

LLSH DOCTORAL SCHOOL N°50

Languages, Literature & Humanities

PhD supervision vademecum

Updated on November 25 2025

The doctoral school rules and regulations provide additional details on particular cases (e.g. gap period, parental leave) if necessary.

0. Preamble: general information

The ministerial decree of May 25, 2016 modified in August 2022, setting the national framework for PhD training and the conditions resulting in the PhD being awarded, aims to ensure that the time spent on the thesis is not entirely devoted to it, but includes a doctoral training program that should increase the employability of PhD students outside the university. As a general rule, you should be familiar with this decree in broad terms.

Supervisor, co-supervisor, thesis advisor

To supervise a thesis (as " supervisor " or " co-supervisor "), you must hold the Accreditation to Direct Research (HDR). If you do not hold an HDR, you can nevertheless co-supervise a thesis up to 50% (as a "thesis advisor"), with an HDR supervisor, who will be responsible for the PhD student and ensure that the thesis runs smoothly and that the doctoral training is carried out.

However, in exceptional circumstances, it is possible to submit a "one-time approval request" to the doctoral school board and the CED ALLSHS Doctoral Exemptions Commission (CD3). This dispensation will be examined, for example, if the applicant plans to defend an HDR (accreditation to direct research) within the next two years. A dispensation may be obtained only once in a person's career, and for a single PhD candidate.

Thesis co-supervision, that is, by two supervisors who have an HDR, is a way of pooling the expertise of two research units and enabling the PhD student to receive material and financial support from both units he/she is affiliated with. Although a co-supervision agreement must be signed by both research supervisors concerned, only one administrative enrollment is required. There is a single defense and it takes place in the university in which the PhD student is enrolled.

Mere co-supervision, for which the co-supervisor outside UGA might be in France or abroad, differs from co-supervision within a joint PhD programme. A joint PhD brings two PhD diplomas (UGA / partner university). The PhD candidate is enrolled in both universities (though he/she only pays registration fees in one of the university each year). The agreement is couched in a joint PhD agreement (*convention de cotutelle*). The PhD candidate must spend at least a third of the total PhD years in each university (the 3rd third is spent as wished).

Duration of the thesis

The duration of the thesis, set by the ministerial decree of May 2016 (article 14), is 3 years for full-time PhD students, 6 years for part-time students. Annual extensions may be granted, based on the opinions of the supervisor, the CSI (Individual follow-up committee) and the doctoral school management team. The application is discussed by the CD3 (Doctoral Exemptions Commission), on the recommendation of the doctoral school management team. In the event of an unfavorable opinion from the CD3, the PhD student can request a second opinion from the UGA Research Commission. The final decision is taken by the President of the UGA.

To follow this rule (avoiding extensions beyond a 4th, possibly a 5th, year), while adapting it to the Humanities context, you must establish a plan and a volume of work in collaboration with the PhD student that will allow the defense of the thesis within a reasonable time frame (ideally in the fourth year for PhD students benefiting from specific funding, in the sixth year for the others). Experience has shown that PhD students who take longer tend to experience increasingly serious difficulties, of various kinds. It should be noted that a thesis started as “full time” will be considered full time even after the specific funding has come to an end, because any extension is only an extension to help the candidate bring the thesis to an end.

A PhD students must validate 120 training hours on ADUM, shared between disciplinary training courses, transversal training and professional integration. One of them has to be on ethics. As a supervisor, you have an important advisory role as regards the training programme: PhD students often tend to look only for training that bears specifically on their thesis topic. The doctoral College and the doctoral school each have their “training catalogue”, designed to be complementary to each other. They are accessible via the doctoral school’s website: <https://ecoledoctorale-llsh.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/fr/menu-principal/formation/programme-de-formation/programme-de-formation-64749.kjsp>

The doctoral school also validates training “outside the catalogue”. This may include such activities as participation in the research lab’s activities (talk, organization of conferences or other scientific events), or expert training that the doctoral school or the doctoral College cannot offer. A grid, available at the link above, specifies what may count towards training hours “outside the catalogue”, and how many hours may be validated for each activity.

