg Neumann and Sigrun Wegener-Feldbrügge)*

Status quo **8**

Institutional responsibilities of the university **9**

Guidelines for good supervision **9**

Monitoring and quality assurance **9**

Recognition of supervising activities **9**

Supervision and assessment **10**

Supervisor training and networking **10**

Ombudsman **11**

Individual responsibilities of supervisors **11**

Contents of good supervision **11**

Teams of supervisors **12**

Prerequisites for supervision **12**

Supervision agreement **13**

Dissertation topic and timeframe of a doctorate **13**

Regular meetings **13**

Introduction to the scientific community **14**

Qualification of doctoral candidates **14**

Good scientific practice **14**

Qualification of supervisors **14**

2. Doctoral Supervision – Good practice examples of institutional support for good supervision	15
I. Development and establishment of guidelines for good supervision <i>(by Norbert Krause)</i>	15
Inter-university guidelines by “QualitätsZirkel Promotion”	15
Guidelines for the supervision of doctoral dissertations at Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology (BGHS) – Result achieved by an internal working group	17
II. Doctoral supervision award: The DRS Award for Excellent Supervision at Freie Universität Berlin <i>(by Berit Carmesin and Norbert Krause)</i>	23
III. Supervisors Training: Workshops for supervisors <i>(by Helmut Brentel)</i>	27
 Selected Literature	 32

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1

Doctoral Supervision -

Recommendations for universities and supervisors

Status quo

Obtaining a doctorate degree involves the candidate performing independent and autonomous research, yet under the supervision of experienced researchers. The scope and quality of the support a candidate is provided with have an influence on the candidate's success. This has not changed through the increasingly structured approach to the doctoral education in recent years. Good support for candidates focuses primarily on (1) supporting the candidate's independent research activities, (2) ensuring a high level of quality and scientific relevance for the results, and (3) ensuring that the dissertation is completed and submitted within an adequate timeframe. At the same time, the doctoral phase qualifies early-stage researchers for a responsible professional position in or outside academia. The right support consequently aims at preparing young researchers for future positions in academia, business organisations or state and social institutions.

The doctoral examination regulations defined by each university or faculty determine who formally qualifies as a supervisor. Usually, this applies to professors, junior professors and private lecturers within the faculties. Increasingly, heads of junior research groups also qualify (e.g. groups founded under the Emmy Noether Programme). In other words, university members who have proved their qualified ability to independently teach and perform research in a specific discipline qualify as supervisors. To date, supervisors need not obtain a specific formal qualification for supervising. One consequence of this is that the quality of the support provided depends heavily on the willingness and self-taught skills of the supervisor when taking on and handling this responsibility. This situation does not meet the growing demands placed on doctoral education or reflect the increasing significance of post-doctoral researchers in the European research area.

Both the PhD awarding institutions and the supervisors themselves bear the responsibility for ensuring adequate support. This publication provides recommendations for the support and advancement of good doctoral supervision and illustrates them with examples of good practice. To highlight the broad range of institutional practices, this issue presents three different cases in which UniWiND members developed and implemented concepts to ensure and advance the quality of doctoral supervision in detail.

Institutional responsibilities of the university

Guidelines for good supervision

In order to provide all doctoral candidates at a university with the supervision and guidance required for successfully obtaining their degree, the working group recommends establishing Guidelines for Good Supervision in every institution that has the right to confer doctorate degrees.

Some examples of good practice concerning such guidelines:¹

- „Principles of doctoral culture“, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin²
- „Guidelines for the supervision of doctoral dissertations“, Bielefeld Graduate School of History and Sociology (BGHS) at Universität Bielefeld³
- „Principles of good doctoral supervision“, Leibniz Universität Hannover⁴
- „Shaping a doctorate together“ - guidelines for supervisors and doctoral candidates (in German and English) by QualitätsZirkel Promotion (Quality Circle for the Doctorate)⁵

Monitoring and quality assurance

Universities should establish a reporting system that provides information on the status quo and progress of doctorates (e.g. number of doctoral candidates, required time for obtaining doctorate, examination procedures etc.) in order to provide a basis for planning activities to improve the general conditions for doctorates and, specifically, for doctoral supervision. This should be complemented with a benchmarking system across universities, in line with the Pro-File project launched by the Institute of Research Information and Quality Assurance (iFQ). (Examples of good practice: Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Universität Hamburg, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena).

Recognition of supervising activities

Despite the fact that advancing young researchers is part of a professor's official duties, the specific engagement in doctoral qualification programmes should be recognised and, to a limited extent, have an effect on the teaching load. Universities need to create the right prerequisites for

¹ There are different ways of establishing and introducing supervision guidelines. Two different approaches are presented in the second part of this publication: case studies from Universität Bielefeld (BGHS) and QualitätsZirkel Promotion. C.f. Example of good practice I, p. 15 et seqq.

