



Support Guidelines for Doctoral Researchers at the Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society

Editorial preface

This document deals with the practical scientific support provided by the Weizenbaum Institute (WI) during the writing of a dissertation in a research group at the WI. The broader framework of the doctorate and scientific research in the context of the structure and culture of the Institute as a whole and its research principles is presented and developed in the Guiding Principles for Doctoral Researchers at the Weizenbaum Institute (referred to in the following as Guiding Principles). Together, these two documents support the entire process of completing a doctorate through research work at the Institute – from synopsis to viva and publication. They deal with spheres of activity, explain expectations and formulate requirements.

Together, the Guiding Principles and Support Guidelines aim to help doctoral researchers and people involved in supporting doctoral researchers at the WI (reviewers, research group leaders, administrative staff) know what to expect from one another. **The doctoral regulations of the network partners should always take precedence when it comes to the legal framework of the doctorate and associated formal obligations** (see further information at the end of this document). The Guiding Principles and Support Guidelines of the WI supplement the applicable regulations of the network institutions without impinging on their normative force. They offer guidance, formulate offers and make suggestions for the support of doctorates.

Readers can address any questions they may have to the contact persons listed at the end of this document.

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Supporting doctorates

KEY TENETS

Support for a doctorate based on research work at the WI is usually carried out by one of the Principal Investigators based here. This does not rule out other forms of dissertation support, e.g. by external professors. Doctoral support by research group leaders is also possible, and may even be desirable and expected, depending on the research culture of the group.

Fundamentally, doctoral support is structured as a dialogic, active process between everyone involved. In order to emphasise transparency and collegiality between the researchers involved, and close collaboration with the network partners of the WI, this document and the accompanying Guiding Principles talk about “doctoral support” rather than “doctoral supervision” (see also GEW 2016). On the basis of transparency, collegiality and cooperation, the WI strives to make it possible for all doctoral researchers to complete their dissertations successfully.

NETWORK PARTNERS

The doctorate itself is completed in the context of the doctoral regulations of the institution where the doctoral researcher’s project has been registered. Further information concerning the WI’s network partners can be found at the end of this document, with relevant websites containing overviews of the doctoral regulations and related materials.

SUPPORT AGREEMENT

We recommend that each doctoral researcher and their support staff agree on and draw up or, as required, update their own support or target agreement (see also Leibniz 2019c, 6, 27; Scherpenberg et al. 2021; DFG 2021, 2). The agreement can encourage clear, intersubjectively comprehensible specifications and skills profiles for individual personnel development and facilitate cooperation with the doctoral support staff.

TASKS

The individuals involved in supporting a doctoral researcher are aware of the high responsibility associated with supporting a dissertation. The central tasks of everyone involved in doctoral support at the WI (especially reviewers, research group leaders and administrative staff) consist in

- \ providing disciplinary and interdisciplinary training for the doctoral researchers,
- \ supporting the doctoral researchers in the research and publication process and in introducing them to general procedures associated with research activities (especially academic self-management and teaching),
- \ helping with the organisation of resources (e.g. technical or financial resources),
- \ facilitating periods of research abroad and other training events,
- \ providing assistance with access to professional networks, or participating in and supporting academic lectures and formats, and

- \ creating opportunities for social participation and transfer, policy advice activities or commercial application opportunities.

GOOD SCIENTIFIC PRACTICE

In addition, the individuals involved ensure through ongoing, two-way, transparent communication, that they are meeting the relevant requirements in terms of all professional rules and overarching regulations, especially the Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice (DFG 2019). For instance, these guidelines aim to prevent abuse of power, as far as possible. Regulations and best practices of the network partners are also applied at the WI and can be used alongside these statements to help resolve problems, unless they clearly take precedence, as is the case with doctoral regulations, for instance (see e.g. WZB 2019).