Supervision rates

In order to ensure that thesis supervisors are fully available, the maximum supervision rate is set at **6 PhD students, with a maximum volume of 500%**, for the entire UGA Humanities sector.

In the case of joint PhD co-supervision or exceptional circumstances, an exceptional exemption may be submitted to the doctoral school, along with a reasoned argument.

A **co-advisor** (that is, someone who does not hold an HDR or equivalent) may not be co-advisor for more than **3 PhD students**.

Supervisor commitment

UGA’s Doctoral Charter, signed by the PhD candidate, the supervisor(s) and the doctoral school dean when applying at the doctoral school, specifies the commitments of all parties. The thesis supervisor (conjointly with the co-supervisor, where applicable):

- “- ensures that the research topic is feasible and monitors and supports its completion. They are the first line of responsibility in supervising the PhD student scientifically.
- helps the PhD student to integrate into the scientific community in their field of research,
- ensures that the PhD student follows the proposed study plan,
- ensures that they have the material and financial means necessary to carry out their project,
- holds regular discussions with the PhD student to ensure that their research, skills acquisition and writing are progressing well,
- establishes a schedule for research work with the PhD student,
- proposes an active contribution to the writing of articles in peer-reviewed journals in which the PhD student’s

- name will appear,
- encourages the PhD student to engage in activities to promote and communicate their research work."

Similarly, the PhD student, among others, agrees to carry out the research as initially determined, to contribute to the life of the research unit, and to leave their documents and results to the laboratory or research team in a usable form.

Well-being at work

Working relationships between PhD students and their supervisors must be constructive and serene. In order to achieve this, they are advised to regularly have meetings, either in person or through visioconference (the recommendation is once a month at least). It is particularly useful to establish an agenda for the meeting, and settling the date for the next one at the end of a given meeting has been proved to help a number of PhD students.

Supervisors are advised to explain to their PhD students that research throughout the thesis is carried out on a trial and error basis: they learn by doing, which is very different from the exams they took earlier (those came at the end of their training), or even from the MA dissertation, which is much shorter and less complex. For many PhD students, this trial and error approach triggers feelings of illegitimacy and poor self-image. Some manage to overcome that feeling, but others need reassuring, need to be told that their progress and difficulties are the norm, that they are doing well. A PhD student is very regularly assessed (feedback on pages written for the thesis, submission of abstracts or papers), which always comes with constructive criticism. They regularly experience times when they feel they have not performed as well as was expected of them (new methods, new tools). Some data may also prove difficult to analyse. As most students were very good students at university, they may be unsettled by these obstacles, and few dare to speak out, whether to their supervisors or their peers. They might get the feeling that the others do not meet such difficulties. Particular care from the supervisors can really make a difference.

Well-being at work also concerns supervisors. While it is important that supervisors show some understanding in working relationships, it is just as legitimate to expect PhD students to show professional behaviour. If a difficult should arise, it is important to look for solutions immediately. Solutions may include letting the PhD student know how their behaviour gives rise to a negative feeling (long silence, not turning up at a meeting, for instance), turning to the dean of the doctoral school for advice or mediation, or talking about the difficulties with the CSI. If the dean of the doctoral school fails to find effective action, the doctoral College's "regulation task force" (cellule de regulation) may be consulted, through the dean of the doctoral school. It is important

that PhD supervisors, and similarly PhD students, should not keep their difficulties to themselves. Otherwise the misunderstandings will only get more and more serious.

Supervisor training

The doctoral College offers training for supervisors and co-advisors. Those sessions are particularly recommended for candidates to an HDR, but may be attended by all. The catalogue may be viewed here: <https://doctorat.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/encadrant-e-de-these/>

1. Recruitment and admission of PhD students

Definition of a thesis project

Anyone wishing to begin a PhD must submit to the prospective supervisor a substantial research project, a résumé, a cover letter, and their master's grade transcript (or equivalent diploma where required) and, if

they did a master's degree dissertation, their dissertation. Applications with a GPA of less than 12/20 for the master's degree and a grade of less than 14 for the dissertation will not be accepted (see the doctoral school rules and regulations, <https://ecoledoctorale-llsh.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/fr/menu-principal/l-ed-llsh/textes-et-reglements/>). It is your responsibility first to examine the project and help the applicants to finalise it so that it will meet academic expectations at this level of studies: state of the art, research question(s), original contribution, methodology, corpus, provisional deadlines. Such help is part and parcel of what supervising involves. It is important not to write the project in the PhD student's place, because this first step gives an insight into their capacity to read sources, produce an overview and research questions. Mere motivation is not enough for a PhD student to succeed, and it is your responsibility not to enroll a student in a PhD programme if you are not convinced that they can succeed.

