

Formal openness of universities for collaborative doctorates together with universities of applied sciences in Germany

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Research Domains

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Abstract

Doctorates are of crucial importance for research activities at universities in Germany and therefore have a significant impact on the German research landscape. However, to overcome the lack of the right to award doctorates at universities of applied sciences, they must look for opportunities to collaborate with other institutions.

We include the two levels of regulation relevant for this case in the analysis of this paper: The different state laws on higher education of the 16 German federal states and the regulations of universities with the right to award doctorates.

Our study deals with the question of how open universities with the right to award doctorates are to collaborative doctorates with universities of applied sciences. Using a qualitative content analysis, we develop – among other results – a typology for universities with regard to their openness to cooperative doctorates with universities of applied sciences.

Full paper

Doctorates are crucial for research activities at universities in Germany and therefore have a significant impact on the German research landscape. Most universities of applied sciences (UAS), however, don't have the right to award doctorates and have difficulties to get it due to major hurdles from the authorities and the high costs that come along with the implementation. They can only seek collaborative doctorates with universities that do have the rights to award Ph.D. degrees as a workaround. German scientific councils such as the Wissenschaftsrat or the Hochschulrektorenkonferenz value such collaborative approaches (Meurer, 2018); they consider it useful for the German research landscape, especially for applied research, where UAS excel. An openness of universities for collaborative doctorates with UAS would increase the quality in research (Conference Track

4). A research policy that promotes collaborative doctorates encourages this openness (Conference Track 3).

The collaborative doctorate takes place at a university, with an actor (e.g. a professor) from a UAS taking on a specific role (e.g. supervision, assessment or as a member of an examination board) (Kessl, 2013). In Germany, the respective laws on higher education of the 16 federal states regulate doctorates individually. Universities then have formal regulations based on their respective state law for doctorates, where the universities' departments can establish individual versions as well.

There is no research on such collaborative doctorates in the international academic literature. Collaborative doctorates usually relate to cooperation between universities and companies or to joint doctorates between (international) universities that basically both could award the doctorate to the candidate.

Even the German academic literature only considers the collaborative doctorate in a peripheral way. Wegner (2022) examines the intensity and stability of supervision as well as the support for candidates in German Ph.D. programs and includes the increasing participation of UAS in doctorates as a determinant (Fröhlich & Kortmann, 2019). Meurer (2018) examines the conditions for collaborative doctorates based on the 16 existing state laws on higher education and the universities' rules and regulations for doctorates. However, her analysis of these state laws only leads to a handful of basic observations but does not connect them to the regulations the universities apply concerning collaborative doctorates with UAS.

Do the state laws reflect the desired openness? And if so, does this apply to the regulations of the universities? Are universities with the right to award doctorates formally open to collaborative doctorates with UAS?

For our paper we qualitatively and quantitatively analyze the 16 German state laws on higher education as well as more than 100 regulations of universities concerning the formal openness to collaborative doctorates with UAS (Mayring, 2022). We relate the results of the university regulations to the applicable state laws. This leads to interesting but also contradictory findings, which we would like to present at this year's EAIR Forum, including a new concept leading to a typology of universities regarding openness to collaborative doctorates with UAS.