

Annual discussions at the University of Kassel

Ph.D. candidates Initial discussions (supervision agenda) and follow-up discussions

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01 Foreword

Dear colleagues,

The annual discussions that are regularly held provide a secure and central platform for communications and go beyond everyday conversions in corridors or in the refectory. Annual discussions at the University of Kassel represent constructive cooperation geared towards meeting common goals. They are a legally binding tool and a core element in a good management and organisational culture.

Annual discussions enable people to jointly agree on future tasks, goals and the working environment – as well as measures to ensure ongoing professional development. The partners can exchange ideas about mutual expectations and therefore prevent any misunderstandings. At the same time, they can use the discussions to obtain feedback.

The annual discussions held in the context of the supervision agenda are important for the process of successfully gaining qualifications for doctoral candidates:

- The **initial discussions** form the basis for establishing broad agreement about the upcoming work. The two sides here agree on tasks, requirements, expectations and the general conditions for writing a doctorate.
- The **annual discussions** with doctoral candidates are adapted to the special situation of these employees
- in the qualification phase. This particularly involves agreeing on work stages for the coming year, which are used as the basis for any decisions if contracts are extended.

This information folder is intended to support you so that you are able to hold well-prepared and structured annual discussions.

We wish you great success as you put things into practice. Do you have any questions? Various offices at our university like the Graduate Academy, the Doctorate Office and those representing various interests will be happy to advise you.

02 Supervision agenda for doctoral candidates

The supervision agenda forms part of the concept to promote young academic researchers, as adopted by the University of Kassel in 2012. Supervisors and Ph.D. candidates appreciate this tool because it provides a binding and reliable framework, clarifies expectations and enables agreements covering different aspects:

- **what a doctorate involves** and what is important,
- which **general conditions** (including those related to funding) are available, planned or being sought until the probable conclusion of the doctorate,
- which **tasks, rights and obligations** those involved have,
- how to identify possible disagreements/**conflicts** at an early stage and what can be done to resolve them (particularly appointing a third party, who may be able to mediate),
- identifying goals that are important **in addition to the doctoral thesis project**,
- becoming aware of possible **career paths after gaining the doctorate** at an early stage.

These goals on the supervision agenda have been integrated into the tool for annual discussions for employees since 2018. If there is no employment relationship (e.g. in the case of scholarship holders), the initial discussions should be used to agree on how often follow-up discussions should be held.

The annual discussions are used for

a focused and undisturbed exchange of ideas
about the current situation and prospects of
working together

providing mutual
feedback on working together
beyond pressing everyday issues

clarifying
mutual expectations

recognising the contribution made to the task
of the working group/the faculty and

agreeing on upcoming goals, tasks,
and supporting measures
during the next year

03 Initial and annual discussions

	Initial discussions (supervision agenda)	Annual discussions/follow-up discussions
Goal	Clarifying mutual expectations and requirements, setting a joint framework for the doctoral thesis phase	Exchanging ideas, feedback, agreeing on development and cooperation, defining work stages for the coming phase
Those involved in the discussions	Ph.D. candidate - supervisor	Doctoral candidate – supervisor, possibly a third person (e.g. for joint supervision or if a conflict has arisen)
Subject of the discussions	Qualification goals, general conditions and expectations related to the complete doctorate period, agreeing on how to proceed if a conflict arises	Summarising the previous qualification phase and planning the coming one, reflecting and agreeing on work stages
Timing	At the start of the doctoral studies	Every year for employees; by arrangement with scholarship holders and other doctoral candidates
What information is passed on	The cover sheet with details on those involved in the discussions and any third party, who can be approached if a conflict arises, is passed on to the appropriate dean's office and the Doctorate Office	Within the context of making decisions about extending contracts, which must be based on a forecast, the documented agreements on work stages are passed on to a faculty member in a related subject area. Documentation on discussions may also be passed on to agreed third parties, e.g. second supervisors.

