

DOCTORAL REGULATIONS

(translation of Doctoraatsreglement versie 2026)

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 obtaining a PhD, under the guidance of a supervisor from the concerned university and a supervisor from VITO. The financing of the doctorate is limited to a continuous period of 48 months.

Financing options:

- The doctoral student receives a PhD grant from or a position as doctoral student at the university involved.
VITO concludes a financing agreement with the university involved, with VITO undertaking to provide an annual allowance. The university involved will pay the selected doctoral student a PhD grant or a salary matching the beforementioned amount; or
- VITO concludes an agreement with the doctoral student, who is given the status of VITO-employee. VITO applies the social legislation required to apply to employees.

2) Degree requirements

Persons who comply with one of the 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 2a);
3. holder of a foreign degree that is recognised as being equivalent to one of the degrees stated in sub 2a);
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 doctoral thesis in one of the study areas stated in sub 3a);

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 doctoral 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

The doctoral candidates must comply with the following conditions:

a) Grade requirements

The doctoral 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 doctoral candidate can submit a grant request at the latest, 5 years after attaining the master's degree. If a doctoral candidate possesses more than one master's degrees, this rule only applies to degrees from the study area applicable to the doctoral proposal. In this case, the first master's degree must (at least) have been attained 10 years prior to the grant application.

c) The doctoral candidate must have a perfect record of conduct.

d) VITO reserves the right, in light of applicable regulations and internal policies, including those relating to knowledge security and the geopolitical context, to impose additional award conditions or restrictions regarding the nationality or place of residence of the candidate doctoral student. The management and/or the Board of Directors shall determine these conditions or restrictions, where applicable on the basis of internal or external advice and on objective and relevant criteria.

e) Deviations from the award conditions

After a substantiated written request from the VITO-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 doctoral 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 university/academic supervisor. The subject and the supervisor will be announced in advance on the VITO website. Based on this topic, a detailed design of the doctoral programme will be developed, including an accompanying work plan and scientific approach strategy. This will be done in consultation with the academic supervisor and the VITO supervisor, with the aim to completing the doctorate within a maximum of four years.

b) *Supervision*

The research project must be carried out under the scientific supervision of a member of the Senior Academic Staff (ZAP) at a Flemish or foreign university and a staff member at VITO, who holds a doctoral degree.

c) *Place of research*

The doctoral research will, in principle, take place on VITO premises and, if necessary, partly at a university or university college/higher education institution (maximum 50% of the time if (co-)financed by VITO). With regards to activities that must be carried out at VITO, the doctoral student must comply with all safety and access procedures applicable at VITO. Doctoral candidates may, under certain conditions and with the support of the academic supervisor and VITO supervisor, be permitted to undertake a temporary stay abroad in support of their doctoral thesis.

5) Characteristics of the mandate

a) *Status*

The doctoral student must have the status of scholarship student at the concerned university. However, for a number of mandates, VITO has established that doctoral students must be VITO members of staff.

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 interruption 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 doctoral student is entitled to follow specific training courses after consent from VITO and the university. This consent can be awarded under condition that the course may be useful for preparing the doctoral 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 doctoral student 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. Doctoral candidates are able to register for an open mandate.

b) *On-line registration for application*

Registration 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. ¹

c) *The application file*

If the candidate is selected by the VITO supervisor and the academic supervisor, the candidate doctoral researcher will prepare a candidacy file in consultation with them. The file consists of a doctoral plan, an executive summary and an administrative section.

¹ The VITO-supervisor and the academic supervisor perform an initial selection of the candidates who have registered. The selected candidate doctoral researcher shall prepare an application file in consultation with them.

d) The doctorate plan

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

1. Administrative information (max 1 page)

- Title: [Enter text here]
- Academic supervisor: [Enter text here]
- VITO Promotor: [Enter text here]
- This project plan has been discussed and agreed with the academic supervisor:
☐Yes ☐No
- Share of the university in the creation of the project plan (short explanation)
[Enter text here]
- Share of the implementation at the university facilities (short explanation)
[Enter text here]

Executive summary: [Enter text here]

- *Brief description of the problem and the current status of science/research/innovation gap*
- *Which "core" scientific questions does the PhD focus on?*
- *What is the novelty in the doctoral proposal? Which innovative or new ideas will be developed further?*
- *Positioning of the doctoral project within the VITO/Unit research strategy.*
- *Brief description of the expected results and their valorisation potential.*
- *Brief description of the research strategy that will be followed to achieve the intended results.*

2. The Project plan (max 8 pages)

- **Situating / context:**
Situating the PhD project in the overall research strategy of the VITO research group.
[Enter text here]
- **Problem definition and state of the art:**
Description of the problem that will be addressed, including the international state of the art, with reference to scientific literature (max. 1 page).
[Enter text here]
- **Research hypothesis:**
[Enter research hypothesis here]
- **Objectives:**
Short and clear formulation of the concrete technical-scientific objective(s) of the project, with explicit mention of the innovative aspects and a clear framework in the research activities of the research unit (max. 1 page).
[Enter objectives here]
- **Methodology:**
High-level description of the work packages, experiments or activities to be carried out, methods that will be used and expected deliverables. Include the motivation for their implementation and how the relationship between the work packages contributes to the objectives.
[Enter methodology here]
- **Feasibility / risk analysis / risk mitigation:**
Describe the feasibility of the project, key risks, mitigation measures and contingency plan.
[Enter risk analysis and mitigation measures here]

