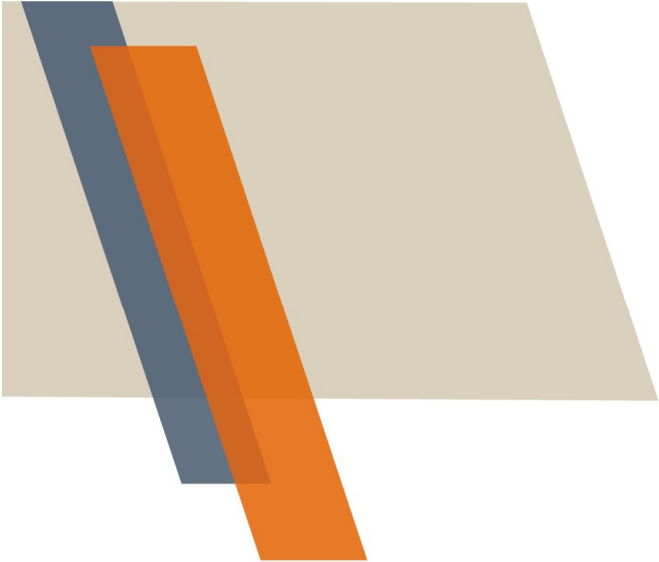




Guidelines on the Qualification of Doctoral Researchers

Weizenbaum Institute

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Change history

Date	Version	Created by	Description of changes
27 March 2026	2	Hanna Krasnova, Stefanie Regel, Herbert Zech	\ Merging of the documents “Guidelines for Doctoral Researchers” and “Guidelines for the Supervision of Doctoral Researchers” into a single document, including necessary content and editorial adjustments \ Incorporation of relevant recommendations on the qualification of doctoral researchers, in particular those of the German Research Council (2023) and UniWiND (2025) \ Addition of an overview of contact and support structures
29 November 2021	1	Julian Vuorimäki, Thorsten Thiel, Hanna Krasnova, Andrea Hamm, Jana Gundlach, Simon Schrör, Gesche Joost, Claudia Oellers	Drafting of two separate documents: \ Guidelines for doctoral researchers at the WI \ Guidelines for the supervision of doctoral researchers at the WI

Foreword

At the Weizenbaum Institute (WI), doctoral projects hold a special place. On the one hand, they are a prerequisite for a future career within, and often also outside, academia and the associated innovation processes for future societal and technological developments. On the other hand, they are an integral and fundamental part of the institution's research activities. It is therefore our aim to ensure the academic quality of doctoral project and to create an optimal doctoral environment in which doctoral researchers receive the best possible support both in carrying out their research projects and in their professional development. With the following guidelines, we therefore aim to:

- \ provide doctoral researchers and supervisors with guidance on the fundamental principles and framework conditions for doctorates at the WI;
- \ establish a shared understanding of doctorates, including clear, mutual expectations between doctoral researchers and supervisors from the start to the completion of the doctoral programme;
- \ establish reliable supervision and qualification structures.

The guidelines are based on the recommendations for the qualification of doctoral researchers issued by the Universitätsverbands zur Qualifizierung von Wissenschaftler:innen in frühen Karrierephasen in Deutschland [University Association for the Training of Early-Career Researchers in Germany] (UniWinD e. V., 2025) and on the guidelines on the completion of doctorates by the Wissenschaftsrats [German Research Council] (2023). They set out qualification objectives for doctoral researchers and provide guidance on doctoral supervision to help create an optimal doctoral environment.

The legal framework for doctorates and the resulting formal requirements are generally set out in the doctoral regulations of the respective institutions authorised to award doctorates at which the doctoral examination is held. The WI's guidelines supplement these regulations and requirements without claiming to have formal binding force. Applicable requirements regarding the qualification of doctoral researchers at the consortium partners also apply at the WI and may, provided they do not have clear precedence – as is particularly the case with doctoral regulations – be used to supplement the present guidelines.