04 General conditions for the discussions

Organising the meetings

Regular annual cycle	Holding initial discussions is a precondition for registering as a doctoral candidate. The annual discussions in the context of the supervision agenda are held once a year with all the doctoral candidates employed at the University of Kassel.
Initiative for an agreement on discussions	Each doctoral candidate (like any other employee) has a right to hold annual discussions with their relevant supervisor once a year. If contracts are extended, the forecast on reaching goals in future essentially depends on agreements that are made during the annual discussions.
Personal discussions	- If the supervising person is not the same as the supervisor, it makes sense to agree together on who can hold these discussions and how the other person can be informed about the results.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If a conflict becomes more serious during personal discussions, this should initially be resolved within the conflict stage model (e.g. with an outside chairperson, mediation, coaching). - Another option for topics that are difficult to discuss during personal discussions: designate topics, which need to be excluded, at the beginning of the annual discussions (e.g. reasons for sickness, personal reasons for down times).
An undisturbed atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supervisors must ensure an undisturbed atmosphere. A neutral place for the discussions is recommended (e.g. a small discussion or seminar room).
Enough time for the discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We recommend that you allow at least one hour for the discussions.



05 Guidelines for initial discussions (supervision agenda)

SUPERVISION AGENDA

between

doctoral candidate (name, address, phone no. /e-mail)

Supervisor or supervisory team (name, address, phone no. /e-mail)

Mr/Ms

is preparing in the following faculty _____

Chair of _____

at the University of Kassel according to the General Provisions for Doctoral Degrees dated

a doctoral thesis on the work topic/if relevant, language of the doctoral thesis

Both persons involved receive a jointly signed report of the regular discussions in line with the following list of topics. The cover sheet is sent to the dean's office and the Doctorate Office.

If any difficulties arise, both parties agree to appoint the following person as a third contact partner (providing he or she agrees):

(Surname, first name)

Date: _____

Date: _____

Signature of doctoral candidate

Signature of supervisor

Guidelines for initial discussions

A. Doctorate and the related subject area

1. What is the subject of the planned doctoral thesis?

2. Work stages and work plan

a) When will the doctoral thesis probably be finished?

b) How can the work on the doctoral thesis be divided up in terms of phases?

c) Which work stages are envisaged for the coming phase? (These work stages form the basis for estimating future discussions and possibly decisions on extending contracts and are therefore documented separately. Please use the form at the end of the guidelines).

d) Which time units are envisaged for the doctorate within the working day? (In the case of academic employees: the official job description is relevant).

e) Are there any other relevant duties (family tasks/professional activities beyond the doctorate etc.), which should be taken into account during these discussions? If so, which ones?

f) Which financial, spatial or even instrumental resources are available for the doctorate?

B. Supervision and working together

1. How frequently are discussions on the current state of the doctoral thesis envisaged? Are there any other frameworks for feedback (e.g. presentation seminars, supervision meetings)?

2. At which intervals should discussions be planned to update the supervision agenda?

3. If joint supervision is relevant, how should this be organised?

C Prospects and development opportunities

1. Which form of support is possible and feasible through participation in the field of study (study group, presentation seminars, etc.)?

2. How is it possible to support the acquisition of teaching experience (in a foreign language too)?

3. Which advanced and further training courses at the University of Kassel (Graduate Academy) or at other institutions are planned as part of the doctoral thesis project or any other academic qualification? How can they be supported by the supervisor?

4. How can support be provided to enable the person to find their place in the domestic and international academic field (special conferences, periods of study abroad etc.)?

5. Which ideas about envisaged publications or a publication strategy make sense? What roles do international specialist media play in this? (Publication strategies are required in line with the relevant disciplinary culture – particularly in the case of cumulative thesis)

6. What ideas about (international) career prospects after the doctorate or even after the conclusion of the current qualification phase are important for the supervision process?

