

Eötvös Loránd University
Doctoral School of Biology

Report of the Site Visit Team

Appendix of the decision No 2021/3/IX/4.

26 March 2021



Content

I. Accreditation proposal of the Site Visit Team.....	3
II Assessment of the Site Visit Team	5
II.1 General description of the Doctoral School of Biology.....	5
II.2 Scientific activities of core members	6
II.3 Assessment based on the ESG criteria	7
ESG 1.1 Quality assurance policy	7
ESG 1.2-9 Design and approval and on-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes.....	10
ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment.....	12
ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	13
ESG 1.5: Teaching staff	15
ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support.....	16
ESG 1.7 Information management	17
ESG 1.8 Public Information	18
ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	19
Site Visit Team	20

I. Accreditation proposal of the Site Visit Team

Based on a review of the self-evaluation report prepared by the Doctoral School of Biology, Eötvös Loránd University, the university's publicly available documents and the online visit, the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) Site Visit Team has found that the Doctoral School of Biology (DS) operates a quality assurance system which, according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), covers the majority of the processes of the DS.

However, the quality assurance and improvement processes of the DS are partially planned; the planning, checking, measuring and evaluation processes are sometimes ad hoc. The link between management and quality assurance processes is detectable, teaching and research activities are managed in a correct manner that is in partial alignment with the DS's strategy.

The supporting financial, economic and IT processes and the infrastructure provide an adequate background for the learning and research activities.

The Doctoral School of Biology may therefore be conditionally accredited for five years, subject to monitoring.

As part of the monitoring process, the DS should present to the HAC, within two years from the date of this decision, a written report with detailed information on the actions taken to remedy the deficiencies identified in this report. If the HAC considers a site visit necessary, it will notify the DS accordingly within 30 business days from the receipt of the report. The deficiencies to be corrected are described in section I.2. Unless these deficiencies are remedied by the prescribed deadline, the HAC will revoke the accreditation granted.

At the end of each ESG chapter, suggestions recommended for consideration by the Site Visit Team are presented. The DS is free to decide whether to follow these suggestions; their fulfilment will not be checked by the HAC.

I.1. Key strengths

The HAC considers it important that the best practices identified in the course of the accreditation processes are disseminated to all institutions providing doctoral programmes. The Site Visit Team has therefore collected the practices which it finds exemplary and inspirational for other doctoral schools as well.

- The mandatory "grant proposal writing" course helps to prepare students for the researcher career.
- Despite the formal DS goals and strategy are not defined clearly, the informal cooperation and vision-setting appears coherent and harmonized within the DS.
- There continues to be a strong collaboration and sharing across research groups/labs with respect to lab scheduling and use.
- The continued transition to an all-English programme is commendable if the DS desires to increase access for international students, further develop scientific research networks, and enhance scientific output.
- During the PhD program, the focus is on research and lab work, and students are not overwhelmed with mandatory courses.
- The progression of PhD students is continuously followed not only by the supervisors, but also by the DS. Yearly reports are useful for the students.
- There is strong representation of experts from research institutes and employers from the non-academic sector within the council of the doctoral school and the program councils.
- The scientific output by the DS reflected by high rank publications and prestigious research grants is outstanding.

I.2 Conditions of the monitoring process

Regarding the quality assurance policy:

- The Site Visit Team suggests clarifying and describing the responsibilities of the heads of the DS and the Doctoral Council in terms of quality management. Procedures should be described, which will help fulfilment and enforcement of these mandates.

Regarding study programmes:

- The DS should develop formal guidelines/policies on how programmes are added/dropped. This could include the compilation and strategic use of programme-level graduation indicators and statistics (currently unavailable)
- The DS should develop its own educational program which ensures that the doctoral students do not need to enrol in courses which they have already completed during their MSc studies.

Regarding student admission, progression, recognition and certification:

- The evaluation criteria of the admission procedure must be made public.

- The regulations of the predefense must be transparent: the DS should define the use of the now existing two options.

Regarding teaching staff:

- The DS should improve avenues for feedback by PhD students on supervisor/programme quality.

