

## **DOCTORATE REGULATIONS**

### **1) Aim of the mandate**

Doctoral research mandates are intended for graduates of university-level higher education who carry out a research project with the aim of attaining a doctorate, under the guidance of a promoter from the concerned university and a co-promoter from VITO.

VITO will conclude a financing agreement with the concerned university whereby VITO awards an annual subsidy that is commensurate with the net value of remuneration for an assistant, supplemented by management costs. The concerned university must pay a doctorate grant to the selected doctorandus, which matches the above mentioned net amount. Financing of the doctorate is limited to a consecutive period of 48 months.

Financing options:

- The PhD student receives a PhD grant from the university involved. VITO concludes a financing agreement with the university involved, with VITO undertaking to provide an annual allowance matching the net remuneration of an assistant, plus management costs. The university involved will pay the selected PhD student a PhD grant matching the aforementioned net amount; or
- VITO concludes an agreement with the PhD student, who is given the status of employee. VITO applies the social legislation it is required to apply to employees.

### **2) Degree requirements**

Persons who comply with one of following degree requirements may submit their candidature:

1. holder of a master's degree from a Flemish university in the study area of sciences, applied sciences, agricultural sciences and applied biological sciences, pharmaceutical sciences, veterinary medical sciences, medicine, dentistry or biomedical sciences;
2. holder of a master's degree from a university in the Walloon community in Belgium that is recognised as being equivalent to one of the degrees stated in sub a);
3. holder of a foreign degree that is recognised as being equivalent to one of the degrees stated in sub a);
4. holder of a degree from extended higher education (HOLT) or a final degree from a foreign university or foreign institute of academic education, who has been exempted from the entry conditions to prepare a doctorate thesis in one of the study areas stated in sub2 a);

Holders of a foreign degree, a HOLT degree or a university degree from the Walloon community in Belgium must also possess a declaration from the university where the doctorate will be carried out (from at least faculty level), which indicates that the degree requirement has been sufficiently achieved and that s/he has been accepted to the concerned faculty to perform doctorate activities.

Final year students in study areas that result in the higher education degrees above, may also submit their candidature under the rescinding condition that the candidate attains the final degree in the year that s/he submits the candidature.

### **3) Award conditions**

Candidate must comply with the following conditions:

- a) Grade requirements  
The candidate must have attained the above mentioned master's degree with (at least) a "distinction", or equivalent.
- b) Maximum period after attaining the master's degree  
A candidate can submit a grant request at the latest, 5 years after attaining the master's degree. If a candidate possesses more than one master's degrees, this rule only applies to degrees from the study area applicable to the doctorate proposal. In this case, the first master degree must (at least) have been attained 10 years prior to the grant application.
- c) The candidate must have a perfect record of conduct;

After a substantiated written request from the VITO co-supervisor, submitted no later than 8 weeks prior to the defence before the Selection Board, deviations to the award conditions may be allowed by VITO's Board of Directors. The Board of Directors makes an ad-hoc and discretionary decision on the deviation request from the VITO supervisor; refusal of the deviation does not have to be substantiated.

### **4) Project-related conditions**

- a) The subject of the research project  
Considering that doctorate research is part of its strategic research, subjects will be defined in advance by VITO and an agreement will be made by VITO with the concerned promoter. The subject and the promoter will be announced in advance on the VITO website. On the basis of this subject, the candidate must consult with the promoter and the VITO co-promoter to present a detailed design for the doctorate programme, with accompanying work plan and scientific approach strategy, with the intention of completing the doctorate in a maximum of four years in consultation with promoter and VITO-copromotor.
- b) Supervision  
The research project must be carried out under the scientific supervision of a member of the Independent Academic Personnel (ZAP) at a Flemish or foreign university and a staff member at VITO.
- c) Place of research  
In principle, the doctorate research will take place at the VITO site and, if necessary, partially at a university or technical academy. With regards to activities that must be carried out at VITO, the doctorandus/a must comply with all safety and access procedures applicable at VITO. In certain cases, after support from their promoter and VITO co-promoter, the doctorandus may be permitted a temporary stay abroad in order to further his/her doctorate thesis.

## 5) Characteristics of the mandate

### a) *Status*

The doctorandus must have the status of scholarship student at the concerned university. However, for a number of mandates, VITO has established that doctorandi must be VITO members of staff. In this case, the classic VITO recruitment procedure will be implemented.

### b) *Cumulation*

Considering the mandate system intends the doctorate to be completed in 4 years, cumulation with other assignments and other grants or other subsidies is, in principle, not permitted. Possible exemptions must be presented to the executive committee of VITO and will be evaluated on an ad-hoc basis.

### c) *Interruptions*

Research mandates can only be interrupted in case of force majeure (e.g. medical reasons) or after mutual agreement. Each case of force majeure that results in the scholarship being interrupted must, if possible, be reported in advance to the university and VITO, who will decide about modifications to the mandate's award modalities.