7. Other aspects on prospects and development opportunities

D Funding the doctorate

1. Livelihood

- a) Is the person's livelihood guaranteed during the current doctoral studies? If not, which support options are feasible (e.g. extending the contract, temporary teaching appointments etc.)?

- b) Should it be assumed that there will be phases with different funding during the qualification phase and how can transitional periods be safeguarded? For university employees: which extension options exist according to the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education (possibly after consulting the personnel department)? **More information on "Annual Discussions and Questions of Extending Contracts" can be found at the end of the guidelines and in the handout from the personnel department (www.uni-kassel.de/go/befristungen-wisszeitvg)*

2. How are the costs of research visits, conferences/congresses, printing or research services by third parties funded?

3. Other aspects on the subject of funding

E Good academic practice

Practice that meets generally binding academic and possibly ethical and/or legal standards is a top priority when completing doctoral thesis projects too. The rules of good academic practice apply when completing each doctoral thesis project and for all those involved in the process (1.). In individual cases, ethical aspects of the research design (2.) or even questions regarding copyright or patent law (3.) may play a role too.

1. Please reach agreement on complying with the rules of good academic practice. Have any possible conflict areas been identified? What are they?¹

2. Is it necessary to involve an ethics commission in order to enable the completion of the doctoral thesis project? How is this being guaranteed?²

3. Do rights to data or patent or copyright issues need to be resolved? How will this be guaranteed?

¹ The University of Kassel has laid down "Principles to Ensure Good Academic Practice". They include a description of guiding principles and rules of good academic practice. Two persons of trust were also appointed on this basis and a permanent committee was set up to investigate any suspicious cases. The "members and associates of the University of Kassel can approach the persons of trust regarding issues of good academic practice in any conflict situations and if they suspect any academic misconduct" (Section 2, No. 1. Para. 1). The permanent committee "supports the Executive Board in cases of suspected academic misconduct by shedding light on the circumstances of the case and assessing it from the point of view of academic integrity" (Section 2, No. 2, Para. 1). Cf. <https://www.uni-kassel.de/intranet/organisation/kommissionen/sicherung-guter-wissenschaftlicher-praxis.html>

² Whether an ethics committee has to be involved in advance to determine whether the specific completion of a project is bona fide (to check, advise or supervise) needs to be resolved for each project, as is the rule in individual disciplines (particularly medical research on human beings, psychology and others), especially to protect test persons, and is also expected by individual funding bodies. There is no central ethics committee at the University of Kassel; there is only a statutory requirement for this at universities with medical departments. An ethics committee does exist in the Humanities and Social Sciences faculty to primarily focus on psychological research.

4. Other aspects on the subject of "good academic practice"

F When should the next meeting for discussions be held?

Date: _____

Date: _____

Signature of doctoral candidate

Signature of supervisor

06 Guidelines for annual discussions

Information on those involved in the discussions and confidentiality

That part of the annual discussions that concerns the doctorate takes place between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor – and possibly one other specialist colleague. This other person must have the suitable qualifications to be actively involved on the doctoral committee at a later stage, if required. If desired, both the doctoral candidate and the supervisor can waive the presence of the other person.

The content of the annual discussions remains confidential and is not disclosed outside the circle of those involved in the discussions. However, any content that relates to the progress of the doctoral thesis project and was agreed on the documentation sheet is relevant for any decisions about extending contracts and should therefore be clarified with care and documented.

A Starting points

1. The current title of the doctoral thesis project (if amended):

2. To what degree are ideas on the topic and courses of action from preceding discussions still relevant? How have these been developed?

B Supervision and working together

1. What kind of impression does the supervisor give in terms of guidelines, checks and specialist support?

2. Is the supervisor approached if difficulties arise? Is support granted?

3. Has the mutual agreement regarding rules of good academic practice been well followed? Have possible areas of conflict been identified?

4. Which special circumstances (e.g. from the private sphere) need to be taken into account during supervision?

5. In the case of joint supervision: how is the joint supervision working? Is there any need for change – and, if so, what kind of change?

