



Doctoral regulation of the *Académie universitaire 'Louvain'*

Approved on 9 May 2005 by the Council of the *Académie*

Modified on 12 March 2007, 23 June and 15 December 2008 at the suggestion of the Doctoral Commission of the *Académie*

1. General framework

Art. 71 of the 31 March 2004 decree lays down that the university institutions of the French Community of Belgium, grouped into consortia named *Académie*, are required to draw up their own individual doctoral regulations¹.

The doctoral regulation of the *Académie universitaire 'Louvain'* sets down the general framework for doctoral programmes taken by students wishing to obtain the academic title of doctor in one of the university institutions belonging to this *Académie*.

The principles of this regulation, which apply to all the doctoral programmes within the *Académie*, are namely

a) that the academic title of doctor be obtained at the end of a doctoral programme with two compulsory components: the first, consisting of advanced scientific training, worth 60 credits, referred to as "doctoral training" in the terms of the decree and the second, a research assignment relating to the preparation of a doctoral dissertation, and worth at least 120 credits,

b) that the doctoral programme includes four compulsory stages – admission, confirmation, private defence and public defence – potentially preceded by a period of pre-admission.

As doctoral programmes are organized by the *Académie*, the Rectors of the member university institutions constitute the "academic authorities" in the sense of the decree, in particular Articles 55 and 56. They delegate this authority to three bodies:

- The Doctoral Commission of the *Académie* (CODAL), whose mission is to ensure the development, application and monitoring of this regulation; the convergence of specific additional provisions; potential appeals made by candidates against the decisions of the doctoral commission by domains ; arbitration between the various Doctoral Commissions by Domain involving theses covering several fields; the relationships between the doctoral programmes offered by the *Académie* and the missions assigned to the National Fund of Scientific Research (FNRS) relating to doctoral training, including any mission which is entrusted to it by the Rectors of the *Académie's* member university institutions,

- The Doctoral Commissions by Domain, as laid down by the decree, whose specific mission is to validate the various stages of students' doctoral programme; to arbitrate in conflicts arising between supervisors and doctoral students and any other mission entrusted to them by the Rectors of the *Académie's* member institutions (henceforth in this regulation, the expression "Doctoral Commission by Domain" refers to the particular Commission involved in the situation),

- The faculty Deans, a generic term designating the local, subject-qualified academic authority.

Within the *Académie*, only one Doctoral Commission by Domain is established for each field of studies envisaged by the decree. These Commissions are constituted in such a way as to ensure representation both from those universities entitled to award a doctorate in the field and also from the disciplines involved in the field. The Doctoral Commissions by Domain should also include representatives from the scientific personnel according to rules specified by the Commissions. A particular Doctoral Commission by Domain can draw up regulatory provisions limited to its own field of study and also to delegate its missions to appropriate bodies while preserving ultimate responsibility for these.

Doctoral programmes are usually coordinated by the *Académie* with the degrees awarded by each member university institution, unless they decide to do otherwise. Accordingly, those involved in the doctoral programmes are responsible to two authorities, the Doctoral Commission by Domain and the faculty Deans.

Given the *Académie's* coordinating role, the Doctoral Commissions by Domain submit an annual report to the Doctoral Commission of the *Académie* (CODAL).

2. Stages in the doctoral programme

The doctoral programme includes four compulsory stages – admission, confirmation, private defence and public defence – potentially preceded by a period of pre-admission.

2.1. Pre-admission

Pre-admission is an optional stage of the doctoral programme. It is intended to enable the candidate to carry out administrative formalities which might require prior registration on a doctoral programme. This might for example involve the award of a tax-exempt doctoral grant or the applicant obtaining a foreign student resident's permit. Pre-admission also makes it possible to provide an official registration, even though the precise subject or supervisory panel may not yet have been fully defined. It also enables the candidate to fulfil all the conditions necessary for his/her admission to the doctorate (see 2.2.2).

Pre-admission is obtained on the basis of a favourable decision from the Doctoral Commission by Domain; this commission checks that the candidate meets the conditions for admission below.

