

Explanatory Memorandum of the Doctoral Regulations Erasmus University Rotterdam 2025

AZ, NdH, February 22, 2025, with added comments on September 2026

Foreword

From 1 March 2025, new doctoral regulations apply. The doctoral regulations 2020 needed revision. Over the past year, academic affairs, in consultation with the deans and rector, PhD coordinators of the graduate schools and faculties and the beadle's office worked on the revision of the regulations. The new regulations were adopted by the doctorate board (the deans and rector magnificus) in December 2024.

The main issues do not change but some rules have been adjusted – in some cases tightening of the rules, in other cases relaxing, but always aimed at clear rules that suit a modern university at the centre of society.

No rights can be derived from this 'explanatory memorandum'. The purpose of this document is to clarify the revised rules surrounding the doctorate and the PhD trajectory and to say something about 'why' the rules have been changed. For questions about the new regulations, an email can be sent to the Beadle's office (pedel@eur.nl) or to the doctorate board (cvp@eur.nl).

Notes per chapter

Chapter one deals with the terms used in the doctoral regulations and in the Higher Education Act (WHW), the group of people who are in charge of it (the doctorate board, which are the deans with the rector magnificus as chair), any additional regulations, confidentiality and the doctorate itself. The section on the doctorate board explains how mandating tasks works and in which case the rector must take over the role of the dean at certain moments.

The rule about obtaining a second PhD has been elaborated on and clarified (the default is that it is not possible, unless certain circumstances allow for it). Bear in mind that a 'dr' title does not always (in every country) has the same significance as the Dutch doctorate, which is equivalent to the internationally recognised PhD degree.

Chapter two is entitled 'the PhD candidate' and deals with admission to the PhD trajectory, conditions (EUR central and school specific), registration and what else is involved (for example the training and supervision plan), evaluation (with the 'go - no go' moment during the first year) and what may be reasons for discontinuing the PhD trajectory.

In the revised regulations, 'admission to the PhD trajectory' (this chapter) and admission to the doctorate (chapter six) have been separated. Admission to the doctorate is regulated by law and basically sets two conditions: a Master's degree and an approved PhD dissertation.

However, the latter component is there only after the PhD track has been completed. Chapter two therefore only discusses the conditions that must be met to enter the PhD track. One of the most important is the correct diploma; a master's degree. In the vast majority of cases, this will be a university master's degree, but it may be a master's degree awarded by a University for Applied Sciences (HBO). Foreign degrees have to be assessed by the 'Admissions Office', the assessment may require the advice of NUFFIC.

If the requirement of a master's degree is not met and if the dean is convinced that the candidate compensates for the lack of the master's degree by, for example, research experience (as evidenced by publications or otherwise at the discretion of the dean), an exception request may be submitted by the dean (in Hora Finita) which will be assessed by the doctorate board. The exception request must be well-founded and supported by underlying material. The doctorate board may decide to reject the request or admit the candidate to the doctoral programme (or admit the candidate to the doctoral programme subject to conditions).

If the candidate has a master's degree, the dean decides on the admission of candidates on behalf of the doctorate board. In doing so, the dean also has the right to refuse candidates put forward by a professor willing to act as supervisor. After all, there may be (strategic) considerations for the dean (the research topic may not fit well within the thematic choices of the faculty, or the intended supervisor already has more than enough PhD students, et cetera) not to start a PhD trajectory.

Chapter three deals with supervision and there are some important changes to discuss. Previously, 'three supervisors' was the maximum and an exception request had to be made for a fourth supervisor. This is no longer necessary; the dean designates a minimum of two and a maximum of four supervisors. More than two supervisors is only desirable if greater disciplinary diversity is needed in the supervisory team. Adding more supervisors with the same disciplinary background, or belonging to the same research group/department, is not the intention.

The second adjustment is that there is no longer any reference to a 'first' and 'second' supervisor (whereby the first supervisor was usually the one who ultimately would award the doctorate at the PhD defence ceremony). The basic rule now is that there must always be a supervisor who has been appointed at EUR or Erasmus MC, this supervisor must be known from the start, at the moment of the candidate's registration, and is called the 'coordinating supervisor' because this supervisor bears the administrative responsibility during the PhD trajectory. The coordinating supervisor is not necessarily the person who will award the doctorate - in practice, however, this will often be the case. Endowed professors of EUR can, although they formally do not have an appointment at EUR, be appointed as 'coordinating supervisor'.

This adjustment is linked to the clarification of the rules surrounding a supervisor who is granted an honourable discharge (either due to emeritus status or otherwise) during the PhD trajectory. It is emphasised that a supervisor who has been granted the emeritus status cannot,

under any circumstances, retain the *ius Promovendi* (the right to award the doctorate) for longer than the statutory period of five years.