C Environment and organisational aspects

1. How is the work divided in the team?

2. What is the working atmosphere like in the team?

3. Is there any special structural or personal potential for conflict? How can good solutions be found?

4. Which blocks of time are planned for the doctorate during the working day? (In the case of academic employees: the official job description is relevant). Can the working conditions and doctorate be well combined with each other?

5. Is there any need or possibility of relating academic qualifications and other official tasks (lecturing, tutoring students, administrative tasks etc.) more closely or restricting them?

6. Which organisational aspects regarding the doctoral examination process need to be noted? For example, is there any special time frame for appraising the dissertation? When will the timing of the defence be discussed?

D Work stages and work planning

Work stages, achievements and the timetable form the basis for assessing future discussions and, possibly, making decisions about extending contracts and are therefore documented separately. Please use the form at the end of the guidelines. If it seems sensible to those involved in the discussions, documentation of the following aspects can also be completed at a separately agreed meeting.

1. Which of the work stages agreed in the past has it been possible to complete? Which goals have not been met or only to a limited degree? What were the reasons for this?
2. How do the supervisors assess the scope and quality of the work performed so far?
3. How does the doctoral candidate assess the current state of progress and the conditions in which this could be achieved?
4. Are there any changes compared to the original timetable? Which work stages have been agreed for the coming qualification phase?

E Prospects and development opportunities

1. Are there any ideas about career prospects after the doctorate or even after the completion of the current qualification phase that play a role for the supervision process?

2. How can support be provided to enable the person to find their place in the academic field (specialist conferences etc.) and possibly for other career prospects (e.g. time off from teaching or recommendations)? Which kind of support can be made available within the institute/chair (working group, presentation seminars etc.)?

3. Which publications are currently being aimed for? Which publication strategy are they pursuing? (These are necessary in line with the relevant disciplinary culture – particularly with a cumulative thesis)

4. Is any further or ongoing training planned as part of the doctoral thesis project or the ongoing academic qualifications and can this be supported?

5. How is support provided to gain teaching experience (e.g. university teaching opportunities)?

6. Other aspects of prospects and development opportunities

F Funding the doctorate

1. Is the candidate’s livelihood guaranteed during the coming doctoral studies and until the probable conclusion of the doctorate? If not, what courses of action (e.g. scholarships, extending contracts etc.) and support opportunities are feasible? Which steps should be agreed?) *More information on the “Annual Discussions and Questions of Extending Contracts” can be found at the end of the guidelines and in the handout from the personnel department (link: www.uni-kassel.de/go/befristungen-wisszeitvg)

2. How are the costs of research visits, conferences/congresses, printing or research services by third parties being funded?
How is the publication of the doctoral thesis being financed?

3. Other aspects of funding the doctorate

G When should the next meeting for annual discussions for doctoral candidates be held?

Date: _____

Date: _____

Signature of doctoral candidate

Signature of supervisor

07 Documenting the work stages and work plan during initial discussions (example)

Documenting the work stages: initial discussions

Initial discussions held on _____ between

_____ (employee) and _____ (supervisor)
Faculty/Chair of _____

Central results and agreements on work stages (question A, 2c)

Which work stages have been agreed for the coming phase?

Agreement for passing on information to third parties (e.g. second supervisor)³

Date: _____

Date: _____

Signature of doctoral candidate

Signature of supervisor

³ In the context of extending contracts, the documented work stages are definitely passed on to a professor in a related subject area. This disclosure does not need to be noted separately here.

08 Documenting the work stages and work plan during annual discussions (follow-up discussions) (example)

The agreements documented below on the progress of the doctoral thesis project may be relevant for decisions about extending contracts and should therefore be clarified with care and documented.