² <https://www.hu-berlin.de/promovierende/betreuung/promotionskultur>

³ http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/bghs/von_uns/downloads/Leitfaden-fur-die-Betreuung-von-Promotionen.pdf

⁴ http://www.graduiertenakademie.uni-hannover.de/fileadmin/graduiertenakademie/pdf/Leitlinien_Broschuere_A5_klein.pdf

⁵ <http://www.qz-promotion.de/home/projekt-handbuch/>

this, and it may require changing the German federal states' directives on teaching obligations (example of good practice: Free State of Thuringia⁶).

Furthermore, universities are encouraged to establish other forms of recognition for the work performed by supervisors. These could consist, for example, in prizes or other forms of gratification for excellent support (example of good practice: Supervisor Award awarded by Freie Universität Berlin's Dahlem Research School⁷).

However, the working group came to the conclusion that rewarding the absolute number of doctorates conferred is a problematic approach when it comes to the performance-related allocation of funds to universities. In line with the goal of offering the best possible supervision, the benchmark should be achieving the ideal number of doctorates per supervisor rather than simply achieving a maximum number.

Supervision and assessment

The fact that a supervisor is both a research partner / mentor as well as an examiner in the doctoral procedure can be an issue. At the same time, the supervisor's specific expertise is often indispensable when it comes to assessing the quality of the dissertation. Universities are called upon to unbundle these roles to a feasible extent and ensure that the basis for the assessment of a dissertation is broad.

Supervisor training and networking

Traditionally, the skill set of a university member entitled to supervise doctoral candidates is dominated by his or her research achievements. Recently, universities have started to offer programmes in the field of higher-education didactics in order to further develop teaching competencies of university staff. However, the situation is completely different when it comes to doctoral supervision and management skills. These are almost always acquired „on the job“. Consequently, it can neither be expected, lest guaranteed, that supervisors are experts on providing the right support. This is why it is highly recommended that universities offer supervisor trainings and encourage the exchange between supervisors. Generally, training schemes and coaching programmes for supervisors serve the purpose well (examples of good practice: „Supervisor Training“, compact workshops at Heinrich Heine Universität Düsseldorf and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, workshops of the QualitätsZirkel Promotion and workshops by Helmut Brentel⁸).

⁶ The Thuringian ordinance on teaching obligations in universities enables the consideration of teaching offers in doctoral education. Article 3 Para. 4 ThürLVVO states that up to 5% of the combined teaching capacity of all lecturers at a university department can be offset against their teaching obligations.

⁷ Cf. Example of good practice II, p. 23 et seqq.

⁸ Cf. Example of good practice III, p. 27 et seqq.

Ombudsman

The working group recommends nominating ombudsmen or liaison officers at faculty or central university level who can mediate when conflicts between supervisors and doctoral candidates occur. Ombudsmen or liaison officers should be offered specific training and, if applicable, case supervision. UniWiND member universities have widely established such institutions (example of good practice: board of arbitration at TU München, with two members from the university and one external member⁹).

Individual responsibilities of supervisors

A key factor in doctoral supervision is that experienced researchers support doctoral candidates to become professional researchers. The supervisor acts as a mentor and should ensure that the supervisee has the freedom to conduct independent and autonomous research activities. This clearly sets the doctorate apart from the first two phases of academic education (Bachelor and Master's Degree).

Contents of good supervision

Good supervision is not only about providing expertise in the doctoral candidate's discipline and the required methodological skills, but it is also aimed at ensuring that progress is made with the doctorate. This includes:

- Monitoring the candidate's research process
- Feedback on the status quo of the candidate's research and results already achieved
- Discussion of future research planning
- Introduction to good scientific practice and monitoring compliance

In addition to this, good supervision also includes:

- Supporting the candidate in structuring the complete doctoral phase
- Supporting the supervisees by introducing them to the national and international scientific community
- Providing advice concerning career opportunities, additional qualification needs and the right steps towards a future career
- Motivating and supporting the candidate in difficult phases.

⁹ <http://www.gs.tum.de/en/about-tum-gs/board-of-arbitration/>

Teams of supervisors

The working group strongly recommends that supervision of doctoral candidates be a team effort, irrespective of other organisational ties. The main supervisor, as primary contact person, should be backed by additional partners. The number of supervisors and who is selected as a supervising partner should depend on the subject and methods applied in the doctorate and the candidate's scientific and organisational setting. It must be aimed at ensuring the best possible support for the doctorate. This may also include mentors from other disciplines or post-doctoral researchers. When early-stage postdocs are made part of the team, however, this must not mean delegating the responsibility for the supervision to them. Binding agreements between the supervisors regarding the supervision concept and a transparent allocation of responsibilities are helpful in any case.

Prerequisites for supervision

Taking on supervisory responsibilities needs to be dependent on certain prerequisites. These include the primary supervisor's expertise in the discipline of the doctorate, sufficient qualification of the supervisors for supervising young researchers, and an admission procedure aimed at selecting the most suitable candidates. In structured doctoral programmes, collectively organised transparent selection procedures have proved ideal. Extending this approach to doctorates outside such programmes would be desirable. However, in third-party funded projects it is important to consider that the supervisor also bears a responsibility towards the funding institutions to ensure that project goals are achieved. When it comes to university staff members, the institute director bears a responsibility to ensure that teaching and administrative tasks are carried out. These factors also need to be considered in the selection procedure of doctoral candidates.