The guidelines thus form a common consensus on the conduct of doctoral projects at the WI and on the attainment of academic independence, demonstrably through the award of a doctoral degree by an institution authorised to award doctorates.

*Prof. Hanna Krasnova and Prof. Herbert Zech
Spokespersons for the Career Development Working Group*

1. Principles of Research at the Weizenbaum Institute

The research work of doctoral researchers is guided by five core principles: **openness, participation, transfer, diversity and scientific integrity**. Our aim is to practise excellent, socially relevant and open science in an inclusive, collaborative environment. Doctoral researchers contribute to this not only through their research, but also through their engagement within the institute and beyond.

The WI strives to conduct excellent basic research using **open data and content**, and to make research results freely accessible and reusable. Open-access publications, open data and software, as well as the relevant infrastructure and funding measures, are specifically supported.

The research projects are deliberately designed to be **participatory**, through joint collaborations within the research groups, dialogue with stakeholders from other sectors, and targeted knowledge transfer activities. Our research aims to draw inspiration from society, business and politics, whilst also feeding back into these areas, thereby facilitating a two-way transfer of knowledge. Doctoral researchers are encouraged to raise the profile of their research, identify relevant fields of application and develop their own knowledge transfer profile. The WI supports these activities through qualification programmes, its own initiatives, and the expansion of partnerships with social institutions and other stakeholders. At the same time, participatory structures are institutionally embedded (e.g. through committees, staff surveys), in which doctoral researchers can also participate.

Interdisciplinarity is a core feature of the WI and stems from its research focus and network structure. Interdisciplinarity is actively promoted, but doctoral projects must have a clear disciplinary foundation in a primary academic subject. Due to the higher demands involved, such projects receive more intensive supervision and are supported through exchange formats.

Diversity encompasses equal opportunities, freedom from discrimination and inclusion, with the Institute following the diversity strategy of TU Berlin (see Diversity Strategy – Equal Opportunities at the Technical University of Berlin). The measures include, amongst other things, ensuring a balanced gender ratio, work-life balance, as well as mentoring and further qualification opportunities.

Scientific integrity forms the basis of trustworthy science. The principles of scientifically sound conduct are legally binding in the “Code of conduct for safeguarding good research practice at the Weizenbaum Institute” (WI Code, 2023) and form the basis for doctoral project.

2. Framework conditions for doctoral researchers at the Weizenbaum Institute

The promotion of academic talent and their careers is a key objective of the WI. The doctorate is regarded as a central phase of qualification and is implemented in cooperation with the consortium partners and other institutions. It is important to us to attract and support outstanding talents in digitalisation research and to offer them attractive, fair and, as far as possible, uniform framework conditions. These guidelines establish binding standards for the qualification of doctoral researchers without restricting their individual career paths.

\ Doctoral environment and specific features of the WI

Research work of high academic quality and, where possible, an interdisciplinary nature is expected in order to reflect the institute's profile. The WI's **network structure** requires both initiative and personal responsibility, alongside close supervision of doctoral researchers. Tailored qualification opportunities are available to support the individual professional development of doctoral researchers. The completion of the doctoral project is the central task of the doctoral researchers. Doctoral projects are primarily conducted within the research groups, which serve as a forum for academic exchange. The scope of doctoral researchers' group work should be structured in such a way that sufficient time remains for the doctoral project and that synergies arise from group work and the doctoral project. In addition, there is the opportunity to participate in knowledge transfer activities, the time commitment for which should be taken into account when planning the project. The interests of doctoral researchers are represented by elected **doctoral researcher representatives** at the Institute.

\ Funding and duration of doctorates

The WI aims to provide reliable employment conditions for doctoral researchers and funding for the standard duration of a doctorates in Germany, which are up to five years. All doctoral researchers are integrated into the WI's research environment, regardless of their contractual status, and are entitled to access to infrastructure, resources and supervision. Supervisory relationships are generally continued even in the event of a change of supervisor or institutional changes; where necessary, support is provided in finding a replacement supervisor. A family-related interruption of the doctorate is taken into account within the framework of statutory regulations. In the case of an externally funded doctoral researcher, the WI may consider providing final funding.

