

EURODOC survey on the Doctorate<sup>1</sup> structure across Europe (version March 2018)  
prepared by the EURODOC Doctoral Training Working Group

## Italy

### I. General information and application procedure

#### **Which institutions award doctoral degrees?**

Universities and Superior Graduate Schools (highly selective university-type public institutions) have a right to award a doctoral degree. National Research Institutes and industry research facilities can provide doctorate and research activities in cooperation with the institutions belonging to the previous list, in the framework of traditional doctorate or of the newly introduced high apprenticeship (Alto Apprendistato) in case of industries.

#### **What forms of doctorate attendance are available?**

The doctorate is defined as a full-time activity. The doctoral candidates have to make a formal request to the professors' board (Collegio dei Docenti) in case they want to undertake any external working activity, that is approved only if the activity is considered not to hinder the research activity of the doctoral candidate.

#### **What is the formal length of time foreseen for completing a doctorate?**

The doctorate is 3 years long. A doctoral candidate can ask for a suspension of its enrolment, in case of severe personal or familiar reasons. The request has to be approved by the professors' board. The possibility for a doctoral candidate to ask for an unpaid extension, in case the progress of the research project is considered to be not enough to defend the thesis, has been recently removed (ministerial regulation 45/2013).

#### **What is the status of the doctoral candidates<sup>2</sup>?**

Doctoral candidates in Italy are considered as students at the highest level of their education. Accordingly, they may have to pay student fee to access a doctoral program, according to the institutions awarding the doctoral degree. Those that do not receive a scholarship may apply for normal student subsidies.

Doctoral candidates receiving a scholarship have some employee prerogatives, as enrolment in retirement plans, unemployment and maternity subsidies.

#### **What are the social benefits for doctoral candidates with student status?**

The social benefits for the student status are student subsidies (if entitled to receive them) and access to student services like accommodations, refectories and libraries.

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<sup>1</sup> **Doctorate** is understood as the institutional frameworks and processes geared towards the completion of a doctoral degree.

<sup>2</sup> **Doctoral candidate** is a person enrolled in a doctorate.

Accident insurances is provided, and doctoral candidates are commonly subjected to periodic medical examinations, particularly for doctoral candidates in the STEM disciplines. In Italy the health system is public and free, so there is no need of health insurance.

For doctoral candidates receiving a scholarship, additional social benefits linked to their employee status, are enrolment in retirement plans, unemployment and maternity subsidies, are granted.

### **How are doctoral candidates financially supported?**

The doctoral candidates with a founded position receive their scholarship from their institutions, that are mostly financed from the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research, but can also being granted from charitable foundations and other sources. The economic conditions are defined at a country level, with a net income of 1130 euro per month (ministerial regulation 40/2018).

For those in an unpaid position (that cannot amount to more than one quarter of the total number of doctoral positions after the ministerial regulation 45/2013), it is possible to be a recipient of a research stipend financed from their institute or external organizations, i.e. banking foundations, nonprofit organization, etc. Those that do not receive a scholarship may apply for normal student subsidies. These financial aids are provided in Italy by the regional agency for student benefits, according to the economic income of the doctoral candidate's family.

### **What are the admission requirements for a doctorate?**

Minimum requirement is to possess a Master's degree or an equivalent. To access to a doctorate, it is necessary to be selected through an open competitive examination (in Italy is constitutionally required in public employment). This is done in the summer, with every institution publicly announcing the number of doctoral positions that are available, as every year the doctoral programs start in October. Commonly these competitive examinations involve an evaluation of the curricula of the applicants (each applicant is required to apply sending documents like: CV, certificate of Master's degree or equivalent, list of publications, recommendation letter, motivation letter. The actual list depends on the requirements of an institute). Additionally, a written examination, an oral examination and/or the submission of a short research project can be required.

## **II. Progression**

### **How is a doctorate organized in your country?**

The doctorate often consists of a set of accredited courses, that a doctoral candidate has to attend in parallel with their individual research activity. The load of these activities is highly different between institutes and disciplines, as well as the presence of final examinations for these courses.

Teaching is not mandatory, and in some institutes is limited in the allowed amount of hours in order to not compromise the research time of a doctoral candidate.

## **How is doctoral supervision provided?**

The supervision is granted from a supervisor provided from the institution awarding the doctoral degree, usually assigned in the first months of doctorate. In case of double degree programs, an additional supervisor from the second institution awarding the other doctoral degree is provided.

Some doctoral programs prescribe the presence of a committee of professors in charge of evaluating the progress of the doctoral candidate and advise him/her on a regular basis (yearly, semesterly, etc.).

## **What are the main obligations of doctoral candidates?**

Doctoral candidates are usually required to attend courses, seminars and others, but the load of this kind of activity widely varies between different doctoral programs.

## **Is any mobility compulsory?**

Mobility is not compulsory.

A budget, not lower than the 10% of the scholarship, is provided starting from the second year directly to a doctoral candidate, and this fund is commonly employed for travelling purposes. The same budget is available also for doctoral candidates without a scholarship.

Additionally, for those with a scholarship, it is possible to request the 30-50% increase of the amount of the scholarship (the increase depends on an institution) as long as a doctoral candidate is residing abroad for research purposes, if the period is longer than 20 days.

## **How are courses in transferable skills provided?**

Regarding the courses in transferable skills, the variety and relevance of them varies between individual doctoral programs.

## **How is the progress of the doctoral candidate evaluated?**

Annually, the professors' board has to approve the research progress of a doctoral candidate. A doctoral candidate can be required to provide written reports and/or an oral presentation of results, either internally or publicly that are evaluated either from the professors' board or from a smaller delegated committee.

## **Is it possible for doctoral candidates to change supervisor(s)?**

Yes. The procedure can vary, but usually involves the chief of doctorate program, the professors' board and the dean/director of an institute.

## **Are supervisors required to have training in order to supervise doctoral candidates?**

No.

## III. Defence procedure

### **What requirements should be met to receive acceptance to enter the defence procedure?**

In order to be accepted for the defence procedure, doctoral candidates have to be approved by their supervisors and the professors' board, with requirements that can vary between different doctoral programs (positive annual evaluations in the course of a doctorate, attendance with success of the mandatory courses if any, etc.). At the end of the third year, the thesis have to be handed in, with a deadline that differs between institutes (typically a couple of months before of the completion of the third year). The defence procedure requires the evaluation of the thesis from two external reviewers, selected from the professors' board in agreement with the supervisor. This process requires 1-2 months, and the reviewers can either approve the thesis with minor suggestions, or in case of major remarks, they can request a resubmission of the thesis after major revisions. In the last case, there is an unpaid extension of the doctorate for six months, after which the revised thesis has to be handed in and submitted to be again evaluated by the same reviewers.

### **What documents are required to start the defence procedure?**

The doctoral thesis can be in a form of a monograph (more common, particularly in the humanities), or a papers collection. The language of the thesis is usually Italian or English, but in some fields like linguistic and foreign literature studies, other languages are utilized as well. A summary of the thesis in Italian is commonly provided, in case of a language other than Italian has been used.

### **What is the defence procedure?**

The defence consists of an oral presentation in front of a deputed committee (composed usually from members of the professors' board and/or invited professors from other institutions), which is followed by an extensive discussion.

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