If the opinion of the Doctoral Commission by Domain is positive, the relevant administrative service from the member university institution chosen by the candidate can, on this basis and on payment of the registration fees, register a candidate who has gone through the stage of pre-admission for the doctorate.

Pre-admission is accessible to any candidate

1° who meets the conditions of access to post-graduate studies as laid down in Articles 55, 56 and 182 of the 31 March 20042 decree,

2° who has identified a suitable supervisor within the personnel of the member university institution where he/she is applying for pre-admission; in agreeing to be mentioned in this role, the member of staff commits his(her)self to following the candidate's application procedure and where possible, facilitating the steps involved,

3° who meets the special conditions laid down by the Doctoral Commission(s) by Domain, into whose domain the proposal falls.

Pre-admission is valid for a maximum period of 12 months. The recourse to a pre-admission period must be justified with a set of objectives the candidate has to reach before a deadline ending the pre-admission period. Unless otherwise decided by the Doctoral Commission by Domain, the candidates receiving a grant from FNRS or FRIA and, more generally, candidates engaged on a well-defined research project are not authorized to go through a pre-admission stage.

2.2. Admission to the doctorate

2.2.1. Admission is the first compulsory step of the doctoral programme.

Requests for admission are submitted to the Doctoral Commission by Domain, which returns its opinion after checking that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions mentioned below in 2.2.2.

When a thesis proposal cuts across several fields of study, the various Doctoral Commissions involved have to make certain decisions; by mutual agreement they designate a principal Commission to whom supervision of the applicant's doctoral programme is then delegated. In the absence of agreement, the Doctoral Commission of the *Académie* (CODAL) adjudicates.

If the opinion of the Commission is positive, the relevant administrative services of the member university institution chosen by the candidate can, on this basis, register the candidate on the doctoral programme, once the registration fees have been paid and all administrative formalities completed. Students are required to pay the full registration fee (which will be reduced if the student receives a grant (a CUD grant in particular) or receives support from social services) when they first register for their doctorate. Registration is then renewed annually, including the year when the student defends his/her thesis, once the annual registration fee has been paid, except in the situation given in 2.2.6. and providing that step 2 of the doctoral programme, confirmation, has been completed within the time frame laid down in 2.3.1.

2.2.2. To be admitted onto a doctoral programme, the candidate must

1° meet the conditions for access to doctoral studies as defined in particular by Articles 55, 56 and 182 of the 31 March 2004 decree or to have been pre-admitted to a doctoral programme in one of the *Académie's* member institutions for less than 12 months,

2° have identified a member of the staff from one of the *Académie* member institutions who is entitled to direct a doctorate and who has agreed to supervise the thesis, and be involved in the work relating to its preparation ; if the research subject justifies it, the candidate can have several supervisors, at least one of whom must be a member of the *Académie*,

3° have written a research proposal likely to lead to a doctoral thesis: this proposal has to include a provisional title, a statement of the objectives of the project, highlighting its innovative aspects in relation to the state of art, a work plan and an inventory of the human, material and financial resources required,

4° have had the research proposal referred to in 3° above approved by his/her supervisor(s), who is/are required to specify the extent of the resources that they are able to put at the applicant's disposal for the purposes of the project,

5° have put forward to the Doctoral Commission by Domain, by mutual agreement with his/her supervisor, a supervisory panel that complies with this regulation; the composition and the mission of the supervisory panel are specified in point 2.2.3. below,

6° have put forward to the Doctoral Commission by Domain, by mutual agreement with the prospective members of the supervisory panel, a proposal for a doctoral training programme, worth 60 credits, which is appropriate for the applicant's scientific profile and the proposed research project,

7° meet the special conditions laid down by the Doctoral Commission(s) with responsibility for the applicant's chosen field of research.

Applicants may have additional courses (Master's courses) in subjects relating to the doctorate imposed upon them by the Doctoral Commission by Domain. As long as the additional program does not exceed 15 credits, it takes place in parallel with the main doctoral training. When the additional program includes from 16 to 60 credits, the candidate has to successfully complete one additional year of study before being admitted on doctorate. This affects mainly the applicants with a post-graduate degree and/or a certificate of research training awarded in a field far removed from the field where the applicant wishes to do his/her doctorate.

