

EPFL Doctoral School

The supervisory relationship: a tool for discussion

This document is intended to provide points for discussion during the initial meeting between thesis director and doctoral candidate. It is neither obligatory nor is it intended as a formal agreement. It should be taken as applicable within the norms and constraints of the discipline concerned.

The doctorate is a professional experience which develops high-level scientific skills as well as generic skills which are of value in employment in every socio-economic sector. It entails (1) the development and performance of an original and innovative research project, and (2) an individual program of higher education in support of a research project and the development of the doctoral candidate's professional abilities.

The doctoral candidate:

1. **Takes responsibility** for his/her thesis. What are the expectations for, and limits to, the doctoral candidate's independence? What can he/she expect from the thesis director in terms of advice, guidance and overall supervision of the candidate's research, coursework and teaching activities?
2. Has the **primary objective** to submit a good thesis **on time**.
3. **Displays initiative** – the doctoral student drives the process and strives to understand the research area.
4. **Develops critical thinking** in order to assess his/her own work and results, as well as those of existing literature, in a critical and honest manner.
5. **Works constructively, productively and proactively** with the thesis director and colleagues to support good working relationships. The candidate endeavors to **help younger colleagues** by engaging them in discussions, demonstrations, or interacting with them socially.
6. Participates in **external forums** such as conferences, scientific journals, seminars and workshops. To what degree can the doctoral candidate expect to present their original research or publish a paper during the course of their degree? What are the disciplinary and other constraints on this process? What are the benefits to the candidate in engaging in this process? Will refereed and accepted papers be reviewed by examiners to assess the technical merits of the candidate's work?
7. **Keeps up with the literature** – by reviewing publications and conference proceedings.
8. Where applicable, keeps a **lab notebook** by maintaining a daily log book of his/her research activities. The lab notebook is intended for the candidate to track and report the progress of his/her research and to document possible inventions. To what extent are lab notebooks used in the research group? Where they are used, what are the expectations within the research group?
9. Informs his/herself of the EPFL **ethical guidelines** and the **scientific code of conduct** and follows them in all his/her activities while a doctoral candidate and in his/her future career.
10. **Is aware of safety** by taking the appropriate training courses and following the safety procedures for his/her research unit and for EPFL at all times.
11. Engages with dedication and enthusiasm in the **teaching activities** he/she is asked to perform, under the supervision of the thesis director or that of another professor or lecturer.
12. Manages his/her own career progression, including the setting of realistic career goals, the identification of own academic and transferable skills, and how best to improve them.

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The thesis director:

1. **Supports** the doctoral candidate, both intellectually and personally. To what extent will he/she guide, advise and oversee the research, coursework and teaching activities towards successful completion of the doctorate? What expectations and constraints does he/she have with regard to the encouragement of a constructive and productive working environment?
2. Supports the candidate's efforts to **outline** a viable project and initial work-plan for research and coursework over a four-year period, and ensures that the candidate has a clear idea of the common aims and objectives.
3. **Helps and guides the candidate** in accordance with his/her progress. To what extent will the candidate's working independence be encouraged? With what frequency and intensity can supervision be expected? How will this support modulate according to the candidate's confidence in his/her own abilities and research skills, and to enable independence and autonomy?
4. **Reviews the candidate's progress** at regular periods, including discussing with the candidate the requirements for definitive admission and for submission of the thesis.
5. **Is available** to meet with the candidate on a regular basis to discuss his/her work. What are the expectations and constraints with regard to discussions of research problems at relatively short notice? Who might be an appropriate substitute when the thesis director is not available?
6. Provides an **environment that encourages the candidate to develop his/her skills** – in scientific and engineering analysis, technical writing, oral presentation, teaching, problem definition, and critical literature reviews.
7. Where applicable, fosters the doctoral candidate's participation in **external forums** such as attendance or presentations at conferences, seminars and workshops, and publications in scientific journals. To what extent will the thesis director help the candidate prepare for such activities? What are the thesis director's expectations of the candidate in respect of the latter's participation in such forums?
8. Discusses with the candidate whether there is a need for a **thesis co-director**. In ordinary circumstances, the thesis co-director will work in collaboration with the thesis director to assure the candidate's day-to-day supervision and will be significantly involved in the preparation of the thesis. The thesis director will nevertheless retain overall responsibility for the candidate's supervision and the relevant administrative processes.
9. Ensures that the doctoral candidate has **adequate funding** for his/her research activities and that it meets EPFL standards.
10. **Reads the thesis** thoroughly, and makes constructive comments on both style and intellectual content.
11. Encourages the doctoral candidate to plan for his/her **future career** in academia or the private and public sectors, and supports the candidate in this endeavor within the scope of his/her abilities.

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