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

During a doctorate at the WI, doctoral researchers also have important responsibilities within their support relationships. As well as their responsibility to conduct target-oriented research on their own initiative in the context of their doctorate and in collaborative networks (especially in the relevant research group), and their personal responsibility to seek out information on further training options, these responsibilities include in particular

- \ getting to grips with the formal requirements of this career phase (particularly the doctoral regulations),
- \ learning the aims and structures of research at the WI and
- \ acquiring basic knowledge about the organisation of the science system in Germany.

Finally, doctoral researchers are requested – partly in their own interest – to report any problems or major delays or unexpected setbacks in the research project to their first and/or second support person, other doctoral support staff or, in problematic cases, other responsible officers, e.g. the ombudspersons or confidential counsellors at the network partner or WI, at the earliest possible opportunity (see also Leibniz 2019c, 35-36).

SECOND DOCTORAL SUPPORT PERSON

We recommend that all doctoral researchers choose a second doctoral support person as early as possible. By having a second support person, doctoral researchers can secure additional support, e.g. for interdisciplinary work and crossing disciplinary boundaries, for international research collaborations, additional expertise requirements or other challenges that need to be tackled during the doctorate. First support persons, Principal Investigators and research group leaders should be involved in the selection process to provide advice and support.

The phases of a doctoral research project at the WI

Start of dissertation

ORIENTATION MEETING

A doctorate at the WI starts on the first day of employment. A meeting must be held with the relevant doctoral support staff within the first three months of employment. This first orientation meeting can also include a discussion of content-related ideas (project outline/synopsis). There should be a clear separation between the organisational aspects and the content-related aspects.

TIMETABLE AND MILESTONES

If the content is not discussed much at this first meeting, we encourage doctoral researchers to submit and discuss an outline – ideally including a timetable and milestones – in the following three to six months. The key outcomes of the orientation meeting can be documented by the doctoral researcher and submitted to the support person for information.

QUESTIONNAIRE

We recommend using these meetings to address the following questions and to come back to them regularly as the doctorate progresses:

- \ **Doctoral regulations:** What special requirements arise from the doctoral regulations of the relevant faculty? Is it possible to complete a doctorate with a monograph dissertation and/or a cumulative dissertation? Which specific requirements have to be met and, if relevant, by when?
- \ **Support person:** What content-related expectations do(es) the support person(s) have regarding the doctorate? How will participation in the doctoral seminar be organised, where relevant?
- \ **In the event of external support:** How can external support be organised to the benefit of everyone involved and how can integration at the WI and at other relevant locations be assured?
- \ **Research group:** What general expectations and requirements are there concerning involvement in research group activities? What is the expected ratio between group topics and individual doctoral work (e.g. in percentage of working time)? What are the expectations and requirements concerning involvement in other WI activities?
- \ **Seminars and conferences:** What possibilities are there for presenting the research in other scientific contexts (e.g. at conferences)? At what point does it make sense to start taking up these activities and what support can be provided?
- \ **Teaching:** Are there possibilities to teach during the doctoral period and what might teaching involvement look like in practice (e.g. co-teaching with research group leaders or Principal Investigators)?

- \ **Supporting degree dissertations:** Are there possibilities to support Bachelor's and/or Master's dissertations alongside research group leaders or Principal Investigators?
- \ **Interdisciplinarity:** What are the offers and expectations in terms of interdisciplinary research?
- \ **Transfer:** What are the offers and expectations in terms of transferring the doctoral researcher's own research into society?
- \ **Other specific Weizenbaum aspects:** Joint discussion of specific aspects of doctorates in the context of the WI

Main phase

CRITERIA

The main doctoral phase covers the period spent researching, developing and writing the dissertation. Depending on the discipline and underlying examination regulations, this can take the form of a monograph or a cumulative work. In addition, cumulative dissertations often involve several intensive research and writing phases that succeed one another like mini main phases. The doctoral support staff have a duty to support the doctoral researchers with their monograph or cumulative dissertation and with any questions that arise in the context of the doctorate.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY

There should be a particular focus on the balance between disciplinary and interdisciplinary work and between research for the dissertation and research for the research group (and associated demands), since these are central requirements of a WI doctorate. As explained in the Guiding Principles, a close connection is usually assured between the doctoral project and group project(s) from the start, so that doctoral researchers can report regularly on their research progress (and challenges) during research group meetings. In addition, doctoral researchers can use other meetings, e.g. meetings on cross-cutting research areas or the six-monthly Research Day, to present and discuss their own research findings.