Regarding information management:

- Appropriate data collection procedures should be developed by formulating quality objectives.
 - The DS has to elaborate an effective own system to get feedback from the students and teachers (for example questionnaire), which information can be used to develop the school and support its operation. Regarding course evaluations there are innovative ways of securing anonymity and confidentiality even with less than respondents.
 - The DS should initiate more comprehensive tracking of graduate career pathways, perhaps in collaboration with University-level tracking systems, or https://www.felvi.hu/diploman_tul.

II Assessment of the Site Visit Team

II.1 General description of the Doctoral School of Biology

At the Eötvös Loránd University, PhD studies are regulated at three levels: the Doctoral Council (DC) of the university, elected by the Senate; the faculty DCs elected by the latter; and the DCs of the DSs. Within the DS each programme has its own programme council. They each have their own, well-defined competence field. The DS belongs to the DC of the Faculty of Sciences together with five other doctoral schools.

The DS was established in 2000. It offers training in a wide range of areas of modern biology, concentrated around ten programmes. In Hungary, six other universities offer PhD education in biology.

Based on the data in doktori.hu, the DS has 86 supervisors and 385 lecturers. The core members, council members and supervisors include representatives of employers from the non-academic sector as well as experts from research institutes. The number of active students was 98 at the time of the online interviews. The total number of students who successfully defended their thesis so far is 688.

The aim of the training is to prepare students for a successful career in life sciences: either in basic research or in industry.

II.2 Scientific activities of core members

Government Decree No 387/2012 of 19 December 2012 on doctoral schools, doctoral procedures and habilitation (the Government Decree) stipulates the conditions that core members must meet. One of the fundamental conditions of being a core member is the requirement in Section 2(3)(b) that core members *'perform continuous, high-level scientific activity in the branch of science and fields of research the doctoral school is active in, such scientific activities – except artistic activities – to be assessed on the basis of the national scientific bibliographic database specified in Section 3(1)(o) of Act XL of 1994 on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (the Database)'*.

It is clearly established that the core members of the Doctoral School of Biology:

Zsuzsanna Bajtay, university professor
László Buday, research professor,
Árpád Dobolyi, university professor,
Anna Erdei, university professor,
Gábor Herczeg, university professor,
Mihály Krisztián Józsi, university professor,
Imre Kacs Kovics, university professor,
Gábor M Kovács, university professor,
Mihály Kovács, university professor,
András Málnási Csizmadia, university professor,
Károly Márialigeti, university professor,
Ádám Miklósi, university professor,
Csaba Moskát, scientific advisor,
László Nyitray, university professor,
Beáta Oborny, associate professor,
Gábor Pál, associate professor,
János Podani, university professor,
István Scheuring, scientific advisor,
Tibor Standovár, associate professor
László Tamás, associate professor,
János Török, university professor,



Tibor Vellai, university professor

perform continuous, high-level scientific activity in accordance with Section 2(3)(b) of the Government Decree.

Professor László Nyitray was elected head of the DS in 2020; he is following Professor Anna Erdei in this position. Professor Nyitray is a world-renowned biochemist, a former chairperson of the Department of Biochemistry at ELTE and a recognised PhD supervisor. His former PhD student, András Málnási Csizmadia is a university professor and a core member of DS. Even though Professor Nyitray is new to the position of head of the DS, he has a good understanding and broad view on the DS. He provided abundant information to the Site Visit Team before the interview about the quality insurance at DS.

II.3 Assessment based on the ESG criteria

ESG 1.1 Quality assurance policy

The operating conditions of a DS regarding quality management are usually determined by the regulations (applicable at university and faculty levels) and guidelines (strategies, policies).

Doctoral training does not receive special attention in the quality management system of the Eötvös Loránd University or the faculty. Although the university has a quality policy, its five-year quality development programme and the annual tasks do not include specific goals for the doctoral programme. There are no university-level student surveys that focus specifically on doctoral education. Therefore, ensuring and enhancing the quality of doctoral education is the responsibility of the University DC, the faculty level DC, and the individual DCs. However, it is not clear exactly how the responsibilities of the quality management office and the doctoral education bodies are separated.

The basic authorisations, responsibilities, and processes related to doctoral education are described in the University Doctoral Regulations and are further specified in the doctoral regulations of the faculties and in the organisational and operational regulations of the individual doctoral schools.

