



Europe and International  
Department

# EXTERNAL EVALUATION STANDARDS FOR DOCTORATES OUT OF FRANCE (ISCED LEVEL 8)

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## INTRODUCTION

The content and structure of programmes can vary a great deal depending on the country. There are a number of classification types for facilitating comparison and adopting common terms. For these standards, HCERES chose to use the UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), the “widely-used global reference classification for education systems”<sup>1</sup>, which is periodically revised. ISCED 2011 was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in November 2011 and has 8 levels.

Level 8 of the ISCED corresponds to “doctoral or equivalent level”, defined using the following major characteristics:

- “Programmes at ISCED level 8, or doctoral or equivalent level, are designed primarily to lead to an advanced research qualification. Programmes at this ISCED level are devoted to advanced study and original research, and are typically offered only by research-oriented tertiary educational institutions, such as universities. Doctoral programmes exist in both academic and professional fields.
- ISCED level 8 usually concludes with the submission and defence of a thesis, dissertation or equivalent written work of publishable quality, representing a significant contribution to knowledge in the respective field of study. Therefore, these programmes are typically based on research and not only on course work. In some education systems, ISCED level 8 programmes contain very limited course work, or none at all, and individuals working towards a doctoral degree engage in research mostly independently or in small groups with varying degrees of supervision. In some education systems, doctoral research is undertaken by individuals employed by the university as junior researchers or research assistants who are undertaking at the same time their doctoral studies.
- Entry into ISCED level 8 programmes or junior research positions normally requires the successful completion of specific ISCED level 7 programmes. Achievement of an ISCED level 8 qualification provides access to professions requiring highly qualified academic skills and research positions for government and industry, and to research and teaching positions in educational institutions that offer ISCED level 6, 7 and 8 programmes.”

HCERES has built its doctorate evaluation and accreditation process on a set of values and objectives that doctorates must pursue to ensure a certain level of quality.

These objectives are organised around four areas:

- Area 1: Positioning of the doctorate.
- Area 2: Organisation and management of the doctorate
- Area 3: Supervision and training of doctoral students.
- Area 4: Integration of doctors into the job market.

These four areas are organised into “standards”, representing the objectives for a doctorate (for example, organised into doctoral programmes and/or doctoral schools) and their lead institutions to achieve. These standards are broken down into criteria explaining the type of actions to be carried out.

This document can be used by institutions to develop self-evaluation of their doctorate. The approach therefore fits into their overall continuous improvement approach.

Finally, these standards are used by the HCERES evaluation panel within its activities to assess the quality and effectiveness of a doctorate's general operation.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/international-standard-classification-education-isced>

## AREA 1: POSITIONING OF THE DOCTORATE

### Standard 1-1: The doctorate's distinctive features and objectives are clearly defined.

- The doctorate content can be easily identified and is clear with regard to the scientific scope covered.
- The doctorate's target audience is clearly identified.
- The objectives of the doctorate are clearly defined, formulated and brought to the attention of all stakeholders.
- The doctorate is in keeping with the institution's scientific policy.

### Standard 1-2: The positioning of the doctorate is consistent with its environment.

- The positioning of the doctorate and its interactions with its lead institution(s) are relevant, formally set out and effective.
- The doctorate contributes to capacity building in the institution.
- The doctorate works with research units whose scope, potential and scientific topics are consistent with its objectives.
- These research units are involved in the doctorate (recruitment of doctoral students, teaching, monitoring of doctoral students and graduates, exploitation of results/promotion of doctoral programmes, etc.).
- The doctorate interacts with the socio-economic and socio-cultural environments, which have a role in training doctoral students and/or integrating doctoral graduates into the job market.
- Through international links with foreign institutions and/or research units/centres, the doctorate has a clear and operational policy on international orientation which benefits doctoral students (work placements, training, conferences, research residencies, etc.).
- The doctorate benefits from an incentive policy (at university level, partnership level or national level) to develop doctoral studies. Where applicable, partnership agreements (between universities, with local authorities or international agreements) are established to ensure the long-term financial stability and future of the programme.

## AREA 2: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE DOCTORATE

### Standard 2-1: Effective organisation and management is in place for the doctorate.

- The doctorate's organisational structure is based on a scientific, teaching and administrative team that successfully manages and coordinates it. The roles and responsibilities of each team member are clearly defined and understood by all stakeholders.
- Governance of the doctorate (directors, any co-directors, board, committees, etc.) is adapted to its context and objectives, and involves doctoral student representatives.
- Management is based on clearly defined rules, which detail procedures for general operation of the doctorate and are brought to the attention of users (charter, in-house regulations, etc.).
- The doctorate has material and human resources, including pooled resources, that are consistent with its objectives (premises, staff, digital platform and dedicated software, information systems, digital document resources).
- The doctorate has operational internal and external communication tools. Doctorate activities (administrative procedures, research activities, scientific and/or professional training events, etc.) are accessible to doctoral students and stakeholders.
- Internal quality assurance mechanisms are in place within the doctorate. Regular self-evaluation of the doctorate is based on a procedure and clearly identified activity indicators. In particular, this

includes surveys for doctoral students and thesis supervisors (e.g. evaluation of teaching and follow-up systems) and helps the doctorate to develop. The conclusions of these self-evaluations and the resulting changes are communicated to the lead institutions, doctoral students and other doctorate stakeholders.

