

Directive concerning doctoral studies at the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne

LEX 2.4.1

21st November 2005, status as at 15 July 2025

The Direction of the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne,
based on Art. 1, para. 3, of the [Ordinance on the doctorate conferred by the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne of 26th January 1998](#),
based on Art. 4, para.1, letter a of the [Ordinance on the Organisation of the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne](#),
hereby adopts the following:

Article 1 Scope of application

¹ The present directive stipulates the terms and conditions applicable to doctoral studies in accordance with the Ordinance on the doctorate at EPFL (hereinafter: the Ordinance).

² The administrative procedures are laid out in the *Internal Regulations of the Doctoral School*.

Section 1 Doctoral programs (Art. 3 of the Ordinance)

Article 2 Structure

¹ Upon the recommendation of the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education, who shall previously consult within the doctoral programme, the Direction of EPFL shall appoint the Director of the doctoral programme for a four-year term, renewable.

² In addition to the tasks and powers as defined by the Ordinance and the present directive, the Programme Director:

1. supervises the programme for which he/she is responsible and ensures that it runs smoothly, in consultation with the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education;
2. ensures the promotion of the programme in collaboration with the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education;
3. represents the programme vis-à-vis the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education, the Directors of other EPFL doctoral programmes, and other teaching and research bodies;
4. participates in Doctoral School Committee meetings attended by the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education, all of the Programme Directors, and between one and six doctoral student representatives.

³ The members of the Doctoral Programme Committee (hereinafter the Programme Committee) shall be appointed by the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education upon the recommendation of the Programme Director, who shall previously consult within the doctoral programme.

^{3bis} The Programme Committee shall be composed of three to twelve members, at least half of whom are professors or MER at EPFL. Except for persons representing doctoral candidates, the other members must hold a doctorate. The Programme Director may request exceptions from the latter condition on a case-by-case basis from the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education.

⁴ The Programme Committee:

1. organises and endorses the programme's courses;

2. makes preliminary recommendations to the Programme Director regarding applications for doctoral studies and, where applicable, the preconditions applicable for admission in special cases (Art. 5, para. 5 of the Ordinance);
3. endorses the programme's study plans and candidacy examination in its study rules and regulations;
4. advises the Programme Director regarding the acceptance of a research plan, the evaluation of thesis progress reports, and on possible exclusions (Art. 8, para. 1 and Art. 10, para. 3 - 4 of the Ordinance);
5. establishes a mentoring system offering guidance to doctoral students regarding the resolution of any difficulties met within the context of their training, in particular regarding the preparation of their thesis or cases of conflict;
6. assists the Programme Director in the resolution of conflicts. In cases where the latter is personally involved, he/she will appoint a substitute.

Section 2 Admission to doctoral studies; enrolment

Article 3 Admissions procedure for programmes (Art. 5 of the Ordinance)

¹ In order to be admitted to doctoral studies, the applicant must apply to an EPFL doctoral programme.

² Applications are processed according to the deadlines announced by each Doctoral Programme. However, in individual cases, the Program Committee may decide to consider applications outside of these deadlines.

³ Letters of recommendation are treated confidentially, including with respect to the applicant, in accordance with the waiver to which the latter has agreed.

⁴ Acceptance on a Doctoral Programme remains valid for one year, during which time the candidate must enrol with the Registrar's Office. Any later and the candidate must re-apply to the Doctoral Programme.

Article 4 Study plan (Art. 3, para. 3 of the Ordinance)

¹ Each Doctoral Programme stipulates in its study rules and regulations the number of ECTS credits required and, where applicable, the mandatory courses. The study rules and regulations require a minimum of 12 credits and a maximum of 30 credits.

² In order to pursue and successfully complete a doctoral study programme, candidates must acquire the number of credits required by the rules and regulations of their Doctoral Programme, divided as follows:

1. at least 4 credits during the first year of doctoral study;
2. the remaining credits prior to the oral thesis examination.

³ The choice of courses is made jointly with the Thesis Director and in accordance with the study rules and regulations. The chosen courses must entail the acquisition of new skills and knowledge.

⁴ A candidate may request the approval of the Programme Committee for courses followed outside EPFL during his/her doctoral studies. In the absence of an assessment to validate the credits, the Committee will organise an assessment at EPFL.

Article 5 Courses

¹ The programme's courses are subject to assessment. The form of assessment (oral or written examination, report and presentation, etc.) is determined by the instructor and announced at the beginning of the course.

² The assessment is evaluated using grades, or as follows: R for pass, E for fail, M for previously notified absence, NA for non-notified absence (in accordance with the [Ordonnance sur le contrôle des études à l'EPFL](#)).

³ The assessment takes place within the four weeks following the end of the course. Should the candidate fail the assessment, he/she will be granted a second and final chance to complete the assessment in accordance with the conditions stipulated for him/her.

Section 3 Admission for thesis preparation; thesis direction

Article 6 Choice of Thesis Director (Art. 10 of the Ordinance)

¹ All EPFL theses are supervised by a Thesis Director, based at EPFL. At the time the Thesis Director is chosen, the likelihood must exist that he/she will continue to be based at EPFL for the duration of the thesis, i.e. for at least four years. The Programme Director and the Registrar's Office ensure that this condition is respected.

