

Charter for PhD candidates and their supervisorsⁱ

Preliminary note

In the interest of inclusiveness and clarity, all terms used in this document are to be understood as gender neutral. Terms such as “PhD candidate” and “(co-)supervisor” refer to any individual involved in a doctoral project or its supervision, regardless of gender identity.

Preamble

The PhD Charter of the University of Mons (UMONS) serves as a cornerstone for doctoral research, fostering mutual understanding between PhD candidates and their supervisor(s). By defining clear expectations and supporting a productive academic partnership, it ensures both academic rigor and professional collaboration. This relationship, built on mutual respect, shared responsibilities, and a commitment to ethical research, is crucial to the PhD candidate's success. The charter outlines several key objectives:

- Establishing clear guidelines for the professional relationship between the PhD candidate and their supervisor.
- Defining the practical modalities for conducting doctoral research.
- Outlining the competencies and expected behaviours as the doctoral project evolves.
- Contextualising UMONS's role in fostering this relationship.

Doctoral research is not merely a technical endeavour but a transformative process that cultivates critical thinking, autonomy, and advanced expertise. It often addresses complex and interdisciplinary issues, requiring a methodical and rigorous approach.

This charter complements key institutional documents governing doctoral research at UMONS, including the doctoral regulations¹ and the royal decree^{2,3} defining the status of academic staff. Both documents are accessible via the university's intranet and form the regulatory foundation for this charter.

¹ [UMONS. \(2019\). Regulations outlining the general principles applicable to studies, research work, and the defence leading to the academic degree of Doctor following the presentation of a thesis at the University of Mons. Amended by Decision No. 99/XV on 1st July 2019. University of Mons.](#)

² [Royal Decree of 31st October 1953 governing the status of scientific personnel in State universities.](#)

³ [Decree of 19 July 1991 on the career of scientific researchers, Belgian Official Gazette of 26 September 1991, updated on 7 March 2019](#)

Role of the PhD candidate

The preparation of a doctoral thesis is a demanding and transformative process that requires consistent dedication and proactive engagement from the PhD candidate. This charter outlines the PhD candidate's expected behaviours, evolving competencies, and responsibilities throughout the doctoral journey. The PhD candidate's role is structured into three key phases, each with specific expectations and developmental milestones.

1. Beginning of the PhD

The PhD candidate is expected to:

- Actively participate in defining and planning the research topic in collaboration with the supervisor(s), considering their recommendations and ensuring alignment with academic and institutional guidelines.
- Integrate into the research team by building professional relationships and contributing to the team's activities.
- Demonstrate openness to feedback from the supervisor(s) and thesis committee, fostering constructive dialogue and continuous learning.

2. Throughout the PhD

The PhD candidate is expected to:

- Develop and refine the research methodology, taking increasing ownership of the design and execution of experiments or theoretical work.
- Demonstrate autonomy and initiative, effectively managing time and resources to ensure steady progress.
- Present research findings through seminars, conferences, and preliminary publications, contributing to scientific discourse.⁴
- Maintain transparency with the supervisor(s) regarding any challenges or delays, seeking timely support to overcome obstacles.
- Actively participate in feedback sessions with the thesis committee, integrating suggestions into the research plan.

3. Completion of the PhD

The PhD candidate is expected to:

- Achieve the maturity of an independent researcher, capable of critically analysing and synthesising complex information.
- Take responsibility for finalising the thesis, ensuring that the research is completed and submitted within the agreed timeframe.

⁴ Subject to prior verification of applicability regarding intellectual property, confidentiality, and patentability constraints.

- Prepare for the defence process, collaborating with the supervisor(s) to finalise the manuscript, address committee feedback and organise the defence.

General expectations across all phases

- The PhD candidate is encouraged to maintain a healthy work-life balance while striving for excellence in their academic responsibilities.
- PhD candidates with specific employment statuses (e.g., part-time or grant-funded positions) should discuss their availability and constraints to ensure realistic planning.
- Uphold the highest ethical standards by presenting research results honestly and rigorously, and by adhering to institutional policies on data management, intellectual property, proper authorship, and research integrity
- Conduct a literature review to contextualise their research and stay informed about relevant scientific advances in their field.
- Expand communication skills, adapting to various formats such as academic articles, reports, or public engagement activities.
- Contribute to the academic administration, including updating institutional systems with progress reports and necessary administrative documents.
- Participation in professional and academic opportunities (e.g., conferences or external collaborations) is highly recommended; provided they are consistent with the doctoral project, institutional responsibilities and the PhD candidate's personal circumstances. In all such activities, PhD candidates are expected to act with integrity and transparency, particularly regarding the use of thesis-related data and results. External collaborations or freelance work must respect UMONS's internal rules on data ownership, confidentiality, and intellectual property⁵.