### **Standard 2-2: There is an explicit policy for funding and recruiting doctoral students which is adapted to their programme.**

- The doctorate is based on a transparent thesis funding policy, which is consistent with its objectives and the institution's scientific policy. The policy involves controlled management of this funding.
- Precise rules for recruitment have been established. The procedures adopted (choice of thesis topics, admission conditions, type and amount of funding, etc.) are accessible, explicitly stated and fair.
- Student induction services are suitable for all types of doctoral students (international students, students with disabilities, etc.) to help them complete their doctorate under the best conditions.
- Doctoral students recruited have the appropriate conditions for preparing their doctorate (supervision, material resources, etc.) and sufficient financial resources up to defence of their thesis.

## **AREA 3: SUPERVISION AND TRAINING FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS**

### **Standard 3-1: The doctorate applies a strict doctoral student supervision and follow-up policy.**

- Precise and explicit rules are set for supervising and follow-up of doctoral students (quality of supervisor, number of doctoral students per supervisor, management of co-director or co-supervisor situations, etc.): these rules are brought to their attention
- The reciprocal commitments of doctoral students and thesis supervisors (or directors) are clearly defined and brought to their attention.
- The doctorate includes individual and regular follow-up of doctoral students, with clearly defined, coherent and transparent procedures for doctoral students and thesis supervisors.
- This follow-up measures thesis progress (results obtained, publications/outputs, teaching received, etc.), checks preparation for employment, and ensures that appropriate conditions are in place (finances, supervision and material resources).
- Measures to combat fraud, plagiarism and corruption are applied within the doctorate.
- The doctorate has systems for preventing any forms of conflict, discrimination and harassment, and for limiting situations which may lead to students dropping out of the programme. In the event of a conflict or lack of scientific integrity, appeal mechanisms for mediation are in place and brought to the attention of users.

### **Standard 3-2: The doctorate offers diverse teaching and organises supplementary events.**

- Doctoral students have access to disciplinary/scientific teaching and professional training (soft skills, work placements, work experience, etc.) suited to their profile and career plans. Doctorates raise awareness of research ethics and scientific integrity.
- The teaching proposed is based on the expertise of research units and socio-economic partners associated with the doctorate.
- Methods for accessing and validating this teaching (test of knowledge acquired, required/recommended number of teaching hours before thesis defence, etc.) are clearly defined and known by users.

- The doctorate invites doctoral students to take part in supplementary scientific and/or professional events or actions, such as scientific events, conferences or panel discussions, etc. For each type of action, the methods for access, validation and evaluation, particularly by doctoral students, are defined and communicated.

### **Standard 3-3: The doctorate is based on explicit rules for thesis duration and defence.**

- The doctorate has set clear and suitable objectives with regard to the duration of theses and re-enrolment of doctoral students each year, taking into account the profiles of doctoral students and any special conditions (employed doctoral students, training leave, parental leave, maternity leave, sick leave, etc.).
- Explicit criteria for authorising thesis defence (producing new knowledge, exploitation of results, validating teaching, mobility, etc.) are communicated to doctoral students and thesis supervisors.
- Organisation rules for thesis defence (composition of the examination board and role of its members, convening notice, manuscript submission, etc.) are communicated to doctoral students and supervisors. These rules are defined in a fair and transparent manner.

## **AREA 4: INTEGRATION OF DOCTORS INTO THE JOB MARKET**

### **Standard 4-1: The doctorate includes mechanisms to promote the integration of doctors into the job market.**

- In partnership with the lead institutions, the doctorate implements systems to promote the doctorate among local, national and international partners (public and private sector).
- Doctoral students are informed of the requirements and conditions for accessing all potential positions.
- Appropriate tools are used to evaluate the skills (discipline-specific and transferable skills) acquired throughout the doctorate.

### **Standard 4-2: The doctorate has effective monitoring of the integration of doctors into the job market.**

- There is an effective monitoring system for cohorts of doctors, ensuring a high level of usable responses.
- The monitoring system takes into account type, profile, remuneration, geographical location and career development in jobs held by doctors.
- With the participation of doctoral students/doctors, the doctorate and its institutional partners seek to create an "alumni" directory or network of former doctoral students.

### **Standard 4-3: The data collected is analysed, communicated and used.**

- Doctorate managers use the data collected, ensuring that it is analysed and sent to doctorate applicants/doctoral students/doctors and stakeholders.
- Analysis of employment data is used to develop the doctorate (recruitment and follow-up of doctoral students, additional teaching and events proposed, etc.).
- Analysis of employment data is used to strengthen promotion of the doctorate to local, national and international partners (institutions and socio-economic partners).