2.2.3. The supervisory panel referred to in point 5° above is made up of the supervisor(s) and at least two other members. At least one of them does not belong to the research team of the supervisor(s). The members of the supervisory panel must have a PhD obtained after public defence of a doctoral thesis or be able to demonstrate equivalent expertise.

The supervisory panel guides and advises the student, both in order to reinforce the supervisor(s) role in guiding the research and to widen the network of scientific contacts available to the candidate. The members of the supervisory panel should be ready to listen to the student and give him/her constructive help with the research; they are thus committed to providing the student with regular support for the duration of his/her doctorate. To this end, the supervisory committee and the candidate must meet at least once a year.

The supervisory panel advises the doctoral student in drawing up his/her doctoral training programme.

Lastly, the supervisory panel evaluates the quality of the scientific work completed by the doctoral student.

2.2.4. The 60-credit doctoral training programme mentioned in 2.2.2. 6°, comprises

- a number of advanced courses, attendance at scientific congresses, high level conferences and schools, and any other type of training which the Doctoral Commission judges equivalent,
- developing scientific communication skills by drafting and presenting proposals, articles and scientific papers,
- eventually providing teaching support, worth a maximum of 6 credits.

By way of doctoral training in scientific communication, success in confirmation, private defence and public defence can be awarded 5, 10 and 5 credits respectively.

The doctoral training is acquired within one or several FNRS Graduate College or a Graduate School approved by the FNRS. This training leads to the certificate of training in research referred to in art.17 of the 31 March 2004 decree.

Providing there is agreement from the Doctoral Commission by Domain, this training can also be either wholly or partially acquired outside an FNRS-approved Graduate college or school. The Doctoral Commission by Domain can include as formative training scientific experience gained after the student's postgraduate degree training, as well as any activities undertaken by the student in a professional capacity which relates to the subject of the doctoral research.

The doctoral training programme can be spread out over the entire duration of the PhD programme.

2.2.5. Doctoral students can use their admission to the doctoral programme to take advantage of the effective, personal support provided by their supervisor(s) and the valuable scientific environment on offer.

2.2.6. The Doctoral Commission by Domain has the authority to withdraw the student's right to follow the doctoral programme, at the request of the supervisory panel. Each Doctoral Commission establishes the individual rules that it will apply in this matter.

2.2.7. Any conflict arising between a doctoral student and his/her supervisor(s) or supervisory panel falls within the competence of the relevant Doctoral Commission by Domain, or, when there are several Doctoral Commissions involved, of the one which has been designated as the principal Commission. It is possible to appeal to the Doctoral Commission of the *Académie* (CODAL) against decisions made by the relevant Doctoral Commission by Domain.

2.3. The confirmation

2.3.1. Within 24 months after initial admission to the doctoral programme by the Doctoral Commission by Domain, applicants take the confirmation step. If circumstances justify it, the deadline can be extended by the supervisory panel in accordance with the Doctoral Commission by Domain on the proposed deadline.

The aim of the confirmation step is to evaluate, on the basis of the state of progress of the student's research work, whether it is likely to lead to the presentation of a doctoral thesis.

2.3.2. In order for the supervisory panel to be able to ascertain whether students' research work is likely to lead to the presentation of a doctoral thesis, students are required to

1° hand over to the supervisory panel a written report, an article which they have written, or any other piece of written evidence which shows how the research is progressing.

2° give an oral presentation, in the presence of their supervisory panel, of the work completed and plans for the next stages of the PhD.

2.3.3. On these bases, the supervisory panel reports to the Doctoral Commission by Domain either stating that the confirmation procedure has been successfully completed and that the student may continue with the PhD or that the step has been failed.

In the event of failure, the Doctoral Commission by Domain can set a period of maximum 12 months within which the student may retake the confirmation test. Where appropriate, it will validate the doctoral training that has been acquired.

In the event of disagreement with the decision of the supervisory panel or the Doctoral Commission by Domain, the doctoral student may lodge an appeal with the Doctoral Commission of the Académie (CODAL).

