

## **Guidelines for Completing a Binational Doctorate (“Cotutelle de thèse”)**

### **I. General**

The binational doctoral process allows doctoral candidates to complete a doctoral degree which is jointly awarded by several universities in different countries. The doctoral degree is conferred for a single scientific or scholarly achievement based on research activities undertaken at (at least) two universities. A binational doctorate does not mean – as is at times wrongly assumed – that the candidate is completing several doctoral degrees. For a binational doctorate, the process leading to conferral of the degree is based on a cooperation agreement between the involved universities and the doctoral candidate. The involved universities define and agree on special regulations applying to this doctoral project. Upon successful completion of the process, the doctoral candidate receives a doctoral degree certificate issued jointly by the involved universities or, alternatively, a certificate from each involved institution which indicates the binational character of the degree.

### **II. Process**

If a binational doctorate is considered, supervisors and/or doctoral candidates should ideally already indicate this when signing up for a doctorate. However, it is also possible to turn a running doctoral project a binational one.

For each cotutelle procedure, an individual cotutelle agreement must be concluded between the participating universities and the doctoral candidate. RWTH provides a model cotutelle agreement for this purpose, which can be found on the web pages of Division 1.5 – Examination and Statutory Law.

Changes and additions to the RWTH agreement template are to be coordinated between the supervisor, the doctoral candidate and the participants at the partner universities. Subsequently the first draft of the agreement is to be sent to Division 1.5 ([pruefungsrecht@zhv.rwth-aachen.de](mailto:pruefungsrecht@zhv.rwth-aachen.de)) for review. In collaboration with Department 9.0 – Legal Affairs, a legal review will take place on the basis of the relevant national legal regulations and the respective doctoral regulations. In coordination with the relevant doctoral office, the draft is forwarded to the participants of the partner universities. This process is to be repeated until all involved universities fully agree on the content of the agreement. In particular, the specifics of the oral examination and the composition of the "Defense Committee" should be precisely defined, as coordination difficulties are particularly frequent at this stage of the process.

In order to formally conclude a cooperation agreement, it must be forwarded to the Rectorate via Division 1.5. Prior to this, the doctoral office of the relevant faculty must obtain the signatures of the dean, the supervisor, and the doctoral candidate.

Division 1.5 and the relevant faculty's doctoral office must be notified of any changes to or termination of the process. The changes should also be recorded in an appendix to the existing contract.

### **III. Please Note**

The conclusion of a Cotutelle agreement can take a long time, depending on the partner university and the country-specific doctoral regulations. For this reason, all participants should be involved in the process as soon as possible (at least six months before registration of the doctoral examination).

The language of the agreement is English. In the event of cooperation with a partner university which, due to national regulations, requires a contractual copy in the respective national language, the partner university is responsible for providing a translation certified by a public authority at its own expense.

### **IV. Options**

Cotutelle agreements can be drawn up in various ways. The most common form is an individual contract between two partner universities and the doctoral candidate. It is also possible to conclude a framework agreement with a foreign university for several future doctoral projects.

Cotutelle agreements may be concluded at the university level or at the faculty level. The framework agreement provides general rules and regulations for the joint doctoral process. Based on this framework agreement, the individual agreements for the respective doctoral candidates are set up.

Alternatively, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) can also be drawn up as a first step. A MoU is not a contract or agreement, but an informal agreement to cooperate in the future. No legal obligations arise from a MoU, even if the document has to be signed by both universities.

### **Contact**

The faculties are responsible for doctoral processes. The Faculty websites provide information on the relevant contacts such as academic advisors.

If you have any questions, please get in touch with Division 1.5 – Examination and Statutory Law ([pruefungsrecht@zhv.rwth-aachen.de](mailto:pruefungsrecht@zhv.rwth-aachen.de)).

A template for cooperation agreements is available for download at:

<https://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/ktxr/lidx/1>

For additional information, please also visit the website of the German Rectors' Conference HRK:

[https://www.hrk.de/fileadmin/migrated/content\\_uploads/Cotutelle\\_Leitfaden\\_ausfuehrlich.pdf](https://www.hrk.de/fileadmin/migrated/content_uploads/Cotutelle_Leitfaden_ausfuehrlich.pdf)