The project must be in your field of research and it must be ratified by the relevant research unit director. It is important that you ensure the admissibility of the project, that the applicant obtained high enough marks in his/her master's degree (equivalent of the French *mention assez bien* at least), and that you read the MA thesis if there is one. If the applicant has never had research experience (no MA thesis, for instance), the doctoral school recommends a particularly long research project (more detailed state of the art, work on a sample of data, etc.), or even to take a year to build the project, so that the student may see whether they like research, and whether they can succeed.

You must also ensure that the future PhD student has the financial resources required to carry out this work. As stated in the doctoral school's Rules and Regulations, "the doctoral school board has set a funding threshold corresponding to the French RSA (Active solidarity income) benefit, i.e. 565 euros/month. But as such an income cannot guarantee decent living conditions, particular attention will be paid to applications which come with an income that is significantly lower than the SMIC." A thesis that is funded by odd jobs is statistically less likely to be defended than a thesis that is funded or carried out at the same time as a salaried job (permanent contract).

Application for a thesis

Once the project has been examined and approved within the relevant research unit, the PhD student must open an ADUM account and send the application to the doctoral school, including the training agreement and the PhD charter signed by all parties. The detailed procedure is available on the doctoral school website.

The doctoral school management team, in view of the project, the elements in the application and the various opinions, gives or withholds its approval, possibly requesting modifications if the project is not sufficiently fleshed out or framed, and enquires about the material conditions during the thesis in the case of a thesis that does not receive dedicated funding (part-time).

The doctoral school board has established the following rules for the recruitment of PhD students, which can be found in the doctoral school rules and regulations, on the following website <http://ecoledoctorale-llsh.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/>

In addition to an overall GPA of 12 and a grade of 14 in the dissertation, the criteria for admission to the PhD program in the LLSH doctoral school are as follows:

- French master's degree including a research paper in the same disciplinary field
- In the case of a French master's degree that includes a research thesis in another discipline: enrollment may be conditional, with, for example, the obligation to attend additional training courses (theoretical or methodological). In this case, these courses must be included in the training agreement (ADUM).
- In the case of a master's degree from a foreign university, a request for an "exemption from a French master's degree" must be sent to the doctoral school; the request is examined by the ALLSHS doctoral school Doctoral Exemptions Commission (CD3); admission may be conditional, as stated previously.
- The doctoral school board can be asked to give an opinion on an applicant.

Language for the thesis manuscript

PhD students who wish to do so may, with the agreement of their thesis supervisor, submit a request for a dispensation to write their thesis in a language other than French. The dispensation is granted by the doctoral school board. A 30-page summary in French must be provided at the end of the manuscript. For PhD students without joint supervision, English is the only language for which a dispensation is possible, except for specialists of a language, who might write their thesis in the language of that area (for instance, Italian for someone in Italian studies). PhD students in joint supervision do not need this dispensation: they may write in the language of one of the partner universities, or in English (they still need to provide a 30-page summary in French).

Joint PhD supervision

For joint supervision theses, PhD students enroll in one university, then applies for admission in the other. Once they are admitted, the agreement is set up. UGA has a dedicated international joint supervision service (contact: cotutelle-international@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr).

Setting up the joint PhD agreement typically takes several months. Joint supervision programmes are available only to first-year students.

Applications for re-admission

Enrollment in the doctoral school is mandatory and must be renewed each year (ministerial decree of May 2016 and the Doctoral College's Charter). PhD students in joint supervision must ensure in advance that their agreement and/or amendment is valid for the year of re-enrollment, and enroll administratively, even if the tuition fees are not due for the current year (they are paid alternately in the two partner universities).