Role of the PhD Supervisor(s)

Doctoral supervision includes all persons involved in supporting the PhD candidate's progress, including the main supervisor, co-supervisors and other academic or professional mentors formally involved in the doctoral process. Its purpose is to provide structured and supportive guidance, to foster a research environment conducive to scientific and professional development, and to ensure that the doctoral project proceeds smoothly.

The (co-)supervisor plays a central role throughout the PhD journey that evolves across three key phases: initiation, progression, and completion of the thesis.

1. Beginning of the PhD

The (co-)supervisor is expected to:

⁵ [UMONS Regulations on Intellectual Property, Protection and Valorisation of Research Results, adopted by the Board of Directors on 9 September 2013](#)

- Focus on helping the PhD candidate define the scope and direction of the research, while ensuring alignment with institutional and disciplinary expectations.
- Facilitate the PhD candidate's integration into the research team by introducing them to peers, resources and networks.
- Provide clear guidance on the literature review, helping to identify gaps and opportunities in the research field related to the thesis topic.

2. Throughout the PhD

The (co-)supervisor is expected to:

- Provide constructive feedback on the development and implementation of the research methodology.
- Encourage the PhD candidate to participate in seminars, conferences and other academic forums to present their work and gain new perspectives⁶.
- Monitor the PhD candidate's progress and address challenges promptly by facilitating discussions within the thesis committee.

3. Completion of the PhD

The (co-)supervisor is expected to:

- Guide the PhD candidate in finalising their thesis, ensuring clarity, coherence and adherence to academic standards.
- Ensure the proper constitution of the jury for the defence and coordinating the required administrative procedures.
- Collaborate with the PhD candidate to prepare for the defence, providing feedback on presentation and a critical analysis of results.
- Support for the PhD candidate's transition into postdoctoral roles or other professional opportunities may be offered, where relevant, for example through informal guidance, academic references or access to professional networks, depending on the PhD candidate's aspirations and needs.

General expectations across all phases

The (co-)supervisor is expected to:

- Ensure that the conditions for carrying out the doctoral project, from its initiation to completion, are consistent with institutional and scientific standards. The PhD supervisors are responsible for assessing whether the available resources, including potential financial support, are suitable for conducting the PhD and its related activities. While funding may not always be guaranteed at the outset, an

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explicit agreement between all parties on the feasibility of the project given the current or expected resources is essential. In the absence of conditions that allow the project to proceed under reasonable circumstances, supervisors may decline a request to initiate a doctoral project.

- Encourage the PhD candidate to engage in relevant training programs, including thematic, technical and transversal skill development in support of their research and professional objectives.
- Supporting the PhD candidate in disseminating their research findings while ensuring adherence to ethical practices and institutional guidelines.
- Maintain a balance between guiding the PhD candidate and respecting their independence.
- Assist the PhD candidate in preparing funding renewal applications by reviewing and providing constructive feedback on the required documents.
- Adhere to ethical guidelines, including proper authorship practices, research integrity and data management policies.
- Promote the PhD candidate's well-being by considering their working conditions, the time realistically available for the thesis and the level of engagement required by the research. Flexibility may be offered where appropriate, provided it remains consistent with the agreed framework of the doctoral project.
- Allow and encourage the PhD candidate to take an interest in the University's institutions, including contacts with and involvement in the scientific assemblies (PerSci(EF)s, CorSci, PhD House), representative organisations and unions, provided this remains compatible with the research goals and timeframe.

Role of UMONS

Institutional support mechanisms

UMONS has established several mechanisms to ensure the doctoral process is conducted in optimal conditions, providing candidates and supervisors with the necessary support, guidance, and resources:

1. Thesis Advisory Committees

Thesis advisory committees play a central role in monitoring the progress of doctoral research and training. Their responsibilities include:

- Evaluating the feasibility and quality of the research project in collaboration with the supervisor(s) and PhD candidate⁷.
- Reviewing and validating the doctoral training programme, including thematic and transversal activities.

⁷ [UMONS. \(2019\). Regulations outlining the general principles applicable to studies, research work, and the defence leading to the academic degree of Doctor following the presentation of a thesis at the University of Mons. Amended by Decision No. 99/XV on 1st July 2019. University of Mons.](#)

- Ensuring the proper constitution of supervisory and examination committees in accordance with institutional regulations.
- Acting as mediators in case of conflicts, by hearing both the PhD candidate and supervisor separately.

The Dean acts as the mediator for any issues or concerns that may arise between the PhD candidate and their supervisor(s), both before and after the constitution of the thesis advisory committee.