The supervisors are responsible for providing sufficient material support to ensure the doctorate's success. This refers both to the resources required immediately for the research activities (scholarships/grants, workplace, consumables, access to laboratories, devices, library and archives) as well as providing or supporting doctoral candidates in obtaining the means required for their participation in conferences, research stays, publications, qualification activities, or for research assistants. Before agreeing to supervision, the supervisor and candidate need to clarify their mutual motivation, goals and expectations. As good supervision requires time and effort, the number of doctorates a supervisor can take on is limited. The ideal number should take the size and staff structure of the chair or department into account.

Supervision agreement

A standardisation of doctoral supervision is not possible. Instead, it needs to take into account the specific circumstances and needs of a candidate individually for each doctorate. The required scope and suitable forms of support as well as the mutual rights and obligations that arise from the supervisor-supervisee relationship must be defined and described. They should be agreed in writing at the beginning of the doctorate, constantly reviewed and adapted as needed during the whole doctoral phase. The traditions of the discipline and the candidate's personal situation (e.g. family obligations, employment) should be reflected in the agreement.

It has proved helpful to include a binding long-term arrangement regarding regular supervision sessions in these agreements. Moreover, the agreement should contain what is expected specifically of the supervisee in these sessions. It is then signed by the supervisor and doctoral candidate. It also needs to contain a transparent procedure for the termination of the agreement by either party.

Dissertation topic and timeframe of a doctorate

The responsibilities of a supervisor begin with the selection of a topic and must cover in-depth advice on defining and demarcating the topic of the dissertation, its scientific relevance and any risks involved. Moreover, the candidate should be supported in structuring the contents of the dissertation and scheduling his or her work on it. Care must be taken to ensure that the candidate is given sufficient time to progress with the dissertation. However, when selecting and defining a topic, always consider that a doctoral candidate should be able to complete his or her dissertation in a period of about three years.

Regular meetings

The frequency of research supervision depends on discipline-specific traditions and cycles of scientific progress. While a very frequent form of exchange is common in laboratory-based fields, book or archive based disciplines usually see much larger intervals. Regardless of the context, a feedback and advisory session with the primary supervisor should be arranged at least once every semester, as well as annual talks about the status and progress of research with the whole team of supervisors. It is essential that the mutual expectations are exchanged before each meeting. In order to emphasise the binding character, it is advisable to take minutes of the meetings and sign them off. The working group also recommends determining milestones and deadlines. Guidelines on good supervision are helpful to ensure orientation and transparency during regular meetings.¹⁰

¹⁰ Cf. Example of good practice I, p. 15 et seqq.

Introduction to the scientific community

Supervisors should support doctoral candidates by introducing them to scientific networks. This includes creating various opportunities for young researchers to report on their doctorate project and findings (e.g. among colleagues they are closely or loosely linked with) and to receive feedback. This concerns, in particular, local research colloquiums, national and international symposia and conferences, as well as publications in national and international scientific journals or with publishing houses.¹¹

Qualification of doctoral candidates

Supervisors are expected to support the ongoing qualification of candidates under their supervision. This covers both qualification in the discipline as well as methodological and transferable skills training. Supervisor and supervisee should jointly establish a qualification strategy reflecting the individual scientific and career goals. The supervisor needs to allow the doctoral candidate sufficient freedom to ensure ongoing qualification while making sure time spent on such measures does not put the successful completion of the doctorate at risk.

Moreover, candidates should be given the opportunity to gain teaching experiences. The time spent on teaching, however, should be reasonable and not lead to a delay of the doctoral project.

Good scientific practice

Supervisors are responsible for monitoring and ensuring compliance with the rules of good scientific practice. In addition to their own involvement, they should support candidates' participation in related training and events.

Qualification of supervisors

Last but not least, supervisors should strive to obtain additional qualifications related to their supervisory activities in order to ensure that they can meet the high demands placed on good supervision. This also includes cultivating exchange with colleagues.

¹¹ The supervisor is responsible for establishing links to the scientific community. In addition, the institution may offer programmes that support networking in practice. Example of good practice: e.g. „Internationalisation Voucher“ (grants for a research stay or conference abroad) and proofreading service (professional proofreading of papers in a foreign language prior to publication) at Technische Universität München's TUM Graduate School.



· Doctoral Supervision – Good practice examples of institutional support for good supervision

The following case studies provide an overview of the broad range of conceivable ways in which an institution can ensure and promote good quality of supervision.

I. Development and establishment of guidelines for good supervision

(by Norbert Krause)

Guidelines for the doctorate can have a binding character and provide clarity on the roles and responsibilities during the doctoral phase. They give supervisors and doctoral candidates an overview of the tasks lying ahead of them in the phases before, during and after the doctorate. Good practice examples for two different approaches to developing and establishing such guidelines are described below. The first example is a booklet called „Shaping a doctorate together“, developed by QualitätsZirkel Promotion (QZP), a network of several graduate centres. The second is a set of guidelines prepared by a working group at Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology together with all status groups (doctoral candidates, supervisors, postdocs). The guidelines were then officially adopted by the bodies of the participating faculties.

