

Doctoral Degrees at Universities of Applied Sciences Quality Standards for UAS7 member universities

The number of doctoral students who conduct research at a German University of Applied Sciences and receive guidance by a professor is continuously on the rise. This means that the Universities of Applied Sciences have to expand their institutional responsibilities, which UAS7 actively takes a lead in. This paper outlines key elements for quality assurance which UAS7 regards as essential for the further development and implementation of (cooperative) doctoral degrees within German Universities of Applied Sciences. This paper was developed under close advisement from the German Rector's Conference (HRK), The German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat, WR), the German Research Foundation (DFG), The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, The European University Association and the EU commission.

I. Research and doctorates at UAS7 member universities

According to their official mandate, German Universities of Applied Sciences are committed and dedicated to science and research. All UAS7 member universities have reported a demonstrable increase in research activities over the past years. Through the growing number of research projects, which were (mostly) supported by third-party funding, more and more opportunities and structures for cooperative doctoral projects arose. Thematically, these doctoral projects cover all disciplines offered within UAS7 member universities.

The number of cooperative doctoral projects within the UAS7 alliance rose to 694 ongoing projects in 2016 – more than a double increase since 2009. In order to conduct cooperative doctoral projects, UAS7 collaborates with national and international universities.

These numbers suggest that, today, young researchers take the opportunity to finish their doctorates at a German University of Applied Sciences much more often than in the past. By offering a higher number of research activities (mostly supported by third-party funding) and by implementing cooperative doctorates, UAS7 is able to offer concrete academic and career opportunities to its graduate students. This is how UAS7 member universities can remove artificial barriers between Bachelor, Master and PhD programs, and how they ensure smooth transitions between these levels. This is also how UAS7 member universities can create and ensure diverse career paths (within as well as outside of academia).

The scientific findings, which are generated through doctoral research, are furthermore seen as important elements for the profiling and advancement of the UAS7 alliance.

II. Quality Standards

The facilitation of cooperative doctoral procedures often happens under challenging conditions. Various requirements, such as having two professors from two different universities as mentors, the formal rules of the PhD procedures at each mentoring institution, and the demands of the third-party funding agencies as well as (in some cases) the need of industry partners, ought to be carefully balanced with each other.

In the course of the continual development of research activities, UAS7 member universities take more and more institutional responsibility for doctoral procedures. In this regard, UAS7 defines the following quality standards:

II.1. Mentoring Agreement

UAS7 universities sign mentoring agreements with all PhD students. Each agreement defines minimum standards according to recommendations by the German Research Foundation (DFG), the German Rector's Conference (HRK), and respective state ministries. The agreements determine the rights and obligations of all participants with regard to regular meetings and mentoring sessions, regular reviews of work plans and timetables, as well as engagement in the scientific community.

II.2. Qualification Procedures

Specifically for cooperative doctoral students, UAS7 offers qualification measures, which aim to ensure academic qualifications but also the deepening of professional expertise. Furthermore, teaching opportunities will be provided so that doctoral students will be able to improve their teaching and mentoring skills.

II.3. University Engagement

The UAS7 member universities established interdisciplinary graduate schools and graduate centers in order to guarantee internal networking structures, interdisciplinary scientific and academic exchange, as well as the doctoral student's engagement and connectivity to the university. The graduate centers offer opportunities for academic career planning, financial advisement, as well as conflict moderation services.

Mentors at UAS7 member universities create opportunities to participate in scientific conferences and colloquia in order to present the latest research findings and to connect to the scientific community. Furthermore, UAS7-mentors support their doctoral students in the process of their scientific publications and UAS7 member universities actively support the establishment of cooperative networks with industry and society.

II.4. Internationalization

UAS7 member universities support and foster international networks and encourage periods of international research abroad during the cooperative doctorate. More and More, UAS7 uses European mobility programs as well as international partner universities in this regard.

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