Republika e Kosovës

Republika Kosova - Republic of Kosovo

Agjencia e Kosovës për Akreditim
Agencija Kosova za Akreditaciju
Kosovo Accreditation Agency

STANDARDS FOR EVALUATION OF DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES

KOSOVO ACCREDITATION AGENCY

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PREAMBLE

Doctoral education is an important segment of higher education system, connecting education, research and innovation. It is an essential part of the traditional identity of a university and, in the majority of European countries only universities can award a doctoral degree. Because of its nature, which is training through research, doctoral education has to be differentiated from the first and second cycle, namely bachelors and masters degrees. Over the last two decades universities have made great efforts to enhance their quality assurance systems and, accordingly, doctoral education has to be focused on quality as well. European practice shows that higher education institutions have been giving a great deal of attention to accountability and quality enhancement relevant for all three cycles. Doctoral programmes need to be developed and maintained by meeting a number of criteria but it is important to bear in mind that research is at the core of doctoral education. Due to that, elements of the quality process are different from the first two cycles and specific for doctoral programmes.

The Kosovo higher education system has been working intensively on improving quality assurance systems in higher education institutions which are facing many challenges, social, economic, structural. Being a country in the process of change, with a growing number of higher education institutions and a high percentage of young people entering higher education, so far, the focus has, primarily, been on bachelor and master level programmes. With an increased institutional awareness of a need for quality programmes and increased institutional motivation to enrol and train more doctoral candidates, it has been recognised that doctoral programmes need to be evaluated and accredited with reference to doctoral-specific standards.

The *Kosovo Accreditation Agency* has identified the key challenges facing the nation's higher education provision. Doctoral education is one of these priorities. Existing legislation on higher education has already covered some aspects of doctoral education and some doctoral programmes have already been accredited under that legislation. The new Standards seek to extend and develop the scope of that legislation in order to further enhance the quality of doctoral programmes. The new Standards are also expected to provide a framework which will facilitate the establishment of more doctoral programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Doctoral education represents the third cycle of higher education studies an, as such, serves to link the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with the European Research Area (ERA). Thus, doctoral education has an important role to play in creating new knowledge and contributing to a knowledge-based society. Traditionally, doctoral degree holders predominantly remained in academia as researchers and teachers. Today, however, graduates of doctoral education should be prepared for a wide range of careers, including those outside academia. In order to prepare them for these wider roles and responsibilities, doctoral education requires a number of changes and to be structured in order to support the more varied mission of a modern doctoral education.

European doctoral education has been in continuous process of change since 2005. Almost all European universities participated in this process and have focused efforts on restructuring and refining the content to meet the more diverse range of careers that such award holders will be following. Special attention has been given to the establishment of dedicated doctoral schools that are in evidence in more than 85% of European universities.

European universities, as well as relevant associations and bodies, such as the European *University Association Council for Doctoral Education* support heterogeneity in institutional organisation, but all universities share a commitment to quality and a similar view of the required outcomes from such programmes. Such an approach raised a threshold for quality on one side, while on the other, it enabled mobility and more collaboration between institutions. It also facilitated a variety of formats of research environment for doctoral candidates, including establishment of joint doctoral programmes. This is certainly a powerful tool in institutional and individual enrichment, in particular when an institution is aiming to increase its research capacity. While doctoral education is a global endeavour, it is also an important factor in enabling universities to be a key regional player for societal and economic development.

Doctoral education offers training through research for research, and it is in its essence very different from the two first cycles that are based on teaching. It should also be adaptable to individual needs, allowing doctoral candidates to choose their own path and to navigate through selected fields of research. It is a very demanding higher education process and requires higher education institutions to be prepared, with different skills and tools. Thus, doctoral education places demands on institutions as well as on the supervisor and doctoral candidate.

The present document provides a set of standards for doctoral programmes (PhD programmes) regardless of the research field. The stated Standards are based on relevant European policy papers on doctoral education, various recommendations and guidelines, and established good practice in European institutions. The rationale for the Standards and the Standards themselves, were presented to representatives of Kosovo higher education institutions in October to December 2019. The resulting feedback has informed this final version. Further feedback was obtained following the placing of the draft document on the KAA website. This offered all stakeholders the opportunity to comment and make suggestions. The final version of the Standards has been adopted by the State Council of Quality, on 25.06.2020, and put in to force on 25.06.2020.

The Standards cover seven major components. Each component is divided into two types of standards: ***Core*** *and* ***Supplementary****. While core standards* must be met in the process of evaluation*, supplementary standards* offer other desirable features that reflect good practice followed in many European universities.

COMPLIANCE LEVEL

The standards are divided in to two types, core and supplementary. There are, in total, ***52 standards: 36 core*** and ***16 supplementary*** standards. All the core standards are obligatory in order to achieve a positive evaluation. A doctoral programme can be accredited in the case of full or substantial compliance.

FULLY COMPLIANT

To be fully compliant, doctoral programme must meet **all the core** standards and at least **12 of the supplementary** standards.

SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLIANT

To be substantially compliant, **all the core standards must be met**. In addition, between **1** and **11** of the **supplementary standards** must be met.