² The candidate is accorded one year from enrolment to obtain the agreement of an EPFL professor or senior scientist (MER, *maître d'enseignement et de recherche*) to assume the role of Thesis Director. Until this agreement is secured, the Programme Director is responsible for supervising the doctoral student.

³ Upon prior notice from the Programme Committee, the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education may authorise the doctoral student to change his/her Thesis Director and/or doctoral programme, provided that the doctoral student is admitted to the new doctoral programme.

Article 7 Co-direction (Art. 10, para. 2 of the Ordinance)

Authorisation for the co-direction of a thesis must be requested from the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education by the Programme Committee.

Article 8 Acceptance for thesis preparation (Art. 8 of the Ordinance)

¹ If one of the conditions for acceptance for thesis preparation (as stipulated in Art. 8, para.1, points b - c of the Ordinance) are not fulfilled within the 12 months following the candidate's enrolment, the Programme Committee and Thesis Director will review the doctoral student's situation.

² Where applicable, the Programme Director notifies the doctoral student of the conditions that he/she must fulfil in order to rectify the situation within a time period of 15 months following enrolment, or proposes the definitive refusal of the candidate's acceptance to the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education. In the latter case, once approved by the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education, the candidate will be notified of the definitive refusal of acceptance.

Section 4 Preparation and writing of thesis

Article 9 Off-site doctorates (Art. 11, para. 2 of the Ordinance)

A doctoral thesis may be prepared partly or entirely off the EPFL campus when justified by certain circumstances (for example, if the necessary equipment is not available on campus). In this case, before thesis research begins, the Programme Director ensures that the following conditions are satisfied:

1. The Thesis Director has obtained guarantees from the host institution or company that it will furnish the doctoral student with the means necessary to advance in his/her thesis, without hinderance to the Thesis Director's prerogatives regarding thesis supervision and without impeding the doctoral training of the doctoral student;
2. The publication and distribution of the thesis in its entirety is ensured;
3. Funding is settled for the duration of the thesis between EPFL and the host institution or company.

²When a doctoral candidate is employed by EPFL under a work contract and that contract ends before the thesis is completed, they may, as an exception, be authorized by the program director to complete their thesis off-campus. This is permitted only if it does not require the use of EPFL premises or infrastructure, and provided that the oral examination has been scheduled before the end of the employment relationship, for a date no later than two months after the contract ends. In the event of immediate termination by EPFL for just cause, the exceptional authorization must be granted by the President of EPFL. In all cases, this authorization will not be granted if the doctoral candidate is receiving unemployment benefits.

Article 10 Duration (Art. 9, para. 2 of the Ordinance)

Duly justified requests for an extension of the planned deadline for completing the thesis (Art. 9, para. 2 of the Ordinance) must be submitted by the Thesis Director, in writing, to the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education and with the Programme Director's prior recommendation.

Article 11 Obligations of the doctoral student

¹ The compatibility between the doctoral student's training and any duties he/she may have as an assistant in an institute is managed through an agreement between the Programme Director and the Director of the institute. In case of disagreement, they refer to the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education.

² The compatibility between the doctoral student's training and his/her teaching responsibilities within an EPFL section is managed through an agreement between the Programme Director and the Head of the Section. In case of disagreement, they refer to the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education.

³ Should the doctoral student decide to discontinue his/her thesis preparation, he/she must inform his/her Thesis Director, the Programme Director and the Registrar's Office in writing and without delay.

⁴ The doctoral student informs the Registrar's Office of any changes in his/her personal data. Any omission or modification resulting in the correction of the doctoral diploma will be payable by the doctoral student.

Article 12 Role of the Thesis Director (Art. 10 of the Ordinance)

¹ The Thesis Director guides the doctoral student in his/her work and ensures that the thesis progresses smoothly.

² Should the work or progress of the doctoral student prove unsatisfactory, and in particular if the Thesis Director's annual report indicates shortcomings, the Programme Director and the Thesis Director will discuss the candidate's situation. The Programme Director will then notify the doctoral student in writing of the problems discerned, the measures required to improve the situation, and the deadline within which these must be taken (Art. 10, para. 4, point a of the Ordinance).

³ In the event of Art. 10, para. 4, point b of the Ordinance, the Thesis Director submits his/her proposal to exclude the doctoral student, pre-signed by the Programme Director, to the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education, who notifies the doctoral student of the decision.

Article 13 Thesis

In preparation for the oral examination and in agreement with the Thesis Director, the doctoral student presents and submits the thesis in accordance with the *Internal Regulations of the Doctoral School*.

Article 14 Submission of thesis

The thesis must be submitted **at least 35 days** before the date of the oral examination.

Article 14a Exclusion

When a doctoral candidate commits acts justifying the immediate termination of their employment contract for just cause, they are automatically excluded from the doctoral program, unless an exception is granted by the President of EPFL in duly justified cases.

Section 5 Oral thesis examination

Article 15 Registration

¹ In order to register for the oral thesis examination, the candidate must have settled a fee, the amount of which is defined in accordance with Annex 1 of the *Ordonnance sur les taxes perçues dans le domaine des EPF* ¹.