Documenting work stages and work plan during annual discussions (follow-up discussions)

Follow-up discussions on _____ between
_____ (employee) and _____ (supervisor)
Faculty/Chair of _____

Central results and agreements on work stages and the work plan (questions on work stages and work planning, D, questions 1-4)

1. Which of the work stages agreed so far have been completed? Which goals have not been met or only to a limited degree? What were the reasons for this?

2. How do the supervisors assess the scope and quality of the work performed so far?

3. How does the doctoral candidate assess the current state of progress and the conditions in which this could be achieved?

4. Are there any changes compared to the original timetable?
Which work stages have been agreed for the coming qualification phase?

Agreement to pass on information to third parties (e.g. second supervisor)⁴

Date: _____

Date: _____

Signature of doctoral candidate

Signature of supervisor

⁴ In the context of extending contracts, the documented work stages are passed on to a professor in a related subject area. This disclosure does not need to be noted separately here.

09 Annual discussions and questions regarding the extension of contracts for staff members employed on temporary contracts according to the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education

For those employees at the university, who have a temporary contract in line with the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education, other career prospects should also be discussed with regard to the employment relationship settled in the contract during the annual discussions. This particularly applies if the current position or employment phase is due to end within the year following the discussions. But even if there is a fairly long period between this time and the current time – for doctoral candidates in conjunction with the supervision agenda or for employees after the doctorate in conjunction with more individual arrangements on the qualification process – it makes sense to look at the issue of other employment opportunities to make it easier to plan the ongoing cooperation and the employee's career goals.

Which time limit principle applies to the employment relationship and what does this mean?

In the case of employment relationships restricted by the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education, where the academic or artistic qualification and not the completion of the externally funded project is the major focus, the time limit follows Section 2 Paragraph 1 of the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education as “**a qualification time limit**”. The central goal of the employment relationship is then often (but not necessarily) a formal qualification through gaining a doctorate or a post-doctoral lecturing qualification. The law also mentions other qualification formats, but does not conclusively define them. Two frameworks apply to the modalities for time limits: the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education and the university's own concept for supporting young researchers within the framework set by the former. These two rules set upper limits for the possible duration of employment in addition to the basic condition for any further employment – that a position or the relevant resources must be available. **The statutory six-year periods before or after a doctorate are key elements here.** A handout from the personnel department (link: www.uni-kassel.de/go/befristungen-wisszeitvg) provides more information on this. Advice can also be obtained from the appropriate personnel officer in the personnel department.

If employment is mainly enabled by the use of external funding, the time limit may come in the form of an “**external funding time limit**” according to Section 2 Paragraph 2 of the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education. On this basis, however, the qualification is not the crucial element for the time limit within this employment relationship in contrast to the “qualification time limit”. In the case of an “external funding time limit”, the issue of further employment usually occurs because of the end of the externally funded project. The issue often arises after the continuation of a formal academic qualification, because the goal of a doctorate or a post-doctoral lecturing qualification is often being pursued within the context of the project.

How can things continue for “externally funded employees” after the end of the current time limit phase in an externally funded project?

If the “time limit is caused by external funding”, further periods of temporary employment may take place on the same basis according to the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education, if an externally funded project is continued or a different externally funded project can be considered. A continuation of the employment relationship with a time limit in line with Section 2 Paragraph 1 of the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education may be considered too as a so-called “qualification time limit” if the relevant upper time limits have not yet been reached (see above). Please note: according to the statutory stipulation, the duration of any academic work in an externally funded project is also added to the time limit possibilities according to Section 2 Para. 1 of the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education!

What does the concept for encouraging young academic researchers envisage?