Professors and researchers in possession of the *ius Promovendi* may fulfil the role of supervisor and, as a rule, there will not be more than two supervisors. It is important to leave room for less senior researchers to fulfil the role of co-supervisor but the rule that a professor or researcher with the *ius Promovendi* cannot be a co-supervisor under any circumstances has been dropped.

Next to the EUR-supervisor, a supervisor from abroad may be appointed as well. It is important to make sure that the potential supervisor is indeed a full professor (a 'honorary professor' is not necessarily equivalent to a full professor).

Until now a co-supervisor had to be affiliated to a university to be eligible for this role. The revised regulations offer the possibility to also appoint a co-supervisor who is not affiliated to a university (for example a co-supervisor who is working for a non-academic hospital). The potential co-supervisor needs to hold a PhD degree. A well-founded proposal of the dean needs to be submitted to the doctorate board to make this possible.

In the revised regulations, it is emphasised that scientific work that has not been carried out under guidance of the EUR-supervisor (but for example has been produced before the PhD trajectory at EUR) may not be used for the thesis.

Chapter four deals with the content of the dissertation and describes, in rather general terms, the final attainment levels the dissertation must meet. PhD candidates regularly indicate that they would like more clarity regarding the final attainment levels that should be met. However, due to the major differences between disciplines, it is impossible to summarise the final attainment levels that apply to the entire EUR in a regulation like this one. The school (or Graduate School) can provide more detailed information on this topic.

Anticipating possible joint dissertations in the context of the Convergence or collaboration with institutions such as Codarts Rotterdam and the Willem de Kooning Academy, the revised regulations also provide for obtaining the doctorate at EUR on a (technological) design or by a PhD in arts. The dissertation (the thesis) will then be accompanied by a (technological) design or artistic expression.

The rules around language, propositions and the acknowledgements have been changed. Where previously Dutch, English, French and German were set apart as possible languages for the thesis (and an exception request had to be submitted for other languages), this has now been reduced to Dutch and English as default options. An exception request must be submitted for all other languages. Important here is that assessment must be properly safeguarded - the members of the assessment committee and the doctoral committee must be proficient in the language in which the thesis is written.

The rules around the propositions have changed and are slightly stricter. For example, citations may still be used but each proposition must also contain the PhD candidate's own original

contribution, only presenting a quote is not the intention. Until now, the eleventh proposition fell outside the rule that propositions must be defensible. From now on, the eleventh proposition does not have to be scientifically defensible but must be arguable (it must be possible to discuss something). The eleventh proposition however may be a quote/citation without an original contribution of the candidate.

The PhD candidate has the option of adding a preface or afterword thanking those involved for their contribution to the work done. Guidelines have been added for this word of thanks (acknowledgements). It should be businesslike, and appropriate to the style of a scholarly work, and should not exceed 800 words. It is also indicated (in Chapter six that any embargo applies only to the academic part of the thesis. This does not include the acknowledgements.

Chapter five deals with the first stage of assessment. In this phase, after approval by the supervisor(s), the manuscript transforms into a dissertation and can be submitted to the assessment committee. Normally, this phase proceeds in good harmony, as the supervisor, together with the other (co)supervisors, is also the one who gives guidance and support. However, disagreements may arise, for example if the PhD candidate is convinced that the thesis is finished and ready to be submitted to the assessment committee while the supervisor(s) do not yet consider the thesis of sufficient quality (in the case of two supervisors, both have to approve). In this case, the candidate may request in writing an assessment to which the supervisor must respond within eight weeks. In case of no approval, reasons must be given

Section 2 of Chapter 5 then sets out the steps to follow after any withholding of approval.

Chapter six deals with the second stage of the assessment process and begins with the rules on the composition of the assessment committee, the three scholars who must give an independent assessment on the thesis after which, if approved, the candidate may reproduce the thesis and defend it in the public hearing (the PhD defence ceremony).

The rules around the composition of the committee have been changed. Previously, two of the three members could be attached to the supervisors working unit. This has been reduced to a maximum of one. One member must be affiliated with the EUR and at least one member must be affiliated with another university. What has also changed is that the dean must approve the supervisor's proposal before the supervisor asks potential members about their availability and willingness to join the assessment committee.

Formally, the dean always makes the final decision to approve or disapprove the thesis. In most cases, the three members of the assessment committee will be in favour of approval after which approval by the dean can automatically follow. An important change in the procedure is that approval no longer automatically follows if a majority of the assessment committee (two out of three) finds the thesis of sufficient quality. If one of the members votes against, the assessment committee must meet to exchange the arguments for and against. The regulations then explain in the 4th paragraph how the decision is made on the thesis and by whom (dean) if (even after deliberation) one of the members remains against approval. It

also describes what options the candidate still has after a dissertation is rejected by the assessment committee.

