

EURODOC survey on the Doctorate<sup>1</sup> structure across Europe (version July 2019)  
prepared by the EURODOC Doctoral Training Working Group

## Portugal

### I. General information and application procedure

#### Which institutions award doctoral degrees?

In Portugal only Universities are able to award doctoral degrees. All doctorates must have their programmes accredited by the Agency for the Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education ([A3ES](#)). Recently, there has been some political discussion about the possibility of allowing Universities of Applied Sciences (also known as Polytechnic Institutes) to apply for accreditation and the promotion of training at the doctoral level. The Legal Framework for Higher Education Degrees and Diplomas<sup>2</sup> has been recently reviewed to allow for this possibility. However, for this change to be enforced, a revision of the Legal Framework for the Portuguese Education System<sup>3</sup> needs also to take place.

Doctoral training programmes offered by Portuguese universities may be promoted either by:

- a single faculty within a university;
- two or more faculties within an university; and
- two or more universities.

For a joint doctoral training programme of two or more universities to be possible, specific coordination instruments must be established between all the universities involved. Universities may also establish cooperation protocols with other public or private, national or foreign institutions with the aim of awarding doctoral degrees.

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

The most common form of attendance is a full-time doctorate. But if the doctoral candidate works outside academia the doctorate may be attended on a part-time basis. There is also a practice of double degree programs, when 1/3 of a research project is fulfilled outside of the main university.

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

The length of the doctorate varies from 6/8 to 10 semesters (3-5 years). The most common type of doctoral training consists of a programme that lasts 6/8 semesters. The programme is based on the mandatory attendance of curricular units/courses (for example, research methods). The completion of these curricular units marks doctoral candidates' progress in

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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> The Decree Law [74/2006](#) was amended and republished for the 5<sup>th</sup> time under the Decree Law [65/2018](#).

<sup>3</sup> The Legal Framework for the Portuguese Education System – [Law 46/86](#) (only in Portuguese).

their training. The courses/units are oriented toward the development of research skills and competencies.

Alternatively, doctoral candidates may enrol in a “classic” doctorate, which does not require the attendance of curricular units and progresses according to a more individualized plan of training. In this case, the length of the doctorate may extend up to 10 semesters (5 years).

Pending on its length, a doctorate confers 180 to 240 ECTS credits.

### **What is the status of the doctoral candidates<sup>4</sup>?**

Doctoral candidates in Portugal have the student status (3<sup>rd</sup> cycle; Bologna Process). If while attending the doctoral training, doctoral candidates also hold a position in the labour market performing activities outside the PhD work plan, then they may activate the “student-worker” status. The “student-worker” status is only available to those doctoral candidates who do not hold a doctoral fellowship. Doctoral candidates holding a fellowship are usually under an exclusivity clause that does not allow them to carry out any other paid activities.

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

Doctoral candidates with student-worker status are entitled to request a leave of absence from work to attend classes and/or to attend or prepare for exams or other forms of evaluation. They are also entitled to a specific regime of vacations and licenses. The maintenance of this status depends on the achievement of the student in the previous academic year (according to the Portuguese Labour Code<sup>5</sup>).

Doctoral candidates with the student status are entitled to many of the same benefits bachelor and master level students are entitled to (e.g., discounts such as bus pass or museum entrance). However, different institutions may apply different rules and these benefits are often also attached to age – for example, doctoral candidates over 23 years of age are not entitled to discounts in public transportation.

Doctoral candidates with fellowships, although not regulated and entitled to benefits foreseen in the general labour law, can access a special regime of social protection called the voluntary social insurance. This insurance covers disability, old age, death, parenthood and occupational diseases covered by the general social/health protection system. Only doctoral candidates with a fellowship lasting six or more months are entitled to the insurance. Foreign or stateless fellowship holders working in Portugal are also entitled to the voluntary social insurance, regardless of their length of residence.

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

Foundation for Science and Technology<sup>6</sup> (FCT), is the Portuguese public agency that supports science, technology and innovation in all scientific domains. FCT is responsible for the competitive funding of doctoral positions in Portugal.

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<sup>4</sup> **Doctoral candidate** is a person enrolled in a doctorate.

<sup>5</sup> Portuguese Labour Code - [Law 7/2009](#) (only in Portuguese).

<sup>6</sup> FCT - [Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia](#).

Candidates can apply for individual funding through a national call, with a specific calendar, and with rather competitive requirements. FCT fellowships or individual grants entitle doctoral candidates to a monthly stipend of 1 003 euros (tax free; for a complete list of the amounts<sup>7</sup>). If the doctoral candidate is doing his/her training abroad, the monthly stipend is 1 750 euros. The scholarship is renewable for a maximum of four years and cannot be granted for periods of less than three consecutive months. Every 12 months, a renewal request must be submitted to FCT, with a justification for the extension request and a progress report. The supervisor(s) must also approve the extension by signing a letter attached to the request. In addition to the monthly stipend, the fellowship includes payment in full for the tuition fees for doctoral candidates acquiring their degree in Portuguese universities (maximum amount: 2 750 euros a year). For doctoral candidates pursuing their training abroad, a maximum of 8 000 euros for tuition fees is offered.

Grant holders (in particular, doctoral candidates with a FCT funded fellowship) are not legally recognized as workers, and the laws that regulate labour in Portugal do not protect them. Therefore, grant holders are not entitled to many of the social benefits other workers have, for example, they do not have access to unemployment benefits or sick leave.