Regarding the quality assurance of doctoral training, the University Doctoral Regulations (UDR) state that "the head of the doctoral school is responsible for the academic quality and educational work of the Doctoral School" (Art. 15). The responsibility of the University Doctoral Council regarding quality assurance is that "the University Doctoral Council – with the assistance of the disciplinary doctoral schools – shall continuously monitor the functioning of the doctoral schools and doctoral programmes. As part of this task, the Council shall take into account the opinions of doctoral students and those having obtained doctoral degrees at

the doctoral school within five years. The Council may seek assistance from external experts if necessary" (Art. 22). In addition, "the University Doctoral Council evaluates the quality of the operations of doctoral schools as part of the annual report prepared on the basis of the quality assurance regulations." (Art. 21, Hungarian version)¹

It is important to note that the DS should consider the independent quality assurance regulations for doctoral training referred to in Art. 22 of the UDR. It is also worth mentioning that there is no university or faculty strategy for doctoral education, no quality policy for doctoral training, and there are no strategic goals and/or quality objectives at either university or faculty level to guide the operation of doctoral schools.

As a result, the quality management system of the DS is determined by the Council and the leaders of the DS with significant independence within the framework of the regulations. Quality management can be grasped on the one hand by the content framework of the DS's efforts to increase quality (quality policy, strategy, quality goals, monitoring of all these), and on the other hand, by how the authorities and responsibilities to quality management are regulated and distributed within the DS (organisational and operational rules).

The DS has its mission. Besides, it has strategic priorities (e.g., internationalization, financial stability). Still, the DS does not have a written strategy, nor formulates strategic goals and quality objectives for a given period. Hence, achievement of the mission and the strategy are not regularly monitored.

The DS prepares an annual academic report on its operation, but there is little feedback on these from the faculty and university levels. Nevertheless, to strengthen the strategic and quality development efforts of the DS, the yearly academic reports should be more evidence-based. It would be useful to systematically review each doctoral programme when preparing the report. At present, this does not happen, even though doctoral programmes appear to have significant decision-making power and impact on the training of doctoral students.

The DS has its own Organisational and Operational Regulations and a quality assurance plan (the latter contains a summary of the main procedural rules, similar to the practice of many Hungarian DSs). The Organisational and Operational Regulation does not address the responsibilities related to the quality assurance of the DS. It only refers to the university doctoral regulations. According to the university level regulations, the head of the DS is responsible for monitoring the operation and for improving the quality of the training. It is

¹ It is worth noting that the Hungarian version of Art. 21 differs from the English version. Here we translated the Hungarian version, which is „az Egyetemi Doktori Tanács a minőségbiztosítási szabályzat alapján elkészülő éves jelentés részeként értékelést készít a doktori iskolák működésének minőségéről.” The English version states that „The University Doctoral Council shall set the principles and methods of the quality assurance of the doctoral programme and obtainment of the doctoral degree – taking into account the opinions of the Disciplinary Doctoral Councils – within the framework of its regulation of the quality assurance of the University.” While the Hungarian version requires the university doctoral council to evaluate doctoral schools, the English version reduces its role to „set principles and methods”.

not clear, however, how the head can enforce this responsibility. In practice, for example, some of the critical processes take place at the level of the programmes, while the responsibilities, powers, and especially the monitoring of the programme leaders are not clear.

The role of the DS Council in quality management should be clarified. Of course, the Council still plays an important role in some critical points that determine the quality of doctoral training (e.g., in awarding degree decisions), but it has no formal responsibility for the quality of the doctoral education as a whole, or for its improvement. For example, it may be appropriate for the DS's strategy and annual report to be discussed and approved by the DS council in a formal meeting.

A student also participates in the work of the Council of the DS with consultative rights. However, it is worth striving for students' involvement in the design of the training to be more meaningful and, if possible, not limited to the Council's meetings. It is also advisable to ensure student participation in the programme councils, because the doctoral programme is a meaningful decision-making level in doctoral training.

Overall, it can be stated that the DS enjoys significant freedom in developing its quality management framework. Many procedural guarantees of quality assurance appear in the regulations, but the tools of quality management (development) are largely informal. For example, there is no strategically focused development effort. As a result, the current system has only a limited (and rather reactive) ability to eliminate quality fluctuations and inequalities in doctoral training.