PROGRESS MEETINGS

Generally, it is suggested that support staff arrange a progress meeting with the doctoral researchers at least quarterly or half-yearly. Where relevant, this can also take place in the context of a research retreat or similar feedback formats. One-to-one discussions are particularly valuable and there should be clear communication about the time constraints for arranging these. Depending on personal requirements and availabilities of the doctoral support staff, more frequent meetings can be advisable for the final phase – partly in the interests of ensuring successful, punctual submission of the dissertation.

The aim of the regular meetings is to discuss the progress of the dissertation and to advance joint research work; to support the doctoral researcher with their ongoing research and transfer activities, including issues such as future publications, participa-

tion in conferences and the development of transfer activities; to carry out academic career planning and, where relevant, to discuss teaching activities.

These meetings also offer an opportunity to talk about the weighting of dissertation time and other working time so that the doctoral researchers and reviewers are always aware of the current timetable for completing the dissertation, and to ensure that, generally, the target date for completing the doctorate is within the contract term. Requirements and options for additional academic education or further training should also be discussed. We advise the participants to keep minutes of the key outcomes of these meetings. This should increase the visibility of requirements and recommendations. Discussions should be conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

If a doctoral researcher's work takes on a significantly new direction or if personal circumstances (e.g. care responsibilities or family needs) are likely to result in medium- to long-term challenges, we expect the doctoral researcher to proactively seek a meeting with their support staff.

ENGAGING IN WI ACTIVITIES

It is part of a doctoral researcher's duty – especially if they are funded by the WI – to contribute to the activities of the WI in line with their own needs and capacity (*see Guiding Principles*). Doctoral researchers can carry out activities in transfer, programme development, Institute self-governance, etc., depending on their own interests and possibilities and the requirements of the research group. We call on the support staff to support such activities, to recognise their necessity for the Institute's profile and to reflect this when formulating their own expectations..

CONFERENCE PAR- TICIPATION AND PUBLICATIONS

We recommend that doctoral researchers present their research results during the main doctoral phase both within the Institute and at external events, and publish them, ideally openly, in appropriate, quality-controlled specialist outlets and, where relevant, that they publish preliminary stages/studies in Weizenbaum publication series. In the case of cumulative dissertations, publications of an appropriate quality and quantity are usually a condition for obtaining a doctorate. The details are regulated in the relevant doctoral regulations of the network partners. We also advise keeping an eye on the dissertation timetable and regularly checking and revising it.

The doctoral support staff will provide advice and support in this context, where required. They also – where possible and where needed – assist with making initial approaches to national and international contacts in the academic field and in publishing.

In the context of publications, everyone involved is guided by the established rules of good scientific practice: “An author is an individual who has made a genuine, identifiable contribution to the content of a research publication of text, data or software,” according to Guideline 14 of the DFG code of conduct on good research practice (DFG 2019, 19; see also WZB 2019 for more details).

Final phase

CRITERIA

The final phase of the dissertation cannot be scheduled precisely. In the case of a monograph dissertation, intensive writing time should take place at the latest the year before the contract ends. This also applies in the case of cumulative dissertations, since the individual publications are summarised in a coherent cumulative paper.