### d) *Training courses*

Considering the aim of the mandate system is to result in an original thesis that justifies the title of doctor being awarded, the doctorandus is entitled to follow specific training courses after special consent from VITO and the university. This consent can be awarded under condition that the course may be useful for preparing the doctorate thesis, irrespective of whether this course results in a post-graduate degree being attained that differs from the doctorate. In order to obtain the above mentioned consent, the candidate must submit a detailed request to the university and VITO.

## 6) The application

### a) *Time of the application*

There are no fixed announcement deadlines for open doctorate designs. Candidates are able to register for an open mandate whenever they choose.

### b) *On-line registration*

Registration for the scholarship application takes place on-line via the VITO website (<http://www.vito.be/>). VITO enables the applicant to enter relevant personal data and information about his/her scientific curriculum. <sup>1</sup>

### c) *The application file*

The candidate must compile an application file in consultation with the VITO co-promoter and the promoter. The file must consist of a doctorate plan and an administrative section.

### d) *The doctorate plan*

The following subjects must be addressed consecutively in the doctorate plan:

- Problem identification: the problem must be put in context, including a description of the international circumstances, and a reference to scientific literature (max. 1 page);
- Objective: brief and clear description of the concrete technical-scientific objectives of the project, with explicit mention of innovative aspects and clear identification of research activities carried out by the research unit (max. 1 page);

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<sup>1</sup> The VITO co-supervisor and the supervisor perform an initial selection of the candidates who have registered. The selected candidates prepare an application file in consultation with them.

- **Project description:** detailed description of the work packages (experiments/activities that will be carried out), reasons for them being carried out and the way in which the relationship between the work packages will result in objectives being realised (max. 10 pages, including figures and tables, and excluding references);
- **Planning:** explanation of the milestones within the project and a graphic display of the planned execution of work packages on a monthly basis, throughout the 4 scholarship years (max. 1 page);
- **Application possibilities:** a description of possible applications for the intended research results, within industry or the services sector (max. 1 page);
- References

The project must be defined so that it can directly lead to a doctorate being completed within a maximum timeframe of 4 years. The emphasis within the project description may be placed on the first and second years, though it must be clear how later objectives will be realised. The length of the detailed description depends on the complexity of the project and the number of part-tasks, but may not exceed 15 pages (including title page and contents, and excluding references) under any circumstances. When compiling this document, please use font size 12.

**e) *The administrative section. The following documents must be included consecutively in the administrative section:***

- The candidate's curriculum vitae.
- The thesis or dissertation that is being presented to attain this degree, along with a summary of the thesis. For final year students, a summary of the thesis is sufficient under the rescinding condition that the thesis will be presented prior to the start of the mandate;
- A copy of the degree that entitles registration
- Approval from the promoter and the VITO co-promoter concerning the design of the research project.
- If applicable: declaration from the university, which indicates that the candidate has been accepted for the concerned faculty to perform doctorate activities

Applications must be compiled in Dutch or in English and submitted to VITO. Part of the file may, after approval from VITO, be compiled in another language. The registered office of VITO is Boeretang 200, 2400 Mol.

The executive committee of VITO will investigate the comprehensiveness and conformity of the application in relation to the award conditions.

Candidates with an approved application file will face a jury, which will have been appointed by VITO, and subjected to a verbal examination about their general scientific knowledge, their doctorate programme and their work plan.

## **7) Award**

The mandates will be awarded by the executive committee of VITO. As part of a pre-concluded agreement between VITO and the concerned university, an appendix will be compiled containing the name of the candidate and the start date. The award will take place based on the application file, the jury report and possible additional guidelines established by the Board of Directors at VITO.

Upon approval, the candidate must, in consultation with the VITO co-promoter and the promoter, register as doctorate student at a university.

The start date will be determined after consultation between VITO, the university and the selected doctorandus. The mandate will end once the selected person has obtained the doctorate for which the mandate was awarded, or after a period of four years.

## **8) Follow-up and supervision**

For the entire period of his mandate, the doctorandus commits himself to work on the research project for which the research mandate was awarded. The mandate can be withdrawn at any given moment if the doctorandus no longer fulfils the award criteria for the research mandate.

For the monitoring the following procedure is in place

- Each year the PhD student is informed by the VITO co-supervisor about the Selection Board date and the deadline for submitting a file as described in the following
- The doctorandus must submit a progress report, a brief overview of the main results that have been realised, the advice of the university promoter, a proposal for further planning and potential modifications to the VITO co-promotor.
- The candidate will also be asked to explain his/her activities to a jury, which includes members of the VITO Directors' Committee. This jury will provide well founded advice about the further course of the doctorate mandate.

Based on this advice, VITO will make a decision about further financing the mandate in accordance with the determinations included in the financing agreement concluded with the university.