

General information on studying for a doctorate

You are likely to see the term “Promotion” used in German for a doctoral degree, which ties in with the aim of a doctorate stated in the German University Act: to “develop and promote up-and-coming scientists”.

We have compiled some general information about doctorates below, which you can consult in more detail by expanding each point:

+ Aims of a doctorate

The doctorate describes a piece of individual postgraduate research that earns the academic title of “doctor”. Upon successful completion, the scientist is awarded a doctorate in his or her subject – the highest academic degree in Germany, other than the professorial adjunct *Habilitation*.

The aim of a doctorate is to hone the candidate’s ability to conduct profound scientific work – the evidence of which is provided by the doctoral dissertation. This independently produced research achievement makes a substantial contribution to progress in scientific findings in the relevant specialist discipline.

The doctorate is rounded off with an oral examination (*viva voce*, commonly known as a “viva”). After successful completion, the university or other institution of higher education awards the doctoral degree to the candidate. In Germany, in particular, the qualification of doctor is often suffixed with an indication of the field of study in which it was earned (e.g. Dr. rer. nat. in the natural sciences, Dr.-Ing. in engineering).

+ Academic criteria

To commence doctoral research, candidates generally require a prior academic degree in a relevant field of study (e.g. master’s, bachelor’s, state examination). The precise requirements are stipulated by each individual university or other institution of higher education (link or reference to consortial doctorate). As a rule, the proposed doctoral thesis will be related to the candidate’s previous field of study. Information about the general conditions and admission requirements is provided in each university’s regulations governing doctoral programmes.

If you graduated in Germany, then the admission requirements will substantially depend upon whether your previous degree was awarded by a research university, an academy of art or music, or a university of applied sciences. The universities offering doctoral programmes make their own decisions with regard to recognising academic qualifications from abroad.

+ Personal aptitude

Studying for a doctorate calls for a great deal of independence and responsibility for yourself. You will need to be self-motivated and interested in your research topic to succeed in earning a doctoral degree. To help you gauge whether doctoral research is the right thing for you, carefully consider the following points:

- What do I wish to achieve by gaining a doctoral degree?

- Do I have the stamina and self-discipline required to spend at least three years investigating one subject?
- Do I have a good relationship with my supervisor and can I imagine working with them for a number of years?
- Can I definitely secure funding for the entire duration?

+ Types of doctoral studies

Individual doctoral studies

You study at the supervising university in accordance with its regulations governing doctoral programmes, under the supervision of one of its professors. As a rule, doctoral candidates are employed as academic assistants on research projects addressing a specific thematic framework at their doctoral university or at a university of applied sciences. Subject to special agreement, the research work can also be conducted outside the university or higher education institute at a research organisation or in the industrial sector. Many universities offer an organised doctoral programme to help candidates compile their dissertations.

Consortial doctoral studies / Joint Academic Partnerships

Universities of applied sciences (UAS) offer doctorates in the form of consortial doctoral studies or in collaboration with research universities.

Consortial doctorates allow candidates to work on their doctoral research projects at a university of applied sciences under the supervision of professors from both the research university and the university of applied sciences. The doctoral procedure is determined by the supervising research university's regulations governing doctoral studies. The professor at the university of applied sciences is involved as an assessor in the formal doctoral procedure at the research university, which confers the degree.

Under the auspices of **Joint Academic Partnerships**, candidates study for their doctorate in one of the eleven subject-specific doctoral partnerships formed between Bavarian research universities and universities of applied sciences. Professors from both categories of university enjoy equal status in their joint roles as supervisors, assessors and examiners. As a rule, candidates are employed as academic assistants at the supervising university of applied sciences while working on their thesis. A supervision agreement is reached for each thesis – outlining the topic, academic supervision and time frame. In the cases of these doctorates, the research university involved has the right to confer the doctorate, with the supervising university of applied sciences named on the degree certificate awarded by the research university. Further details can be found on the website of the [BayWISS Verbundkolleg](#).

Doctoral studies (professional development degree programme)

As part of their professional development programmes, research universities and universities of applied sciences offer “structured” doctoral programmes in selected research areas. These self-funded doctoral degree programmes are targeted particularly at candidates in professional employment. A fixed training programme stipulating the duration and funding follows a specific curriculum, which is usually provided in blocks of classes.

Kempen University of Applied Sciences offers an [Advanced Academic PhD programme](#) in conjunction with the Professional School of Business and Technology for doctoral candidates.

+ Supervision

If you are seeking an opportunity to undertake doctoral research, there are various openings:

- Scouring job advertisements for academic assistants in national newspapers, on online portals such as Stepstone, or on universities' own websites;
- Asking the professor who supervised your master's thesis;
- Pinpointing research universities and universities of applied sciences – based on their key areas of research and research profiles in potential fields of interest;
- Investigating ongoing and completed research projects and the academics involved;
- Browsing the websites of various faculties, departments and chairs;
- Consulting universities' online information about doctoral studies.

+ Funding options

As a rule, it takes at least three years of full-time, dedicated study to complete a doctorate. It therefore helps to work at least half-time as an academic assistant for this purpose – at either a research university, a university of applied sciences, a research institute, or even at a company – in order to conduct your research in a professional setting.

In addition, various organisations offer doctoral scholarships, which usually involve a strict selection process and often only award partial funding (further information is provided in the [Scholarship Guide](#) [in German only] compiled by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research).