PARTIALLY COMPLIANT

If the programme **meets some but not all of the core** standards, it will be evaluated as a partially compliant, **regardless of the number of supplementary** standards met. If the programme is evaluated as partially compliant, it cannot be accredited and the evaluation process must to be repeated to gain full compliance.

NON-COMPLIANT

A programme that **fails to meet any core standards**, regardless of how many supplementary standards it meets, will be evaluated as non-compliant.

COMPLIANCE

FULL	*SUBSTANTIAL*	*PARTIAL*
Core **36**	*Core* **36**	*Core* ***35 or fewer***
+	+	+
Supplementary	*Supplementary*	*Supplementary*
12 or more	Between 1 and 11	Any number

PERIOD OF ACCREDITATION

For **fully compliant** programmes accreditation will normally be for three or five years.

For **substantially compliant** programmes, accreditation will normally be for a period of three years.
For **partially compliant** programmes accreditation will not be awarded.

For **non-compliant** programmes accreditation will not be awarded.

THE STANDARDS

1 INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE, ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT AND FUNDING

CORE

1.1 The institution* has established institutional regulations for doctoral programmes that are either a) part of the existing regulations, but as a separate named section, or b) a free-standing document

1.2 The institution has allocated sufficient human (academic and administrative), spatial, physical and financial resources, specifically to support its doctoral programmes.

1.3 The institution has sufficient academic staff with a doctoral degree so that at least 50% of courses at doctoral level are delivered by academic staff from that institution. Further, at least 5 academic staff must have a PhD in the research field of the doctoral programme and have at least 3 papers, as first or corresponding author, published in international relevant publications in the last 5 years. Relevance of publications is defined according to international criteria for the particular field of science- indexed in WoS[1] and/or SCOPUS[2]).

**The institution may be a university, faculty, department, depending who is the main organiser and carrier of the PhD programme; while disciplinary programmes are usually organised by the department, or faculty, interdisciplinary programmes may be inter-departmental, inter-faculty or university-level.*

SUPPLEMENTARY

1.4 The institution conducts regular reviews and updating of the programme.

1.5 Doctoral education opportunities are shown on the institutional website, in an official language of Kosovo, and in English, and include all relevant information.

1.6 The Institution has a clear strategy for the delivery of its doctoral education. If this is embedded in a general institutional strategy, it is explicitly recognised in a separate section.

[1] WoS (SCIE, SSCI and AHCI)
[2] SCOPUS (excluding predatory journals or publishers)

2 SELECTION AND ADMISSION CRITERIA

CORE

2.1 Doctoral candidates must be selected on the basis of a competitive and transparent process.

2.2 Applicants for a doctoral programme must have an educational level equivalent to a masters degree.

2.3 In the selection process doctoral candidates' potential for research should be assessed

2.4 Applicants must be able to demonstrate a satisfactory working knowledge of English

SUPPLEMENTARY

2.5 Both, full-time and part-time doctoral candidates must have a clearly defined time for completion of their studies.

3 DOCTORAL PROGRAMME STRUCTURE/CONTENT

CORE

3.1 Doctoral programmes must be research-based although they may include course work and other activities that contribute to critical thinking and the development of research skills.

3.2 Doctoral programmes must have a time limit of 3 or 4 years for full-time doctoral students and of 7 years for part-time students.

3.3 The programme should enable individual research opportunities; courses should not exceed 1/5 of ECTS (36 credits) of total credit hours or 20% of the total workload; programme must develop transferable skills, and provide sufficient training in the methodology, ethics and integrity of research.

3.4 The programme should encourage mobility and participation in learning opportunities in other institutions.

3.5 The programme must have an established process for monitoring the progress of doctoral candidates.

3.6 A doctoral candidate must have a supervisor/s allocated within the first 12 months.

3.7 Acceptance of a doctoral research proposal must be subject to clearly defined and transparent procedures.

SUPPLEMENTARY

3.8 Doctoral candidates' mentors and members of the doctoral committee should be involved in institutional bodies relevant for doctoral education.

3.9 Doctoral candidates should be allowed to take courses outside the institution, as well as afforded opportunities to gain other relevant experience, such as presentations at academic conferences, workshops and other relevant activities

3.10 The majority of course work should be based on tutorials, seminars, discussion groups, workshops and individual work rather than predominantly didactic methods of instruction.

3.11 There should be evidenced data collection on cohorts of doctoral candidates.

3.12* If there is insufficient research capacity the institution is considering different approaches, such as joint programmes, collaborative programmes); a serious endeavour needs to be documented (please, see S 4.5).

4 RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT/CAPACITY

CORE

4.1 Infrastructure and facilities must be up-to-date and compatible with the area of research of a whole doctoral programme and doctoral research projects.

4.2 It must be evident, and clearly documented, that research is performed according to international ethical standards.

4.3 An Ethics Committee should be responsible for approving research involving humans and animals. Members must be active researchers, with publications in relevant international journals with no record of any kind of misconduct of research, plagiarism or any other ethical issue, no identified conflict of interest, and committed to data protection.