FOCUSING ON THE DISSERTATION

To achieve this aim, we recommend that in the final year of the doctoral researcher's contract term, if not before, the focus should be clearly on the doctorate and writing the dissertation. Those responsible for the research group (Principal Investigators, research group leaders and other leadership staff) should, as far as the situation within the research group allows, generally delegate fewer tasks in this phase than in the previous ones, so as to support the completion of the dissertation as far as they are able. It is taken for granted that doctoral researchers will take part in the group's overarching research projects. In the final phase, we advise making sure that the workload for group projects (and general WI obligations) is reduced in favour of dissertation work..

WORK AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

When entering this final phase, we encourage doctoral researchers to arrange a meeting with their support staff to discuss this division of work and the progress of the dissertation. At this meeting, or in a separate meeting closer to the submission date, the support staff should also actively address the future career plans within or outside of academia. These counselling interviews are confidential. We also encourage doctoral researchers to submit a part of their work to the first reviewer and, where possible, the other support staff, for an expert discussion at least half a year before the dissertation is submitted (see also Leibniz 2019c, 33). Submission of the manuscript may also be mandatory, depending on the culture of the research group, and it may need to comprise a full draft. The timing may also vary slightly.

Submission and viva

PRIORITY OF DOCTORAL REGULATIONS

As a rule, requirements for submitting the dissertation and the form of the viva, and relevant deadlines for doctoral researchers and support staff are described in detail in the relevant doctoral regulations. A list of website addresses for the network partners can be found at the end of these Support Guidelines. If you need advice, please contact the relevant examination office or doctoral degree office.

AWARDS, PRIZES

If the dissertation might be considered for an award because of its grade and/or topic, we recommend discussing the topic with the support staff, if necessary, and, if there is a need for further advice or support, to involve the career support staff in the WI administrative office.

Publication and change of status

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLICATION

The doctoral process ends with the publication of the dissertation. The WI sees itself as a place for open research and therefore strives to promote open access publications by its staff. This principle also applies to peer-reviewed papers in journals, articles in conference proceedings and dissertations. Members of the Institute who conducted most of the research for their doctorate at the WI but who are not, or no longer, WI employees (e.g. because they have started a new job since submitting their dissertation and attending the viva), are also entitled to apply for funding for open access publications and for printing cost subsidies.

REPORTING DUTY

Regardless of their employment status, all doctoral candidates have a duty to inform the WI of any publications and awards linked to their dissertation, for reporting purposes.

Special conditions: external doctorate and funding, change of support staff, conflict resolution, etc.

There are many special doctoral conditions that cannot be covered by these guidelines but for which there is nevertheless a general expectation that support staff and doctoral researchers will look for solutions together in the interests of a successful completion of the doctorate.

EXTERNAL DOCTORATE

- \ If, for professional or other reasons, the doctoral researcher is not supported by a Principal Investigator of the WI, an external doctorate is also possible within the context of the WI, i.e. where the first and second reviewers are not involved as Principal Investigators or research group leaders.
 - \ In this case, it should be ensured at an early stage (usually by the end of the first year, at the latest) that the external support person is involved in relevant discussions at the WI, that the doctorate is registered and that the procedure is agreed with those responsible for the research group (Principal Investigators and research group leaders). Principal Investigators and research group leaders can help identify a suitable support person if needed.
 - \ Efforts should be made to involve the external support person in the group context, e.g. through guest lectures, in the role of associated researcher, research fellowships, etc. Notifying the administrative office promptly of the external support is also necessary for monitoring and reporting purposes.