Inter-university guidelines by “QualitätsZirkel Promotion”

QualitätsZirkel Promotion is a working group consisting of members of several central graduate institutions to discuss and agree on general issues concerning the doctorate process. It is a body at the working level of graduate schools rather than at the administrative level.

The group was established in 2008. At that time, several universities were in the process of founding graduate centres. Linking these new academic units with each other appeared to be a sensible step, especially as the leaders and managers were faced with similar challenges. QualitätsZirkel Promotion was explicitly set up as an informal group without written agreements or hierarchies in order to be as close as possible to daily practice with the objective of improving the conditions for doctorates at the involved universities. The first step was a stocktaking exercise: from the existing literature on doctorates, mainly studies and concepts, a more practically-minded guideline for the doctorate was developed. It was supposed to be easy to use for supervisors and candidates and provide them with a general overview. Moreover, the guideline should be oriented towards the specific needs of its au-

dience as the advancement of young researchers was organised differently at the different universities (e.g. through different doctoral degree regulations). These considerations resulted in the „Shaping a doctorate together“ booklet. As doctoral supervisors and candidates approach the doctoral phase from different angles, two separate sets of guidelines were developed and combined in one booklet. They are structured identically: the first part answers all the questions supervisors and doctoral candidates commonly have before, during and after a doctorate. Both versions contain a chapter on solving conflicts that may occur during the doctorate and a Q&A checklist part to clarify mutual expectations of the supervision.

The first edition of the booklets was published and distributed at the QZP universities in 2010, a revised edition with additional contents followed in 2012 and a third edition in 2014. The English version was published in 2012. In addition to the printed issues, the booklets are available as downloads from the homepages of the contributing universities and QZP. Moreover, several universities in and outside Germany have referred to their contents.

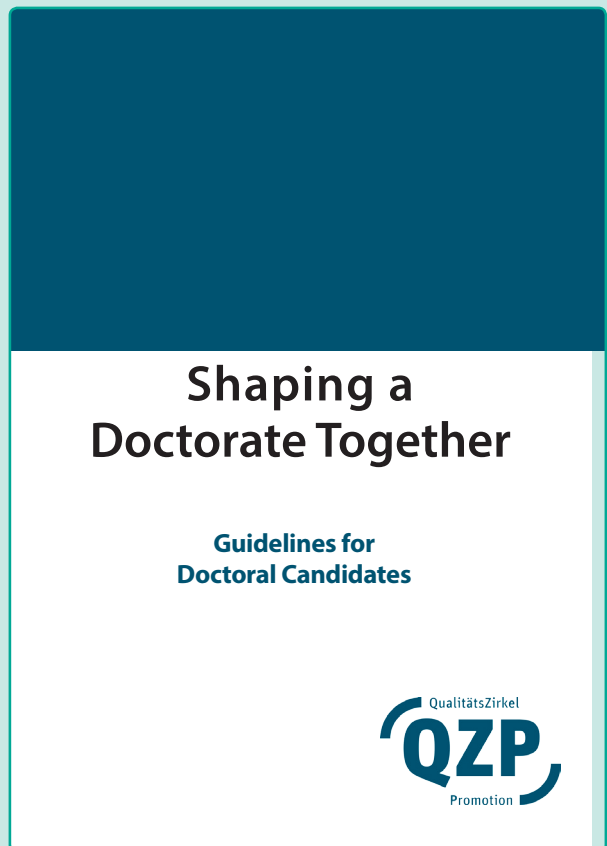


Fig. 1: Cover page of QZP guideline

The guidelines were communicated internally at the QZP universities, but as recommendations, they were not officially adopted by the university bodies. However, university management is supportive of the representatives' work as both supervisors and doctoral candidates benefit from the results achieved by QualitätsZirkel Promotion.

Contact

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Guidelines for the supervision of doctoral dissertations at Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology (BGHS) - Result achieved by an internal working group

In 2011, the Faculty of Sociology, and the Faculty of History, Philosophy and Theology as well as the Executive Board of Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology at Bielefeld University jointly adopted the „Guidelines for the supervision of doctoral dissertations“. They were the result of a long internal development and coordination process.

The process had originally been initiated by Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology (BGHS). The supervision of doctoral researchers was perceived as a „black box“ to which no one except those immediately involved had any insight. But the success of doctoral candidates depended heavily on these obscure conditions. This is why it was decided that there should be an exchange of experiences, and that a general framework for supervision should be developed. To this end, a working group for good supervision was established in 2009. It consisted of four doctoral researchers, two professors and two postdocs. The first objective was for all those involved to define common goals for the document they were developing, followed by a review of the current situation regarding the supervision of doctorates at BGHS.

Initially, it was still open how binding the finished document would be: would it be a set of suggestions, standards, recommendations, or rules for the doctoral phase?