The planned **duration** of the doctoral project should be clearly defined from the outset, and the doctorate should ideally be completed within 5 years. The aim is to complete the doctorate within the standard timeframe. Any deviations from this must be justified.

\ Well-being and work culture

The WI emphasises the importance of mental and physical health as a prerequisite for successful research. The working conditions and qualification opportunities here take into account the needs of researchers, particularly doctoral researchers, and offer targeted support and counselling services. The WI's work **culture** is based on collegiality, transparency, fairness and a willingness to engage in dialogue. Abuse of power, sexual harassment and discrimination are expressly not tolerated. In the event of such an incident, independent points of contact (e.g. confidential advisors and ombudspersons) are available.

3. Supervision of doctorates

The core of a doctorate is independent research work. Supervisors promote the academic independence of doctoral researchers and support the progress of the doctoral project through ongoing academic guidance. The **primary supervisor for a doctoral researcher** should be appointed within six months of the start of the doctoral project where possible, and is usually a Principal Investigator or research group leader based at the WI, provided this meets the requirements of the relevant doctoral regulations. Any potential dual roles as supervisor and line manager must be handled transparently. It is recommended that an **independent co-supervisor** be involved to bring in additional subject-specific and interdisciplinary perspectives and to prevent any potential conflicts of interest. Supervision arrangements involving external professors are expressly encouraged. The doctoral regulations of the institution authorised to award doctorates at which the doctoral examination is to be undertaken are decisive for doctoral requirements and supervision. Supervision at the WI is based on continuous, transparent dialogue in accordance with the rules of good academic practice (WI Code, 2023). In the case of interdisciplinary doctoral projects, the different academic cultures are taken into account.

If internal supervision is not possible for academic or other reasons, an **external doctorate** with external supervisors may be undertaken. In this case, it must be ensured at an early stage (within the first three months) that external supervisors are familiar with the WI's structures, that the procedure is agreed in advance, and that relevant departments (Human Resources and Career Development) are informed.

If a **change of supervisor** becomes necessary during the doctorate (e.g. due to changes in the research project), the change should take place at an early stage and with the agreement of all parties involved. In the event of disagreements, advisory services may be consulted in confidence. In the event of serious problems (e.g. research misconduct), an ombudsperson and, where appropriate, the Human Resources department must be involved to discuss the continuation of the doctoral project.

\ Role and responsibilities of supervisors

Doctoral supervision is a collaborative and active process in which expectations and responsibilities are communicated transparently and a collegial working relationship is fostered. Supervisors are supported through professional development and peer mentoring programmes and are responsible for ensuring high academic standards and the timely completion of the doctorate. The key responsibilities of supervisors include, in particular:

- \ **providing academic guidance for the doctoral project** through a structured process, including a documented initial meeting within the first three months to discuss the topic, structure and timetable of the project, regular progress meetings (at least every six months) until the completion of the doctoral degree, as well as advice on implementation and publication;
- \ **promoting the development of an academic profile** and supporting further career development within or outside academia, including facilitating participation in professional development opportunities;
- \ **networking opportunities for doctoral researchers** through participation in academic events, visiting scholarships and support in building their own networks;
- \ **support for transfer activities** aimed at utilising research results and their application in various sectors of society (e.g. politics, business).

\ Role and responsibilities of doctoral researchers

Doctoral researchers bear primary responsibility for conducting independent, goal-oriented research in accordance with the guidelines and in line with the rules of good academic practice. In addition to their doctoral project, they undertake tasks within their research group in accordance with their employment contract and take personal responsibility for shaping their professional development and future career progression. Key requirements for doctoral researchers are:

- \ **compliance with the formal requirements** of the qualification phase, in particular the early selection of and enrolment at an institution authorised to award doctorates, as well as knowledge of and adherence to the relevant doctoral regulations;
- \ **engagement with the objectives and structure of the WI**, as well as support for knowledge transfer activities and participation in the institute's development in line with their individual capacities;
- \ **proactive communication** with supervisors, particularly in the event of difficulties or delays in the doctoral process.