In order to apply for reenrollment, the PhD student must send an application, containing the documents specified on the doctoral school's website, among which is the CSI report. This CSI report must also be sent by PhD students to their supervisors on reception.

Re-admission is not automatic: it depends on your conclusion, on that of the CSI (see below) and on the general progress with the research. The application must include an overview of research progress during the past year, also a prospective schedule for the year ahead. This prospective schedule is not just a document for the administration: it is important that you all refer to it, manage any lagging behind, and if necessary, that you adjust the initial research project so that the PhD can end within a reasonable interval.

Do not hesitate to remind your PhD students that enrollment is a two-step process: first academic admission (whether for a first admission or for re-admission), then enrollment. It must be done before the end of October. A PhD student who does not re-enroll is considered to have withdrawn. The thesis supervisors must ensure that this procedure is carried out each year.

2. Thesis funding: doctoral contracts

The only comfortable way to do a PhD serenely is to get funding through a 3-year doctoral contract. Doctoral contracts may originate from:

- "university" (UGA), funded by the Ministry (around 7 per year, apart from "Disability" (*Handicap*) contracts)
- UGA, funded by a number of research programmes (IRGA, GATES, Cross-disciplinary programmes etc)
- from the regional authority (rare)
- from the ENS for its masters' students
- from research programmes (ANR, ERC in particular)
- from a company, association, local authority, with a CIFRE contract
- other organizations (Vinci, DAAD, Eole, Chateaubriand, EFE, grants from foreign governments : see the doctoral school website, "the PhD -> Funding your PhD studies")

French or foreign grants may bring short-term support, as does the doctoral school, which offers funding for field research or international mobility.

Applying for a “university” doctoral contract

These doctoral contracts are 3-year employment contracts. The employer is UGA, and the job is to do the PhD thesis. Such a doctoral contract costs around 100 000 € of public money, so that particular care is taken to the selection of laureates. Similarly, it is important that the candidates be aware of these expectations.

To apply for a doctoral contract, candidates are invited to respond to the call for applications in March-April and to submit an application to the doctoral school. They must first have contacted their future thesis supervisor and their application must have been viewed by the research unit, which returns an opinion. The jury for the doctoral contracts is the Board of the doctoral school. Any member with a conflict of interest withdraws, and is replaced by a colleague from the same research unit. The jury first decides on which candidates to audition, then ranks auditioned candidates.

Applicants are candidates who have a master's degree with a research dissertation, with a GPA of more than 12/20 for the four semesters, may apply; the minimum grade required for the dissertation is 14/20, in accordance with the doctoral school rules and regulations. Applications that do not meet this criterion are inadmissible. The rules and dates of the application period are available on the doctoral school website. For applicants who do not have a French master's degree, the master's degree diploma will be examined by the Doctoral College ALLSH Doctoral Exemptions Commission (CD3) to establish equivalence to a French one. PhD students who are already in their first year can also apply.

The application, which is carried out entirely online, is sent to the doctoral school as specified on the doctoral school's website. Incomplete or unsigned applications that do not respect the deadline or the number of pages requested will be declared inadmissible and will not be forwarded to the jury members.

Offers for doctoral contracts funded by a research programme (IDEX or others) must be widely publicized offer. The PIs of the research programme must upload the offer on ADUM, which automatically broadcasts it also on ABG and other platforms. It is up to the relevant research unit to organize the selection of the laureate. This procedure must be sent to the doctoral school, together with the results.

3. The individual follow-up committee (CSI)

Every year, from the end of the first year of the thesis (i.e., to apply for re-admission for a second year), each PhD student is interviewed by his/her CSI (Individual follow-up committee), which ensures that the PhD is running smoothly, based on the PhD charter and the training agreement. In an interview in three steps (presentation by the PhD student, with the supervisors; confidential time with just the PhD student; confidential time just with the supervisors), the CSI assesses the conditions of his/her studies and research progress. It makes recommendations and sends a report to the doctoral school dean, the PhD student and the thesis supervisor. It ensures in particular that any form of conflict, discrimination or harassment is prevented. (article 13 of the ministerial order of May 25, 2016). PhD students must send on this report to their supervisors and co-advisors, and include it in their application for re-admission. If the situation is a matter of concern, the CSI contacts the doctoral school immediately to share the report and express concerns, which in turn enables the doctoral school to look for solutions at once, without having to wait until the PhD student sends an application for re-admission.