The working group came to the result that a set of standards would most likely create concerns of over-standardising the supervision relationship, and rules or recommendations would probably be met with reluctance. This is why it was decided to develop guidelines for the doctoral phase that users would feel bound to without imposing rigid standards or regulations. The result was a guideline that provides doctoral supervisors and candidates with tips on how to shape their supervisor-supervisee relationship. It is designed as a practical handbook on strengthening the work alliance between supervisor and doctoral researcher, on how to clarify mutual expectations right from the beginning on and on how to make binding working arrangements in order to avoid conflicts in supervision.



Fig. 2: Cover page of BGHS guideline

The guideline covers the following topics:

1. Initiation of supervision arrangement (first and second supervisor, responsibilities of a supervisor, personal meetings, defining a timeline for the doctoral process, supervision agreement, role of graduate school)
2. Helpful information (roles and responsibilities: supervisor - faculties - BGHS; on the doctoral process; number of pages in a dissertation; rules of good scientific practice; contact persons at faculties, BGHS and university level)
3. Area of application of the guidelines

The guidelines developed by the working group were discussed and revised by the faculties' bodies. The cooperation between all the affected bodies and stakeholders proved highly worthwhile for the definition of common goals and the development of the content, and helped the guidelines achieve an exceptionally high degree of acceptance and awareness. It was approved by BGHS and the faculties in April 2011.

Once approved and applied in practice, it received a great deal of positive feedback both from supervisors and doctoral candidates. Today, it is used mainly in supervisory meetings. It is available from the BGHS homepage in German and English: <http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/bghs/>

Fig. 3: Checklist from the BGHS guidelines

Checklist for initiating supervision

- What are the hopes and expectations for the supervision relation?
 - Hopes and expectations of the supervisor
 - Hopes and expectations of the doctoral candidate

- Is it a good match in terms of...
 - supervisor's research area and the topic of the dissertation
 - time available for adequate supervision
 - expectations regarding the timeframe of the doctoral project
 - expectations regarding the length of the dissertation

- What career goals are pursued with the doctorate?
 - Career in academia
 - Career outside academia

- How (or via which communication channels) is the supervision to be carried out?
 - Personal meetings
 - Regular telephone calls, exchange of Emails etc.

- How do I prepare and follow up on supervision sessions?
 - Provide texts and working papers
 - Take minutes of the outcome

- At what intervals are meetings or phone calls to be held?

Fig. 4: Checklist from the BGHS guidelines

Checklist for supervision sessions

- What is the **status quo**? Have the agreed milestones been reached? (Reflection and, if required, revision of work schedule and timeline).
- What went well **since the last session**? What did not go well? What requirements does this mean for the future work on the dissertation project?
- Which **text extracts, working papers or presentation notes** do we need to discuss?
- What kind of **qualification measures** (seminars, colloquiums and workshops) would be relevant in the next semester?
- What **conferences** would be suitable for putting the dissertation project or parts of it for discussion?
- What steps can I take now for my **future career**? Which measures are available for developing my career options?
- When is the **next supervision session**? Which work steps need to be done by then?
- What **else** is important?

Further development of the BGHS guidelines:

In 2012/2013, the working group for good supervision was asked to develop principles for dealing with supervision conflicts at BGHS (with professional support of mediator Dr. Karsten Wilke). As a result, internal principles on dealing with conflicts were developed for the BGHS office and the academic liaison („Roadmap for dealing with conflicts“). In this context, the guidelines were expanded to include these aspects.

Contact

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II. Doctoral supervision award: The DRS Award for Excellent Supervision at Freie Universität Berlin

(by Berit Carmesin and Norbert Krause)

Since 2011, Dahlem Research School (DRS) at Freie Universität Berlin has honoured exemplary commitment in doctoral supervision with the „DRS Award for Excellent Supervision.“

Scientific support and psychological skills, assistance with career planning and constant availability – the expectations for good promotional supervision are manifold. In contrast to activities in research and teaching, however, lecturers’ above-average commitment in this area is usually not sufficiently recognised and rewarded.

Dahlem Research School wanted to change this with its DRS Award for Excellent Supervision. Two professors are rewarded with the prize each year and it is endowed with EUR 2,000 each. The prize money is intended for the advancement of young researchers.

Nomination based on a structured process

The selection of award winners is based on suggestions by doctoral candidates from DRS’ current 27 doctoral programmes. Nominating doctoral candidates have to be in their final year, so that they have experienced supervision in different phases and are able to assess it properly. A structured process and a specifically designed form have proven successful for nominations. In the first part, doctoral candidates assess the intensity and quality of their supervision in different areas on a scale of 1–4. Predetermined criteria ensure that the entire scope of doctoral supervision is taken into account and that statements on the relationship between supervisor and supervisee are comparable.