The early involvement of a co-supervisor is recommended in order to secure additional subject-specific, interdisciplinary and career-related perspectives.

Primary supervisors, research group leaders and principal investigators should be involved in the selection process in an advisory and supportive capacity.

Furthermore, all doctoral researchers, regardless of their employment status, are obliged to report publications and awards related to their doctoral project to the WI for reporting purposes.

4. Continuing professional development and career support

\ WI Qualification Programme and Opportunities

The WI supports the career development of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers within and outside academia through a needs-based qualification programme and individual advisory services. As part of a central WI-specific qualification programme, subject-specific, interdisciplinary, transferable and communication skills are taught. The programme focuses in particular on:

- \ the development of **expert skills** in the field of digitalisation research and relevant methodological knowledge, including data management;
- \ the development of **interdisciplinary skills**, particularly with regard to academic presentation, project management, and career planning and development;
- \ the development of **science communication and transfer skills**, particularly within the local interdisciplinary context.

In addition, further training courses are available for supervisors (e.g. on topics relating to supervisory practice, team management and project management). An expanded interdisciplinary range of further qualification is provided through the cross-institutional, decentralised **Qualification Programme in Digitalisation Research (QPD)**, in cooperation with the Center for Advanced Internet Studies and the Bavarian Research Institute for Digital Transformation. The QPD enables the acquisition of fundamental and advanced skills in digitalisation research through a variety of teaching formats and brings together the expertise of the participating institutions. Participation in the qualification programmes is voluntary, but is recommended for building an individual skills profile as well as for networking. Doctoral researchers enrolled at one of Berlin's universities also have access to the continuing education programmes offered by the WI network partners.

The **Weizenbaum Early Career Researcher** Support Programme further supports the career development of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers through mentoring within and outside academia, whereby experiences regarding career paths and entry-level opportunities are reflected upon and shared.

\ Networking for doctoral researchers

The WI supports the internal and external networking of its doctoral researchers as a contribution to knowledge transfer. Various interdisciplinary events and collaborations with partner institutions offer opportunities for both exchange and networking. Furthermore, dedicated formats, such as the cross-institute digitalisation seminars **DigiSem/DigiMeet** or the institute-wide **Research Day**, address current developments and challenges in digitalisation, bring together multidisciplinary perspectives and strengthen inter- and transdisciplinary dialogue. They also contribute to the visibility of WI researchers and their achievements.

5. Internationalisation

The WI supports international cooperation, networks and mobility within its research focus on digitalisation. Key instruments include the **Outgoing Mobility Programme**, which supports the research activities of WI doctoral researchers at foreign research institutions. At the same time, the **Fellowship Programme** facilitates research visits by international visiting scholars at all career stages to the WI and contributes to further academic networking. Further measures include the expansion of strategic partnerships and the promotion of international academic dialogue (e.g. through conferences and summer schools). In addition, doctoral researchers are given the opportunity to participate in international conferences subject to available funding, and to engage an international co-supervisor, provided this is in accordance with the relevant doctoral regulations. Information on international exchange and funding programmes is also provided.

The WI fosters an **open, inclusive and welcoming culture** and provides particular support to international doctoral researchers as they enter the German academic system. The working languages are German and English. Key WI documents and regulations are provided in both languages where possible.

Validity: This document was adopted by the Executive Board and the Institute Council on 8 June 2026. A review of its content by the Career Development Working Group and the Management, as well as, where applicable, the WI Advisory Board, takes place at least every three years. If you have any queries, please contact the spokespersons of the Career Development Working Group and the relevant Career Development Officer.

Use: This document serves as a binding guide for current and future WI staff. It is used for information purposes and as a basis for discussion in staff recruitment procedures, including job interviews, at all stages of an academic career.

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