2. Commission on Ethics and Scientific Integrity (CEIS)

The CEIS oversees issues related to research ethics and compliance. Its key functions include:

- Promoting awareness of ethical research practices among the doctoral community.
- Ensuring alignment with national and European standards for scientific integrity.
- Addressing cases of potential breaches of ethical standards or scientific misconduct.

In addition to the CEIS, several faculty-specific ethics committees provide complementary oversight in their respective fields:

- The Ethics Committee for Research in Psychology, Speech Therapy, Orthopaedics and Educational Sciences, affiliated with the Faculty of Psychology and Education, reviews research involving human participants in these disciplines.
- The Ethics Committee on Animal Experimentation, under the Faculty of Medicine, Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences, ensures compliance with ethical standards for research involving animal models.
- The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Translation and Interpretation – School of International Interpreters, which addresses ethical considerations specific to research in translation and interpretation studies.

These committees work alongside the CEIS to ensure a comprehensive ethical framework across all research disciplines.

3. PhD House

The PhD House is a dedicated space that fosters collaboration, well-being, and professional development among PhD candidates. Its main objectives are to:

- Provide a co-working space that encourages mutual support and networking within the doctoral community.

- Facilitate access to peer advice and institutional resources, promoting a sense of belonging.
- Organise events and workshops to enhance both academic and transferable skills.

4. CorSci

The CorSci is the representative and consultative body for all scientific staff members of the university, from all faculties, support services and the FNRS. Its functions include:

- Representing scientific staff in internal and external board and assemblies.
- Safeguarding and promoting the interests of UMONS scientific staff.
- Maintaining permanent contact within - PerSci(EF)s - representative bodies of scientific staff from faculties, schools, the FNRS and support services.
- In general, actively contribute to UMONS life and to its policymaking and organisation.

Access to support services

As students and researchers, PhD candidates have access to a wide range of resources aimed at supporting their academic and personal well-being:

Doctoral regulations: this document, applicable to all PhD candidates regardless of their administrative status, outlines the rules, procedures, and obligations governing the doctoral journey at UMONS. [It is available via the university's intranet.](#)

For students:

- Psychological consultation services are dedicated to promoting mental health and well-being for PhD candidates.
- Social services offering offer guidance on administrative and social matters, including housing and financial aid.
- “100% Respect”: this initiative ensures a respectful and inclusive research environment for all PhD candidates.
- Career Services & Alumni Office: supports PhD candidates in their professional transition via the UMONS Career Center, providing access to job postings, career events, alumni testimonials, one-on-one coaching and workshops to prepare for the postdoctoral job market.

For staff members:

- Access to professional training opportunities: including transversal doctoral training (via the Career Services & Alumni Office), Corsci training and the HR Department's training catalogue.
- Support and guidance from the Human Resources Department:

- Welcome and integration support (e.g., welcome breakfasts).
 - Career support: personalised guidance available upon request to help address specific challenges related to work context, organisation, or interpersonal relationships.
 - Administrative support: assistance from the HR Department to improve the work environment and manage research-related activities.
- Individual support: tailored advice and assistance from the HR Department, available upon request, to help PhD candidates and academic staff navigate personal or professional difficulties.
- Trusted Advisors: designated individuals providing confidential and impartial support to PhD candidates. They help address interpersonal conflicts, workplace stress, harassment or any other issue affecting the research environment, offering a neutral and secure space for professional dialogue and resolution.
- Internal Service for Prevention and Protection at Work (SIPPT): responsible for workplace safety and psychosocial risk management.
- Cohezio: UMONS's external service for occupational health and prevention, in charge of medical supervision and psychosocial risks.
- AVRE: provides guidance to PhD candidates on questions related to scientific valorisation, intellectual property, data management or participation in funded research projects.
- CRECH: offers a variety of doctoral support initiatives including mobility grants, thesis finalisation funding and excellence incentives.⁸

⁸ Further information is available on the UMONS "Research" webpage – <https://web.umons.ac.be/fr/nos-missions/recherche/>

The PhD candidate and their (co-)supervisor(s) confirm that they have discussed the mutual expectations and responsibilities and have made the necessary arrangements to ensure effective collaboration.

The signed charter is submitted to the relevant faculty authorities and retained by the faculty's administrative secretariat. A copy is also provided to the PhD candidate.

PhD candidate Name: Signature: Date:	Corresponding supervisor Name: Signature: Date:
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Other (co-)supervisors (if applicable):

Supervisor – co-supervisor (<i>strike through non-applicable roles</i>) Name: Signature: Date:	Supervisor – co-supervisor (<i>strike through non-applicable roles</i>) Name: Signature: Date:
Supervisor – co-supervisor (<i>strike through non-applicable roles</i>) Name: Signature: Date:	

ⁱ We thank the Languages and Internationalisation Department for its review of the English version of this document.