The following areas can be evaluated:

- **Supervision of the doctoral thesis**

Developing a research schedule, regular consultations and feedback, supporting the completion of the dissertation and preparation for the defence, supporting the development of becoming an independent researcher

- **Research Infrastructure**

Access to necessary equipment and to important resources, helping in the search for funding opportunities, supporting the development of more in-depth research methods and communicating good scientific practice, facilitating the development of an independent research mindset

- **Integration into the (inter)national scientific community**

Making it possible to present scientific results in seminars and at conferences, introduction to the scientific community in and outside Germany, encouraging participation in international conferences, supporting the publication of research results, supporting the organisation of a longer research stay abroad

- **Career counselling**

Jointly exploring career options both in and outside academia, supporting the acquisition of transferrable skills, advice on seeking funding as a postdoc

The second part concerns the individual priorities within the relationship between supervisor and doctoral candidate. Supervisees are asked to justify their nomination by freely describing the relationship, offering more detailed or additional information that they deem important. The resulting texts are often impressive descriptions of exceptional commitment. Both parts of the nomination are weighted equally in the selection of winners.

Anonymised selection

The further selection process is confidential and objective. Once submitted to DRS, the nominations are anonymised. All references to name, gender and the doctoral programme are censored, so that the selection committee - which is made up of doctoral candidates and DRS employees - can come to no conclusions regarding the submitting candidate or the nominated supervisor. In addition, a major concern of doctoral candidates has been taken very seriously: winners are never informed about the identity of the doctoral candidate who nominated them. Moreover, during the award ceremony, speakers will only quote passages of the nominations with the submitting doctoral candidate's agreement.

Public appreciation

The award is presented at the annual ceremony on the founding day of Freie Universität, „Ernst Reuter Day“. Two reasons make it the ideal forum: firstly, it provides an adequate setting to celebrate the award. The winners are honoured with a laudation that quotes excerpts from the nominations, and then receive a certificate in front of about 200 attendees, including alumni of Freie Universität, doctoral candidates, and employees and colleagues of the laureates. Secondly, this is the traditional day on which the best theses of the past year are honoured. Increasingly, this combination of publicly honouring doctoral candidates and supervisors is making the day a celebration of young researchers and the promotion of young talent.

FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN
DAHLEM RESEARCH SCHOOL

PROF. DR. SABINE SCHMIDTKE

is honored with the

DRS AWARD FOR EXCELLENT SUPERVISION
2011

in recognition of her exemplary performance as a doctoral supervisor.



Univ.-Prof. Dr. Peter-André Alt
President of Freie Universität Berlin

Berlin, 5. December 2011

Dr. Martina van de Sand
Managing Director of Dahlem Research School

Fig. 5: DRS Award Certificate

“From the first moment, my supervisor was at my side with professional, methodological and personal advice. The special sensitivity she showed when work on the thesis didn’t progress so well at times was particularly noteworthy. [...] The countless technical discussions between her and her PhD candidates are unforgettable, and often went far into the night. [...] If you sent her a new 40-page chapter from the dissertation, she always replied within 24 hours and offered an appointment in the same week. [...] I have never met anyone who was so strongly committed to doctoral candidates as she is.”

From the anonymous nominations for the DRS Supervisor Award



Reactions of supervisors and doctoral candidates

The winners tend to say that they are very happy to receive the award, but also surprised at being recognised for a part of their work for which they had not expected it. The professors particularly appreciated nominations coming from their doctoral candidates and not, as is more usual, from the circle of colleagues.

Doctoral candidates in turn see an opportunity to express their appreciation and gratitude for the support in formative years, which are usually marked by highs and lows. By nominating their supervisors they can show that they do not take this support for granted.

A contribution to the debate on doctoral supervision

In only three years, the DRS Award for Excellent Supervision has already become a tradition at Freie Universität Berlin. The growing number of nominations and exclusively positive reactions confirm that it is beneficial and important to steer the attention of the university itself, as well as the public, to the excellent work that is done in this core area of promoting young researchers on a daily basis and which tends to go almost unnoticed. By providing positive examples, the award can help to promote the exchange of individual supervision practices, but also to establish university-wide guidelines for doctoral supervision.

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III. Supervisors Training: Workshops for supervisors

(by Helmut Brentel)

Ongoing education and training in the field of supervision is an important prerequisite to ensure the success and quality of the doctorate project. For a long time now, this has not been sufficiently recognised and considered in Germany and across continental Europe, with the exception of some very good approaches in Scandinavian countries. The knowledge and skills required to provide excellent supervision to doctoral candidates were simply taken for granted, achieved through habilitation and research experience. Approaches to train these skills were considered an imposition and a waste of time, rather than a useful and important measure for quality assurance in the international competition among universities.

In contrast, Britain and Australia developed first best practice models as early as the 1990s, forming the basis for a supervision culture that has made it a matter of course for British and Australian supervisors to undergo voluntary or mandatory ‚supervisor training‘ and to develop methods and tools for the supervision of doctoral candidates as well as to publish the experiences gained in the process. Thanks to the recommendations of UniWiND, DFG and the Science Council and transnational cooperation in the European University Association (EUA), Germany has started to rethink and catch up with these standards, so that an increasing number of German universities have begun offering workshops to train supervisors in recent years.