A change in the fifth paragraph of Chapter six is that the obligation to provide printed copies has been dropped. It is important to note that this is the obligation that EUR stated centrally (beadle office, library). Faculty or the Graduate School may maintain the obligation. This section also defines rules around any embargo - importantly, there cannot be a 'perpetual' embargo, the maximum period is 24 months. Only the academic part of the thesis is eligible for a possible embargo. The default situation is that within three months of the defence, the thesis is published in full on the publicly accessible library page.

Chapter seven is about the doctoral committee, the group of people who have the role of 'opponents' during the PhD defence ceremony. The doctoral committee consists of the three people who reviewed the thesis (the assessment committee) supplemented by a minimum of two to a maximum of four members. The rules regarding the composition of the doctoral committee have been changed, e.g. the majority does not have to possess the *ius promovendi*, a minimum of half of the members is sufficient. Also, the supervisor must first have the proposal for members reviewed by the dean before potential members may be invited. New is the possibility of adding an expert (advisory member) who does not hold a PhD degree. This requires however a well-founded proposal that explains what specific knowledge the expert has and the added value of having the expert in the committee.

A diverse composition of assessment and doctoral committees is required - this starts with rules regarding the composition of the committees in terms of gender. It may be noted here that non-binary is seen as a separate group that counts as a contribution to diversity.

Next, the role of the chair (the rector magnificus, or the rector magnificus' replacement) and the requirements around committee members' presence (and possible online presence) are discussed. A fully online PhD defence ceremony, in which the PhD candidate is also not physically present, is in principle not allowed.

Chapter eight broadly describes the PhD defence ceremony and the final stage of decision-making (awarding/not awarding the PhD degree). For more detailed (and practical) information surrounding the ceremony, the beadle's office can be contacted.

The third paragraph discusses a 'negative decision'. Many PhD students worry about the nature of the PhD defence ceremony and whether it will 'end well', and it is therefore important to discuss this a little further. The rectors of the Dutch universities have agreed that the doctoral ceremony is not purely ceremonial in character - that would also be strange because the ceremony is part of the decision on whether or not to award a possible 'cum laude' distinction. This also means that in principle the possibility exists for the doctoral committee not to award the doctorate - however, this requires a unanimous decision by the doctoral committee. This means that even the three members who previously approved the thesis, all three of them, changed their minds after the defence and must vote against awarding the doctorate.

Such a situation will only arise if, during the defence, the committee for example begins to doubt whether the candidate is actually the true author of the thesis, or if clear indications are surfacing that point to a possible violation of the code of scientific integrity.

This is not about not being able to answer the committee's questions fully. Also, a candidate who struggles to put the answers into words properly due to nerves need not to worry. The thesis has been approved, and the ceremony is meant to give the candidate an opportunity to discuss the scientific work with peers and explain the importance of the research.

Chapter nine discusses the cum laude distinction. From now on, the criteria for cum laude are more in line with the profile established by the deans for this purpose in the doctorate board. Also new is that the supervisor is consulted by the beadle (after two members of the assessment committee have proposed the possibility of awarding the cum laude distinction). Both external referees must give a positive opinion in order to continue the procedure.

Chapter ten says a certificate (diploma) will be issued and who has signed the certificate.

Chapter eleven deals with the honorary doctorate and describes the procedure for it.

Chapter twelve describes the rules for a 'joint doctorate'. A PhD degree that is the result of research carried out by the candidate at the EUR and another (foreign) institution. See also appendix 2 which contains a format for drawing up an agreement for a joint doctorate. Such an agreement must be signed by the Executive Board.

Chapter thirteen provides guidance on how to deal with a dispute or conflict.

Chapter fourteen deals with the effective date of the revised regulations, possible faculty guidelines and how the regulations should be cited. There is no transition period, which means that all ongoing PhD tracks are subject to the new regulations from 1 March 2025. The doctorate board may make an exception to this (and this will take into account whether a dissertation was completed just before 1 March 2025, for example).

Annex 1. Regulation 'Ius Promovendi', deals with the award of Ius Promovendi to associate professors and discusses the criteria and process. It was recently decided that anyone awarded the Ius Promovendi who has a role in the PhD defence ceremony (supervisor or opposition) is eligible to wear a gown.

Annex 2. Model Agreement For Joint Doctorate is an outline for entering into a 'joint doctorate', and is also made available as a word document on the website. See also Chapter 12 of the regulations.