4.4 No supervisor should have more than three doctoral candidates.

SUPPLEMENTARY

4.5* In case of a need to up-grade research capacity, a joint doctoral programme with another university, preferably from abroad could be accepted (the whole programme with all the components needs to be documented, following all the applicable standards); other forms of collaboration with other institutions from abroad may also be acceptable.

4.6 Taking in to account the field of research, employment opportunities, and its research capacity, the institution should consider the scheduling of enrolment of new cohorts of students.

4.7 The institution should support research quality by requesting and reporting on research-paper quality and publication, external research funding, the establishment of research groups, etc.

5 SUPERVISION

CORE

5.1 A doctoral candidate must have at least one supervisor (two is advisable), covering the research area/topic that is the focus of his/her doctoral research.

5.2 Supervisors must be a member of academic staff of the institution, hold a PhD and an approved academic title, be an active researcher, with a minimum of three years' research experience following the award of his/her PhD; he or she must have at least 3 papers published in international relevant publications in the last 5 years (relevance of publications is defined according to international criteria for the particular field of science- indexed in WoS and/or SCOPUS).

5.3 Supervisors must have experience in research projects and participation in international academic conferences and workshops relevant to the field.

5.4 The number of doctoral candidates per supervisor should be compatible with the overall work load of a supervisor.

5.5 Supervisors and doctoral candidates must meet regularly (at the very least monthly) to discuss the candidates' research and monitor progress. These meetings must be documented.

5.6 Responsibilities of the institution, supervisor and doctoral student must be set out clearly in a policy document.

SUPPLEMENTARY

5.7 The Institution provides professional development opportunities for supervisors.

5.8 Participation in international academic networks and similar activities should be documented.

6 ASSESSMENT

CORE

6.1 Doctoral candidates are supported and required to publish at least 1 paper as a first or corresponding author in a peer-reviewed journal relevant to the field (indexed in WoS and/or SCOPUS).

6.2 Doctoral candidates must confirm that the doctoral thesis is their original work.

6.3 Doctoral candidates must submit their thesis to the doctoral committee within the stipulated time frame and participate in an oral public defence.

6.4 The institution must have a clearly documented protocol for the assessment process including the composition of the evaluation committee, which should comprise at least three members

6.5 The institution must have clear criteria for the assessment of doctoral theses

6.6 The institution must have clear regulations governing the instance of a negative assessment.

6.7 Institutions must have clear policies and procedures to address any kind of misconduct such as unethical practice, plagiarism, fabrication of data, etc.

6.8 All the members of the committee for the evaluation of the public defence must be established authorities in the research field. The committee must have at least one external member from a domestic or international institution.

6.9 A supervisor may not serve as a member of the evaluation committee.

SUPPLEMENTARY

None

7 DOCTORAL RESEARCH OUTCOME

CORE

7.1 The final outcome of the doctoral programme is a thesis. There is no singular, stipulated, format for the thesis. However, the copy must be publicly available. This may be on-line, but a hardcopy must be held in the institution's library and elsewhere, as deemed appropriate.

7.2 The thesis should reflect original thinking and represent a valuable addition to the knowledge base of the topic

7.3 Doctoral programmes should provide a successful candidate with a set of competences that will provide him, or her, with a choice of career paths.

SUPPLEMENTARY

7.4 Where a doctoral candidate does not complete his/her PhD studies successfully

the institution may wish to consider issuing a certificate recording the courses he/she attended during the course of study.

7.5 There is a defined procedure for the assessment and public defence in cases where the result may lead to the application and award of a patent.

GLOSSARY

- ***Critical mass**. In doctoral education, the size and number of resources (equipment, facilities, students, academic staff, supervisors, etc.) needed to produce top-quality research.
- ***Doctoral (PhD) candidate**. A person enrolled on a doctoral programme, conducting research and aiming to defend a thesis and to be awarded a doctorate.
- ***Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**). Type of doctorate, and the highest academic degree, awarded by universities and which is a minimum requirement for starting an academic career or becoming a researcher in various scientific fields.
- ***Doctoral programme**. An organised set of courses and research opportunities within one or more disciplines (e.g. a single-discipline programme in early modern literature, or an inter-disciplinary doctoral programme in computer linguistics).
- ***Joint doctoral programme.*** A PhD programme that has been developed jointly by two or more universities; it is a doctoral degree awarded by two or more institutions who share the responsibilities of supervision, coordination and assessment, of doctoral candidates' research.
- ***Research misconduct.*** This is unacceptable practice that occurs when an individual deliberately, dangerously or negligently deviates from the accepted practices to be followed in carrying out research. This may include plagiarism, fabrication and falsification of the data and results.
- ***Supervision**. Interaction in the form of coaching, monitoring and support between responsible supervisor(s) and the doctoral candidate, as opposed to taught courses or technical activities.
- ***Transferable skills**. Skills learned in one context (e.g. research) that are useful in another, including employment in the private or public sector, in areas such as science, business or governmental and local community organisations. They make it possible to develop, and apply, both subject-specific and research-related skills effectively.

* *This part of the Glossary is taken from the Further development of doctoral education, outcomes of the UZDOC project, Kovacevic, M. and Mihaljevic, S. (2016).*

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