Next, I would like to report about the concept and effects of the supervision workshops that I have been giving as a consultant and trainer for German and European universities since 2011.¹ I offer two-day initial workshops for supervisors who are just starting out, a one-day follow-up workshop after about 6 months, one-day workshops for directors of graduate schools, train-the-trainer workshops, and one-day introductory workshops for doctoral candidates to make them familiar with the state of the art concepts and tools in doctoral supervision. This ensures that candidates and supervisors can discuss matters concerning the supervision process and their relationship on roughly equal footing.

The two-day introductory workshop ‚*Professionalisation of Doctoral Supervision*‘ aims to bring participants up to speed with the basic knowledge and skill set that is the international state of the art in doctoral

¹ The workshops described in this text were developed based on the international state of the literature on research supervision and on impulses from EUA-CDE conferences and UNICA PhD Master Classes since early 2009. Fortunately, a number of initiatives have begun to emerge in Germany, which take into consideration the central issues of doctoral supervision and offer content and educational concepts that are adapted to the respective qualification goals. The DHV seminar and the workshop offered by QualitätsZirkel Promotion, to the development of which I contributed, are examples of this. The cooperation with Ute Noack, during which we developed workshops tailored to Universität Göttingen’s needs and which we have held successfully on various occasions since 2014, is another example.

supervision and to enable them to adapt and successfully apply these concepts. It is an *integrated approach* consisting of 5 key modules:

- *International developments* in doctoral supervision,
- The *supervisory biography* – a monitoring and overview tool that helps doctoral supervisors and candidates keep an overview of the doctoral process in all its phases, individual elements as well as additional supervision and qualification instruments
- The supervisor's changing roles and the importance of clarifying *mutual expectations* and building a productive *supervisor-supervisee relationship*
- The criteria, strategies and techniques of *selecting* doctoral candidates
- Identification of early *warning signs* and *analysis* and *solution* of problems during the supervision of the doctoral project.

The modules of the workshop are integrated, meaning that their content and the supervisory skills they cover are mutually interconnected and interdependent, in order to benefit from the synergy effects that a highly productive and successful supervision process and relationship entail.

Two elements are key to the success of supervisor training: on the one hand, it requires detailed explanations of professional knowledge and tying this in with the participant's experience as a supervisor; and on the other hand an approach that encourages and enables participants to sharpen their sensitivity and awareness for the responsibilities and challenges of doctoral supervision, using their own issues, expectations and ideas as a basis, and to develop the right techniques for analysing and solving problems. To this end, the workshop includes teamwork sessions after each module is presented and discussed. One of the major advantages of such workshops is that they afford an opportunity for supervisors, who are often left unsupported when problems with supervision occur, to discuss supervision models and exchange experiences across disciplines without being subject to the usual time constraints.

To conclude the workshop, the participants go through a one-hour 'Intervision' exercise, a peer consulting practice session, introducing them to the concept of peer consulting or a coaching technique for groups. The session presents a problematic case in doctoral supervision and the participants develop solutions together. The workshop also contains an introduction into English literature on doctoral supervision and shows where to find extensive materials and resources online, and how working with a tool kit (containing e.g. worksheets, check lists, questionnaires, guidelines and form templates, for instance for progress reports) can simplify and structure doctoral supervision.

In the follow-up workshop, supervisors discuss their experiences, strategies and successes achieved by applying the suggestions and insights of the workshop. They talk about cases and problems in further intensive 'Intervision' sessions. This workshop is also aimed at intensifying the use of supervisory tools and conveys the skills required to create custom supervisory tools tailored to the individual requirements.

The goal of these workshop concepts is to help supervisors understand and appreciate the value and the conditions for success, not only of the necessary individual elements and modules, but of a comprehensive supervision *culture*, which they create and invent through their individual and joint activities. Against this backdrop, using the term '*professionalisation*' in the workshop title was a deliberate and firm decision, underlining how training the skills necessary to offer outstanding doctoral supervision is more than exchanging a few formulas, tips and tricks. It's about the self-perception and awareness of supervisors for the joint development of individual and institutional capacities for doctoral supervision at a high level. It is about a *professional* aspiration and a mutual understanding by everyone involved that excellent quality doctorates can only be achieved through cooperation and the creativity of the supervisors. Only they are ultimately able to develop the necessary concepts and supervision tools, as well as to disseminate them. This overriding qualification objective concerns the transformation of the supervisors' self-image to being designers and creators of innovative and effective supervision concepts and sensitive advisors to their doctoral candidates.

I would like to demonstrate such an approach through an example of best practice, which is currently running at Rovira i Virgili University in Tarragona as a three-year pilot project for the qualification of doctoral supervisors. The university avoided the mistake of offering only occasional supervisor training sessions for some individuals at the university. Instead, they began with the strategic idea that the qualification of doctoral supervisors can only lead to a lasting change and improve supervision culture if the workshop programme includes a sufficiently large number particularly of younger supervisors within a foreseeable time frame. So, as a medium-sized university, we set ourselves the ambitious, but still realistic goal to train 120 supervisors in 5 workshop cycles, each with two initial and one follow-up workshop, between 2012 and 2015. What was remarkable was that after the second workshop cycle, the participants came together and formed a „*community of best practice in research supervision*“, which meets for regular „*supervisors lunch time meetings*“ to discuss and exchange experiences beyond the workshop setting.