2.4. Jury formation and the private defence

2.4.1. When the supervisory panel considers that the student's research work and doctoral training programme have been satisfactorily completed, it draws up a proposal for the composition of the jury. After this proposal has been agreed by the Doctoral Commission by Domain, it is transmitted for approval to the Dean of the faculty concerned.

The members of the jury are designated by the Rector of the university concerned or his/her delegated representative.

The jury includes the thesis supervisor(s) and at least three other members, at least one of which must be external to the *Académie* and chosen because of their scientific expertise. All members of the jury should have earned the title of PhD through public defence of a thesis or be able to demonstrate equivalent expertise.

The jury is chaired by the faculty Dean or his/her delegated representative, who is not counted as one of its members in the sense of the paragraph above.

The appointment of the jury is dependent on verification that the candidate is registered as a doctoral student and that the tuition fees have been paid.

2.4.2. The jury comes to a joint decision on the date of the private defence, in agreement with the doctoral student. One month at the latest before the date chosen, the candidate forwards the provisional text of his/her thesis to the jury members; this text must consist of either an original thesis, or an essay accompanied by a coherent set of publications and work of which the doctoral student is either the author or the co-author. These documents can be submitted in French or in English or, if the subject matter of the thesis justifies it, in another language accepted by the jury.

The entire jury should be present for the private defence (videoconference is authorized). If for some reason this is not possible, the absent member must send the jury President a written report before the sitting, giving his/her reasoned opinion on the value of the thesis and a list of the questions that he/she wishes to put to the candidate.

During the private defence, the jury examines the text submitted by the candidate and discusses the research results with him/her.

At the end of the private defence, the jury deliberates and comes to a conclusion about the admissibility of the thesis. The result of this deliberation is communicated immediately to the candidate and forwarded to the Doctoral Commission by Domain.

If the thesis is judged admissible, the jury agrees with the candidate on a date and time for the public defence, which takes place at least one month after the private defence, and communicates this information to the Doctoral Commission by Domain. If the thesis is judged admissible subject to modifications being made to the text, the supervisor(s) are instructed to check and approve these modifications before the date of the public defence. In the event of non-admissibility, the jury agrees on the length of time that should elapse before

a new private defence. The implementation of these modifications can't exceed 3 months of full-time work. If not, a new private defence has to be organized.

The jury also validates the candidate's doctoral training. Doctoral training is considered acquired when the doctoral student is able to show the jury that he/she has obtained 60 credits as discussed in 2.2.4 above (including the 5 credits potentially granted for the forthcoming public defence), and, where appropriate, the supplementary credits referred to in the last subparagraph of 2.2.2.

2.5. Public defence

2.5.1. The public defence consists of an oral presentation given by the candidate of the results of the research work which have led to the thesis; on this occasion the candidate should lay emphasis on the qualities and originality of the work, and its relevance to the wider scientific public. This presentation is followed by a discussion between the candidate and the jury and then with everyone present at the defence. At least two thirds of the members of jury should be present at the public defence, which may not last longer than three hours. Any member unable to attend the public defence must send the jury President a written report before the sitting, giving his/her reasoned opinion on the value of the thesis and a list of the questions that he/she wishes to put to the candidate.

2.5.2. At least two weeks before the public defence, the candidate gives the jury members a bound copy of his/her thesis approved by his/her supervisor(s) and one copy is given to the Doctoral Commission by Domain. An electronic copy must also be sent to the person responsible for electronic theses within the *Académie* member institution which will award the degree.

2.5.3. Immediately after the public defence, the jury members withdraw to decide on the outcome of the doctoral programme and to certify that the candidate has obtained the minimum 180 credits required for the granting of the academic title of doctor.

The jury then moves to sign the degree certificate and other additional documents; an official report of the deliberation is drafted. These additional documents include a report co-signed by the jury members present during the defence confirming the training and work undertaken by the student whilst preparing his/her thesis and the conclusions of the jury's discussions. The President of the jury then declares the result in public. The certificate is then signed by the new doctor, and at a later date by the Rector of the university institution which has awarded the degree. The official report of the jury's deliberations is kept by the faculty Dean.