- **Planning:**
Define the milestones in the project and include a graphical representation of the planned course of the work packages on a monthly basis over the 4 mandate years.
[Enter planning and milestones here]
- **Relevance for VITO / application potential:**
[Enter relevance for VITO and application potential here]

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 subtasks but may not exceed 15 pages (including title page, contents and exclusive references) under any circumstances. When compiling this document, please use font Arial size 11.

e) The section with personal data of the doctoral candidate. The following documents must be included consecutively in the administrative section:

- The doctoral candidate's curriculum vitae.
- An overview of the courses relevant to the doctorate taken during the master's programme, including the scores obtained.
- A summary (max 1 A4 page) of the thesis or dissertation that is being presented to attain this degree. A letter of reference from the master's thesis supervisor is strongly recommended.
- A copy of the degree that entitles registration.
- The in-principle confirmation of admission to the doctoral programme by the academic supervisor.
- For candidates who obtained their master's degree outside Belgium and/or in case of a doctoral training at a non-Belgian university: declaration from the university, which indicates that the doctoral candidate has been accepted for the concerned faculty to perform doctoral activities.

Applications must be compiled in English.

If case of incompleteness and/or non-conformity of the application with regard to the award conditions, the application can be refused, and the final selection interview may consequently not take place.

7) Defence of the application

Doctoral candidates with an approved application file will face a selection team, which will have been appointed by VITO, and subjected to a verbal examination about their general scientific knowledge the doctoral plan. The selection team assesses the candidates using the evaluation form attached as Appendix 1.

8) 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 doctoral candidate and the start date. The award will take place based on the application file, the report of the selection interview and possible additional guidelines established by the Board of Directors at VITO.

Upon approval, the doctoral candidate must, in consultation with the VITO supervisor and the academic supervisor, register as doctoral student at the university.

The start date will be determined after consultation between VITO, the university and the selected doctoral student. 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.

9) Follow-up and supervision

For the entire period of his mandate, the doctoral student undertakes to work on the research project for which the research mandate was awarded. The mandate can be withdrawn at any given moment if the doctoral student no longer fulfils the award criteria for the research mandate / the requirements of the Doctoral Regulations. For each doctoral topic/mandate, a VITO Supervisory Committee is assigned, consisting of a VITO supervisor, a subject-matter expert, and a member from the VITO reviewers pool who comes from a VITO unit other than that of the VITO supervisor.

Formal monitoring will take place at VITO, for which the doctoral candidate must prepare a report. The evaluation file consists of a progress report, a concise overview of the main results achieved, the advice of the academic supervisor, a proposal for further planning and any adjustments, to be submitted to the VITO supervisor.

On 9 months, the doctoral student will explain the progress report to the VITO Supervisory Committee. This committee draws up a reasoned opinion about the further course of the doctoral mandate. Based on this advice, VITO decides on the further financing of the mandate agreement in line with the provisions included in the financing agreement concluded with the university.

The following timetable shows the formal evaluation cycle:

- After 9 months: evaluation by the VITO Supervisory Committee; in the event of a negative assessment, a remedial process is set up, and the doctoral student can propose a revised file for the VITO Supervisory Committee in 11 months;
- After 11* months: evaluation by the VITO Supervisory Committee, if negative evaluation at 9 months;
- After 18 months: evaluation by the VITO Supervisory Committee; if recommended following the 9 (11) month evaluation.

In exceptional cases, the selection of the candidate does not take place in accordance with Article 7 and/or without a fully developed doctoral plan. In such cases, the candidate must prepare and defend the doctoral plan as described in Articles 6d and 6e before the VITO Supervisory Committee before four months have elapsed from the start of funding of the doctorate.*

**Possible exceptions:*

- *An external selection procedure in which the VITO doctoral regulations are subordinate to external regulations due to external funding.*
- *A reasoned exceptional decision by the Executive Committee.*

Candidate selection Evaluation form

Average Score (Total)

Candidate Name: «First_Name» «Last_Name»

Doctoral topic: «subject»

CANDIDATE QUALITY	1	2	3	4
1. Basic scientific knowledge - Education/CV is relevant with regard to knowledge needed for the topic - Knowledge is evident from the answers to the questions	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Research competence - Demonstrates critical thinking skills - Demonstrates reasoning ability-methodical thinking	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Independence - Dares to defend his own opinion - Made an independent contribution to the project proposal/dossier - Demonstrates a sense of reality	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Communication skills - Clarity of the presentation/slides - Way of answering questions - General appearance	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Insight into a broader framework - Can situate the subject in a broader context - Has insight into the economic social importance	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Motivation of the candidate - Has familiarized himself with the topic - Shows enthusiasm	☐	☐	☐	☐

Frequency
(sum=6)

x1

x2

x3

x4

Scoring agreements reference is a graduated master's student:

1. unacceptable, below the expectation
2. less than expected but possible to remedy
3. according to expectations
4. exceeds expectations

Information for VITO guidance

PROJECT QUALITY	weak	sufficient	Good	Excellent
1. PhD worthiness	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Originality and innovative character	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Quality support	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Feasibility of the project	☐	☐	☐	☐

- **Comments on project proposal**

- **Comments regarding the candidate (points of attention, necessary training, ...)**