This is an excellent example of how workshops on doctoral supervision can inspire new, more comprehensive supervision concepts and strategies. It shows how some very committed young or experienced supervisors take the matter in hand with the assistance of the university administration, the doctoral school and the centre of excellence campus, and can help to bring about a long-term comprehensive approach to doctoral supervision. In Tarragona, this includes the workshop programme "*Training for Trainers of Supervisors*" (TTS) launched in autumn 2014, in which four of the participants of the previous workshops have been trained to become future supervision coaches in a basic workshop, with exercises for independently developing modules and through subsequent training assistantships.

The feedback on the effect of the workshops was hugely positive and encouraging. Participants report that the changes in their supervision strategies and way of communicating resulted in a marked improvement of the supervisory relationship as early as the first weeks after the workshop. The motivation and productivity of their doctoral candidates also increased, and poor decisions in the selection processes as well as problems and conflicts in supervisions could be identified early so that they could either be avoided all together or were much easier to resolve.²

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² A video by the University of Tarragona gives you additional insight on this best practice example:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iv78-esXsQ

Fig.6: Overview „Which Supervisor Do I Want To Be?“ (from the workshop with Helmut Brentel)

Which Supervisor Do I Want To Be?

Development of professional knowledge, skills, processes and tools

Supervision as balance and process

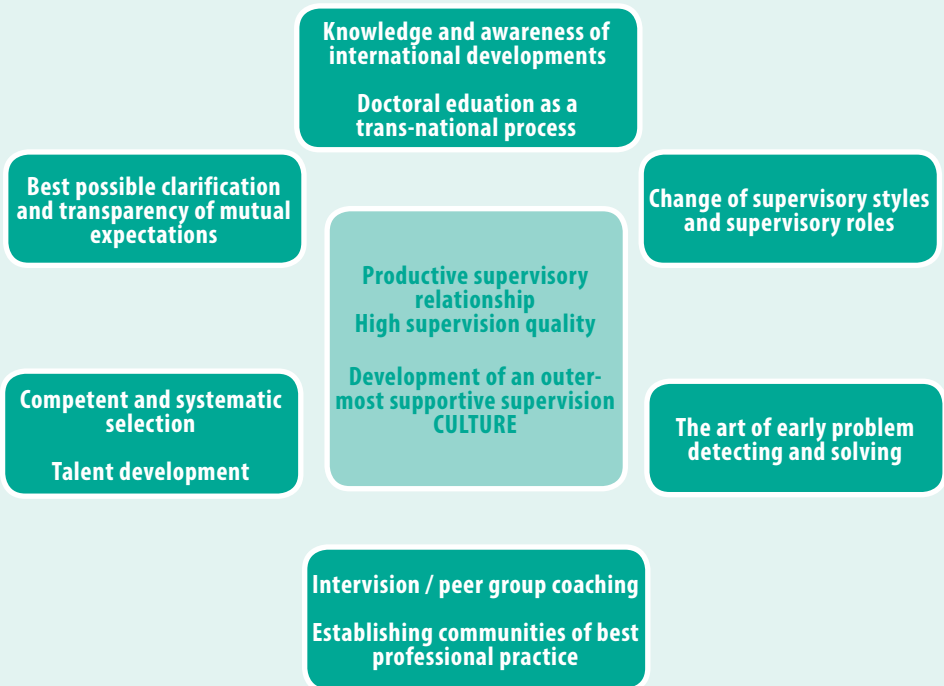


Fig.7: Overview „How to Achieve Outstanding Quality in Research Supervision“
(From a presentation by Helmut Brentel, 2014)

How to Achieve Outstanding Quality in Research Supervision

Cultivating the Research Mindset by Providing an Integrated Set of Actions, Measures and Tools

Training for Supervisors

- Initial and Advanced Training
- Follow-Up Workshops
- Lunch Time Meetings
- Peer Group Supervision
- Training for Trainers of Supervisors

Guidance and Commitment

- Mission and Vision
- Commitment of University's Top Management
- Mobilising the University's Actor System

Monitoring and Reporting

- Doctoral Agreement
- Supervision Guidelines/ Code of Practice
- Self-Assessment
- Meeting Protocols
- Annual Progress Report
- Midterm Evaluation

Advice and Information

- Graduate School Starter Kit
- Supervision Workshops for Doctoral Candidates
- Websites
- Literature on Supervision

Establishing an Outermost Supportive Supervision CULTURE

Internationalisation

- Workshops on Supervising International Doctoral Candidates
- Best Practice Partnerships

Awards and Rewards

- Supervisor of the Year Awards
- Reduction of Teaching Load

Management and Organisation

- Core Responsibility of Doctoral School
- Annual Development Plan
- Sustainability of Actions, Measures and Services

Quality Assurance

- Innovative Key Performance Indicators
- Exit Questionnaire
- Tracking
- Transparency of Criteria and Procedures

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