The employment phases for work in a qualification position may be subdivided differently. The university's own concept for encouraging young academic researchers describes a basic model for this – and it cannot be exceeded in terms of the duration of the individual phases or the complete duration – but may be shortened. It assumes two phases – the first no longer than three years, and the second, which can last no more than two years for a doctorate and no longer than three years for a post-doctoral lecturing qualification. It is possible to break down these times to create a model of “2 + 2 + 1”, “2 + 2” or “2 + 1”. The upper limit of five years while working for a doctorate may be used, but does not have to be. Following a doctorate, a post-doctoral phase is possible, which is not geared towards a six-year post-doctoral lecturing qualification period – or not immediately – but to one or two years for a sensible post-doctoral qualification. However, this phase too must form part of the complete period of six years (after gaining a doctorate). Further employment is possible after completing a post-doctoral lecturing qualification, if time limit potential still exists. An adequate definition of tasks and goals should always determine the organisation of the phases in each case and they can be set in a very flexible manner.

It is one task of the annual discussions – in conjunction with the supervision agenda for doctoral candidates or with individual target definitions for those who have already gained a doctorate – to create transparency about this and

set partial goals for agreed periods in such a way that they are achievable and a well-founded decision is possible on whether the employment relationship should be extended for the purpose of achieving the formal qualification goal. The criterion involves setting the length of phases that correspond to the achievement of the relevant goals. The law makes clear that the “qualification being sought [...] [must] be able to be sensibly pursued within the agreed time limit period.” It also states that it does not have to be *completed* within this period.

Which opportunities exist if the basic model of the concept for encouraging young academic researchers has been exhausted or the “six-year threshold” in the qualification phase has been reached according to the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education?

If this or that upper limit on temporary positions has been reached, further limited employment may still be considered according to Section 2 Paragraph 1 of the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education if a) one or more children under the age of 18 are being cared for during the phase of activity leading to academic/artistic qualifications for one or two years per child; b) a severe disability or a serious chronic illness has existed for up to two years during the phase of activity leading to the academic/artistic qualification; c) such circumstances have existed that lead to an extension according to Section Paragraph 5 of the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education (see below).

They are, however, also relevant for organising the ongoing employment relationship. The handout from the personnel department, which has already been mentioned, describes the precise conditions for the circumstances in each case – e.g. defining the relevant care conditions for children or how to provide evidence of a serious disability or chronic sickness. In these cases, it also depends on whether the relevant resources can be made available for ongoing employment and whether an appropriately favourable forecast regarding the progress of the project justifies this. The circumstances, which create an extension of the employment relationship according to Section 2 Paragraph 5 of the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education, are also outlined more precisely in the handout mentioned. In contrast to the two other options mentioned, a forecast and the availability of resources are not pre-conditions for extensions according to Section 2 Paragraph 5 of the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education.

A continuation of the temporary employment based on external funding is another option according to Section 2 Paragraph 2 of the Law on Temporary Employment in Higher Education; no upper time limits exist here.

How is the ongoing process of extending contracts organised?

In many cases, the annual discussions, which are conducted in the light of the goals developed in previous discussions, create a situation where an extension of a contract will be agreed in line with the concept to promote young academic researchers. The discussions lead to a forecast, by means of which the supervisor formulates the request to the personnel department to extend the contract to a degree that needs to be individually determined within the relevant upper limits.

The supervisor concerned previously makes the documents, which have led to the decision in question, available to a colleague with similar professional qualifications, who is then included in the process as the “third person” in the sense of the triple control principle. The rules for this are laid down in the Executives Board’s resolution known as P/308 vom 22.01.2018.

What happens if the contract is not extended?

Each temporary employment relationship ends at some stage. In many cases, this occurs according to plan with the conclusion of the central project, whether it is an externally funded project or academic qualifications. Many employment relationships end because further continuation is not possible for different reasons – e.g. because no resources are available for further employment or because periods of temporary employment defined by the law or within the university have been fully used. It is also possible that an employment relationship is not continued on an individual basis, despite the possibility existing, particularly if there are serious doubts about the prospects that the qualification project will be positively completed. In this case, a procedure is also defined in the resolution already mentioned – P/308 vom 22.01.2018. In any case, the annual discussions should create the framework for addressing further prospects after the work at the University of Kassel and in this context what appropriate support might look like from the current supervisor or from central organisations like the personnel development department.

10 Support and advice

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