Doctoral candidates may also hold a fellowship/individual grant financed through a project or be self-funded (*i.e.*, they pay their own tuition and often all expenses regarding the execution of their PhD). The number of self-funded doctoral candidates has been growing in Portugal, especially in the follow-up of the Bologna reform and of a series of reforms in how higher education and research is funded in Portugal.

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

According to the Legal Framework for Higher Education Degrees and Diplomas<sup>2</sup> (art. 30), admission requirements for a doctorate in Portugal are as follows:

- candidates with a master degree or a legal equivalent;
- candidates with a bachelor's degree and with a relevant curriculum that is recognized as attesting the candidate's ability to attend the doctoral training programme;
- candidates who have an academic, scientific or professional curriculum that is recognized as attesting the person's ability to attend the doctoral training programme.

These admission requirements apply to all accredited doctoral training programmes offered by Portuguese universities.

Procedures require candidates to submit an application to the scientific committee of the institution promoting the doctoral programme they wish to attend. The application must include the candidate's curriculum vitae, information about the field of research and a letter of acceptance of the member of the academic staff who will be the supervisor.

In addition to these common requirements, each institution promoting a doctoral training programme is entitled to further specify entry requirements or recruitment procedures for applicants, such as an interview.

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<sup>7</sup> [FCT - Studentships and Fellowships values](#)

## II. Progression

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

A doctorate could be organized in two different types:

- a “classic” doctorate, with no mandatory curricular units/courses. The main requirement the doctoral candidate needs to meet to acquire a doctoral degree is the writing and public presentation of an original dissertation thesis;
- a “doctoral training programme” in which the candidate must attend a mandatory, predetermined amount of curricular units/courses and write and publicly present an original dissertation thesis.

### How is doctoral supervision provided?

Doctoral candidates have an individual supervisor that must belong to the academic staff of their host institution/university. Co-supervision is also possible. There are no clear or universal guidelines for supervision and the supervision process varies immensely according to supervisors and universities, departments, or doctoral programmes.

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

To design and implement an original research, to prepare, submit and publish in peer-reviewed journals, to participate in conferences and scientific seminars. As specified in the Legal Framework for Higher Education Degrees and Diplomas<sup>2</sup> (art. 28), the doctoral degree is conferred to those who demonstrate:

- the ability to systematically understand the scientific field of study and to critically analyse, assess and synthesize new and complex ideas;
- competences, skills and the ability to implement research methods associated with a scientific field;
- the ability to design, adapt and carry out a meaningful research respecting requirements imposed by the standards of academic quality and integrity;
- they have carried out a body of original research that is significant, contributed to expand knowledge, and has merited dissemination in renowned national or international top-specialty peer-reviewed publications;
- the ability to critically analyse, evaluate and synthesize new and complex ideas;
- the ability to communicate topics within their field of expertise to peers, academia, and society in general;
- the ability to promote academic or professional progress (technological, social or cultural) in a knowledge-based society.

### Is any mobility compulsory?

No, it is optional. Depends on the research project as well on the doctoral candidate and the supervisor.

### How are courses in transferable skills provided?

On a voluntary basis for those attending a “classic” doctorate. For doctoral candidates enrolled in doctoral training programmes, some units directed toward the development of

transferable skills are mandatory (such as communication skills developed through the attendance of academic writing courses). However, a lot of variability exists between doctoral training programmes and the specific units of training offered to doctoral candidates.

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

It varies according to the supervisor and the programme the doctoral candidate attends. In general, at the end of an academic year, the doctoral candidate must elaborate a report describing the progress in the work plan and establishing a set of goals for the next academic year.

For those enrolled in doctoral training programs there are other formal forms of assessment such as literature reviews, oral presentations or paper and reports elaboration. For these doctoral candidates there is usually also the requirement of presenting and defending the thesis project at the end of the first year of the doctoral training. The defence of the thesis project is public and it signals the start of the doctoral project.

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

Yes, it is possible, although there is a lot of variability according to supervisors and/or doctoral programmes.

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

No. The only requirement imposed by the law is to have a doctoral degree. However, on a strictly voluntary basis, supervisors may choose to attend some training. In some universities, only supervisors who were, at least, co-supervisors of a complete PhD dissertation are allowed to supervise.

## **III. Defence procedure**

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

The thesis must be submitted to the academic services of the doctoral training host and, for the doctoral training programmes, all curricular units must have been completed. A growing number of doctoral training programmes requires doctoral candidates to have a predetermined number of manuscripts published, accepted or submitted. The exact number of publications or the status of the manuscript (submitted, accepted or published) varies across programmes.

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

The dissertation needs to be submitted to the academic services in an electronic version. Usually, the dissertation needs to be accompanied by a recommendation letter from the supervisor attesting that the doctoral candidate meets the requirements for the defence. However, procedures vary according to the programme or the university.

## What is the defence procedure?

The defence is public and is organized around three moments:

- oral presentation of the dissertation by the doctoral candidate. This presentation is a summary or overview of the candidate's dissertation.
- committee members' argumentation, questioning and discussion of the doctoral candidate's dissertation; and
- committee members' deliberation (grade).

Although universities and departments have some autonomy to make decisions, the composition of the defence committee is established by the Legal Framework for Higher Education Degrees and Diplomas<sup>2</sup> (art. 34):

- the Rector of the university or someone appointed as his/her representative;
- a minimum of three persons with a PhD (the minimum number of committee members may vary across universities and departments),
- the doctoral dissertation supervisor or supervisors, if more than one exists.

Of the persons with a PhD that will integrate the committee:

- two must be external to the university;
- one may be an expert of recognized competence on the topic or field of research of the thesis;
- at least three committee members need to be experts on the topic or field of research of the thesis.

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