² The oral examination cannot take place until this fee has been paid.

Article 16 Role of the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education

On the basis of a proposal from the Thesis Director and the Program Director, the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education:

1. appoints the jury (Art. 14 of the Ordinance);
2. notifies the jury and the candidate of the date, place and time of the oral examination;
3. invites the Thesis Director and the examiners to send their report to the president of the jury at least ten days before the oral examination.

Article 17 Role of the jury (Art. 15 of the Ordinance)

¹ The Thesis Director and the examiners evaluate the scientific value of the work according to the following criteria:

1. originality and quality of the research;
2. presentation;
3. value of the results.

² They send their signed report to the president of the jury at least ten days before the oral examination, specifying whether the thesis can be unconditionally accepted, conditionally accepted, or if it should be rejected. If necessary, they stipulate the conditions for the unconditional acceptance of the work and for the presentation of the final version.

³ These reports are confidential and are only sent to the president of the jury. They may be given to the other members of the jury at the time of the examination only and must be returned to the president of the jury at the conclusion of the examination in order to ensure their confidentiality.

Article 18 Procedure for oral thesis examination

¹ The jury assesses the candidate in accordance with Art. 15, para. 2 of the Ordinance.

² The examination is not public and takes place at EPFL. Faculty members may attend and may consult the thesis at the Registrar's Office. They are nevertheless required to respect the confidential nature of the examination and may not question the candidate.

³ The duration of the examination is not defined, but is on average two hours.

⁴ It is possible for two of the examiners (both external, or one external and one internal) to conduct the oral examination via videoconference. Should major impediment prevent another examiner from attending the examination, the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education

¹ http://www.admin.ch/ch/fr/rs/c414_131_7.html

may exceptionally authorise videoconferencing for three examiners. Oral examination via teleconference is not permitted.²

Article 19 Payment of jury members' expenses³

¹ Transport, accommodation and meal expenses are reimbursed to jury members who are not members of the ETH Domain.

² The reimbursement is carried out in accordance with the Directive relating to the organization of responsible professional travel.

Section 6 Public defence

Article 20 Invitation and notification

¹ The Programme Director invites the jury members to attend the public defence.

² The Registrar's Office publishes notice of the public defence through the channels it considers appropriate.

Article 21 Procedure (Art. 16, para. 2 - 3 of the Ordinance)

¹ The doctoral candidate defends his/her thesis at EPFL in a public defence presided over by the Thesis Director. The candidate's presentation, lasting approximately 45 minutes, is followed by a discussion. The presence of the other jury members is not obligatory.

² The public defence is held in one of the official Swiss languages or in English.

³ The public defence may take place **four weeks at the earliest** and **six months at the latest** after the oral thesis examination.

Section 7 Printing and distribution of thesis

Article 22 Final version

¹ The Thesis Director ensures that the final version of the thesis is correctly completed, taking into account any conditions imposed by the jury and appearing in the official minutes. He/She authorises the distribution of the thesis.

² The original copy of the final version must be submitted to the Registrar's Office prior to the public defence of the thesis and **at the latest one month** after the unconditional acceptance of the thesis. Failing this, it is considered as having been conditionally accepted. Justified requests for an extension of the deadline must be addressed to the Associate Vice President for Doctoral and Lifelong Education.

Article 23 Printing and distribution

The thesis is printed and distributed in accordance with the *Internal Regulations of the Doctoral School*.

Article 24 Doctoral degree (Art. 16, para. 4 and Art. 18 of the Ordinance)

¹ The doctoral degree is presented to the candidate at the conclusion of the public defence of the thesis, provided that all conditions relating to the printing and distribution in due form of the thesis (in accordance with Art. 23) have been fulfilled.

² In the case of co-direction of a thesis, the degree will bear the signature of both Thesis Directors.

² Amendment of 17th March 2020, entered into force on 1st April 2020 (version 1.5)

³ Amendment of 19th December 2011, entered into force on 1st January 2012 (version 1.2)

Article 25 Thesis publication (Art. 19 of the Ordinance)

¹ Neither the author nor his/her Thesis Director has the right to delay the printing of the doctoral thesis.

² The public release of the thesis may only be postponed for the time necessary for the prompt filing of a patent. As soon as the application for the patent has been filed (within the meaning of Art. 49 of the Federal Act on Patents for Inventions⁴), the thesis must be released.

³ Before embarking on a thesis, the candidate and his/her Thesis Director must ensure that nothing will impede its complete publication and distribution.

Section 8 Final provisions

Article 26 Entry into force

The present directive, which entered into force on 21st November 2005 (version 1), was revised on 1st September 2008 (version 1.1), on 1st January 2012 (version 1.2), on 1st July 2012 (version 1.3), on 1st January 2017 (version 1.4), on 1st April 2020 (version 1.5) and on 25th January 2021 (version 1.6), on 1st January 2024 (version 1.7), on 1st January 2025 (version 1.8), as well as on 15 July 2025 (version 1.9*).

On behalf of the EPFL Direction:

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⁴ <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19540108/index.html>