2.bis Registration for doctoral training only

A student may also request to be registered for doctoral training only. Admission to doctoral training is accessible to any student who fulfils the conditions for access to post-graduate level studies. Decisions on access to doctoral training are taken by the relevant doctoral commission. A contact person is identified for this purpose. The doctoral training programme can be spread out over one or two academic years.

3. Special and temporary provisions

3.1. PhD degree certificates issued by one of the *Académie* member institutions should specify the awarding institution and its membership of the *Académie universitaire 'Louvain'*. It is accompanied by a diploma supplement, in accordance with article 82 of the 31 March 2004 decree.

3.2. If the certificate is issued jointly by two or more *Académie* member institutions, it should specify the awarding institutions and their membership of the *Académie universitaire 'Louvain'*. The model agreement is given in Annex 3.

3.3. Where the doctorate has been co-sponsored by a university institution outside the *Académie*, the supervisors on behalf of the *Académie* or on behalf of one of its member university institutions, should ensure that the joint Ph.D. degree agreement conforms to the model established by the *Académie universitaire 'Louvain'* (see Annex. 1) and thus to the legal provisions laid down by the *Académie*. They should submit the convention to the Doctoral Commission by Domain and to the faculty Dean before presenting it for signature to the Rector of their institution.

3.4. This regulation applies to candidates pre-admitted or admitted to a PhD programme in one of the *Académie* member institutions from the 2005-2006 academic year on.

In accordance with a decision of the authorities of the *Académie*, it will also apply to candidates admitted before or during the 2004-2005 academic year who have not finished their thesis by the end of the 2011-2012 academic year.

3.5. The special conditions laid down by the doctoral commission by domain enter into force after they have been approved by the Rectors of the *Académie* member institutions, following a procedure established by them. These provisions apply according to the same timetable as this regulation.

3.6. During the procedure described under 3.5, Rectors seek the opinion of the Doctoral Commission of the *Académie* (CODAL) and also confirm the Commission's composition and mission.

3.7 At the request of the Rectors, the Doctoral Commission of the *Académie* (CODAL) will evaluate the implementation of this regulation. Where appropriate, it submits proposals for amending the regulation to the competent authorities of the *Académie*.

¹ Notes

¹ Article 71. - (...) For juries instructed to confer the title of doctor, there should be one single regulation for the university *Académie*.

² Article 55. – Under the general conditions laid down by the academic authorities, students holding one of the following degrees will have access to the doctoral programme:

1° a research oriented Master's degree as referred to in Article 16, § 4, 2°, in the same field as the proposed doctorate ;

2° an other Master's degree conferred after a programme of post-graduate study worth at least 120 credits or a Complementary Master's degree, under the terms of a decision of the academic authorities, meeting the additional conditions that they lay down and after the reasoned opinion of the jury;

3° a degree similar to those mentioned above awarded in the Flemish Community, the German-speaking Community or by the Royal Military School, under the same conditions;

4° a foreign degree deemed equivalent to those mentioned above and in application in this decree, in a European directive or an international convention, under the same conditions;

5° i.e. a title or foreign degree authorizing post-graduate studies and valued at a minimum of 300 credits by the jury, under the same conditions.

When the conditions of access require one or more additional courses to be taken and when this exceeds 15 credits, the student's programme of studies will involve an additional year of study, according to a course distribution established by the jury. However, students registered on this first additional year are not taken into account for financing purposes.

Article 56. – Under the condition laid down by the academic authorities, students who have successfully completed the research training year referred to in article 17, § 2 will also have access to the doctoral programme.

Article 182.- Students who have been awarded a post-graduate degree delivered under the terms of the provisions prior to this decree have the same potential to follow study programmes and the same access to professional life as those holding a master's degree introduced by this decree which endorses post-graduate studies worth at least 120 credits.

³ Article 82. – Degree certificates are issued with a diploma supplement which includes the list of courses taken by the student in his/her programme of study, the conditions of access to studies and the evaluations endorsed by the degree awarded.

This diploma supplement is signed by the jury secretary. The personal aspects of this diploma supplement relating to each individual student can be gathered in an annex. In this case, it is only the annex which has to be signed by the jury secretary, the common part of the diploma supplement being certified by the establishment. The diploma supplement to the degree certificate complies with the form and content laid down by the Government of the French speaking Community.