- EXTERNAL FUNDING \ In the case of doctoral researchers who are firmly associated with a research group at the WI but have external funding (e.g. third-party funding or a scholarship), if their funding runs out before they complete their doctorate, checks should be made to see whether the completion of the dissertation can be funded by the WI.
- COMPLETION FUNDING \ The WI is prepared in principle to advocate for doctoral researchers after the end of their contract or, in individual cases, following a relocation, and, where required, to work with the doctoral researcher to identify options to finance the rest of the doctorate.
- CAREER CHANGE OF SUPPORT PERSON \ If a Principal Investigator or other support person leaves the WI, the support relationship will normally continue. If a support person changes careers, the Institute will help the doctoral researcher look for a suitable replacement..
- INTERRUPTION \ A temporary interruption of the doctorate for family reasons or because of caring responsibilities is supported by the WI within the framework of the legal provisions (*see also Guiding Principles* under “Diversity”).
- CHANGE OF SUPPORT PERSON \ If a change of support person is necessary, e.g. because of changes to the content of the doctoral project, we recommend discussing the change with everyone involved early on. In the event of difficulties, the relevant ombudspersons at the network partner institution or the confidential counsellors at the WI can be contacted.
- MEDIATION \ In the event of serious problems in the support relationship, e.g. as a result of diverging views with regards to content or methodology, or any scientific misconduct, the doctoral researcher and support staff are advised to approach the ombudspersons of the relevant network institution or the confidential counsellors at the WI in confidence to resolve the problem (see also Appendix, Overview of Ombudspersons and Confidential Counsellors).
- ABORTION OF RESEARCH PROJECT \ In individual cases, if, after exhausting all the support instruments mentioned, the situation has not been cleared up, aborting the doctoral project may be a last resort. As a basic principle, this decision should be accompanied by rapid termination of the employment relationship.

Further reading and information

CC-BY (2020). Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode> (last accessed: 22.12.20).

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Scherpenberg et al. 2021 Scherpenberg, Cornelia van, Lindsey Bultema, Anja Jahn, Michaela Löffler, Vera Minneker and Jana Lasser. "Manifestations of Power Abuse in Academia and How to Prevent Them". Elephant in the Lab. 11 March 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4596397> (last accessed: 18.03.21)

WZB (2019). Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin. Guidelines for authorship in the context of Good Scientific Practice at the WZB. Berlin: WZB.

Doctoral regulations and other network partner materials

Fraunhofer FOKUS: [introductory information](#) about doctorates; [Doctoral Candidates at Fraunhofer](#). Code of Conduct (Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft)

Freie Universität Berlin: [introductory information](#) about doctorates; [further information](#) about subject-specific doctoral regulations

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin: [introductory information](#) about doctorates; [further information](#) about subject- and faculty-specific doctoral regulations

Technische Universität Berlin: [introductory information](#) about doctorates; TU Berlin [doctoral regulations](#)

Berlin University of the Arts (UdK Berlin): [introductory information](#) about doctorates; [further information](#) about subject-specific doctoral regulations (esp. [ZIW](#))

University of Potsdam: [introductory information](#) about doctorates; [further information](#) about faculty-specific doctoral regulations

WZB Berlin Social Science Center: [Guidelines](#) on career support

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Imprint

Validity: This document was adopted by the Board of Directors and the Scientific Council of the WI in spring 2021. Regular updates by peer groups at the Institute are possible and envisaged, in line with the concept of a living document.

The content will be checked by the Career Development Working Group and the administrative office every three years, if not sooner. If you have questions, you can contact the Career Development Working Group and/or the relevant member of staff in the administrative office.

Application: This document is intended to be used as a guide by current and future staff at the WI. It is used for information purposes and as a basis for discussion in recruitment processes, including interviews, at all scientific career levels.



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Cite as: Weizenbaum Institute e.V. (contributors: Julian Vuorimäki, Thorsten Thiel, Hanna Krasnova, Andrea Hamm, Jana Gundlach, Simon Schrör, Gesche Joost, Claudia Oellers), Support Guidelines for Doctoral Researchers at the Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society, Berlin: Weizenbaum Institute e.V. 2021, DOI: 10.34669/wi.wis/4.2

The author sequence is based on a combination of the first-last-author-emphasis norm and an approach where sequence determines declining credit (cf. [Tschardt et al. 2007](#)). The activities of the contributors are further detailed in the metadata of this document based on the Contributor Roles Taxonomy ([CRediT](#)).

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