Composition of the CSI (Individual follow-up committee) is determined at the beginning of the thesis, and is recorded in a "CSI installation form" (see form on the doctoral school website) to be included in the application for admission. Members are chosen by the research unit (supervisors may provide suggestions), in agreement with the PhD student. The rules setting the organization of these committees for the LLSH doctoral school are available here: <http://ecoledoctorale-llsh.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/fr/presentation/textes-et-reglements/>

4. Getting ready for after the PhD: Portfolio, Competence guide and PhD Alumni network

Whether or not a PhD student knows from the start what they want to do after their PhD, it is important that they get ready during their PhD. The doctoral College has a rich offer to do that efficiently:

- the Guide to Competences, which helps PhD students promote the competences they develop during the PhD, beyond their expertise on a very specific topic. The guide was devised to help students talk about their competences effectively, whether to friends or to professionals outside the academic world. It is available here: <https://doctorat.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/pendant-la-these/competences-du-doctorat/les-competences-du-doctorat-1415893.kjsp>

The **portfolio**, available on the same page, enables each student to monitor their own progress.

The **PhD Career Center** offers a lot of training and other activities (workshops, webinars, times with professionals; individual interviews; and so on). Please let your students know about this resource: <https://doctorat.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/pendant-la-these/projet-professionnel/les-services-pour-la-poursuite-de-carriere-882485.kjsp?RH=1586511248055>

Finally, the **PhD Alumni network**, which brings together doctors and doctoral students of UGA, offers a wealth of connections, also a mentoring programme so that students may easily ask questions to their peers. Do encourage your students to register! <https://www.phdalumni-uga.fr/fr/page/pole-carriere>

5. Thesis defense

Prior to defending the thesis, the student must have validated 120 HF of training, **including the training module on research ethics**. PhD students can access a summary of their training program on ADUM.

Once the PhD student's supervisor has given approval, he/she starts the procedure on ADUM, at least two months before the defense (if possible three). It is the student's responsibility to provide the date, room and time as well as the jury members. The thesis must be uploaded on ADUM and analyzed by the Compilatio anti-plagiarism software.

Jury composition (established on the recommendation of the thesis supervisor) is validated by the CED vice dean (who is delegated to sign by the Presidency), on the advice of the doctoral school management team. The candidate provides a copy of his/her thesis to each member of the jury as well as to the external referees. PDF files are strongly recommended. Laboratories may be asked to help with thesis printing.

The external referees must be HDR (accredited to direct research) and external to the UGA.

Defense authorization is granted by the Presidency (the CED management team) after two pre-reports with a favorable opinion, countersigned by the doctoral school management team. Laura Galland is in charge of the thesis defense management (laura.galland@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr).

The defense procedure is online on the doctoral school website: https://ecoledoctorale-llsh.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/fr/menu-principal/soutenances/soutenir-sa-these/soutenir-sa-these-64731.kjsp?RH=U3LLSFR_SOUT

The Doctoral College rules and regulations, pursuant to the ministerial decree of May 2016, specify highly important points regarding the composition of the jury (statutes, parity, absences). In particular:

- emeritus professors do not count as "professors" in ratios: they are equivalent to "MCF HDR"
- a CSI member may be a jury member, but may not write a preliminary report ("rapporteur")

All matters related to booking the room, transportation and accommodation of the jury and the thesis meal are handled by the research unit administrators. Defense expenses are paid by the research units.

6. Doctoral school administrative management

All the texts and regulations are on the doctoral school website, which we encourage you to visit regularly. You will find information on the training program, news and calls for applications (doctoral contracts, thesis prizes, summer schools, symposiums, etc.).

Do not hesitate to contact the doctoral school administrator, Kheira Baraka: ed-lsh@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr

The offices are located on the first floor (up the short flight of stairs) of the Maison du Doctorat (maison Jean Kuntzman, "bibliothèques" tram stop). It is recommended that you make an appointment by email first, so the doctoral school and the balance between University Professors and Associate Professors.