At the university level, it would be important to regulate more precisely which elements of the quality management system of DSs are regulated by the Quality Management Handbook and which elements fall under the responsibility of the councils of universities, disciplines, and individual doctoral schools. As a next step, the DS should define its quality policy in alignment with the university and faculty level quality policies.

Recommendations

Every three or five years, the DS should develop a strategy in accordance with the university/faculty level doctoral strategic goals and priorities. This should be formulated by the University DC and/or the Faculty DC. In the DS strategy, the DS's situation should be evaluated and strategic goals and indicators for the period should be set. Among the goals, specific objectives concerning the operation and quality of doctoral training should be defined (quality goals).

The Site Visit Team considers it good practice for the DS to prepare an annual academic report including additional key indicators (e.g., the composition of the student by, the dropout rate, the average time to obtain a degree). It is worth supplementing the report with an action plan, in which the most important tasks and goals for the next period are set out.



It is advisable to reflect in the annual reports on the implementation of the DS's tasks and progress towards the goals set in the previous years.

We recommend that students be more involved in the design and operation of quality assurance in doctoral training and in the operation of programme councils.

ESG 1.2-9 Design and approval and on-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

The DS is the largest student school in its discipline of science in Hungary. It brings together very heterogeneous fields. For this reason, doctoral programmes, 10 of which are currently in operation, play an important role. Doctoral programmes represent an important decision-making level in doctoral education. At the same time, a formal mechanism of creating, dropping, managing, and supervising the programmes has not been developed. It is based on more informal mechanisms, and thus it is not transparent how the quality differences and fluctuations of doctoral programmes and the structural problems behind them can be monitored and addressed in time by the management of the DS. The DS is programme-heavy DS (10 programmes). The DS leadership recognized that individual programme activities are not always known to the DS, as it is 'difficult to track so many programmes, teachers and supervisors'.

The term "learning outcome" was used in the self-assessment report, which is excellent. It would be useful to raise awareness of the learning outcomes of doctoral education and to evaluate doctoral programmes against these outcomes.

If PhD holders are employed in large numbers outside of academia (as it is stated in the mission), it is advisable to strengthen transferable skills as well. For example, it may be worth incorporating skills related to business and organisation into the training of doctoral students.

Rules for the design and approval of programmes within the DS are specified in the *Eötvös Loránd University Organisational and Operational Regulations, Vol. 2, Annex 6 to the Academic Regulations for Students Doctoral Regulations*, and the *Quality Assurance Plan of the Doctoral School of Biology at Eötvös Loránd University (2016)*, whereby the Council of the Doctoral School (CDS) decides the list of courses and their topics accepted and offered in the programmes of the DS.

According to our interviews, justification for the existence of programmes is based largely on (i) the availability of funding, (ii) scientific output, and (iii) the number of graduating students. Although formal DS goals and strategy are not formulated, the DS is informally trying to address the need to increase internationalization, the decreasing number and



quality of PhD applicants, serious funding constraints, and the absence of increase in stipend amounts.

The Council of the Doctoral School (CDS) comprises inter alia programme leaders, one elected PhD student representative, potential or active supervisors, representatives of employers from the non-academic sector, as well as researchers from institutions not working in higher education. According to the *Operational Regulation of the Doctoral School of Biology at Eötvös Loránd University (after 2016)*, the tasks and working rules of the CDS are specified by points a-k of the FDR Art. 3(3). The DS specifies that the further tasks of the CDS are to (i) determine the requirements and evaluation criteria of the entrance exam, (ii) determine the qualitative and quantitative criteria of the independent publication activity that students have to fulfil, and (iii) re-evaluate the list of scientific journals in which publications are accepted for fulfilling the publication requirement for a PhD degree.

Individual Programme Councils within the DS, on the other hand, re-evaluate the list of the offered courses and ask lecturers to update the topics, discuss new or modified courses and topics or ask for changes if they find it necessary. In addition, programme heads are responsible for maintaining the standards and quality of education and research performed in the corresponding programme and report annually to the DS. Academic workload for students is clearly specified and expressed as credits in the *DS Training Plan (after 2016)* document, as well as in the *Operational Regulation of the Doctoral School of Biology at Eötvös Loránd University (after 2016)*.

The *DS Self-Assessment Report 2020 (SAR)* stipulates that the quality goals of DS are fully consistent with the objectives and criteria set in the *Institutional Strategy of Eötvös Loránd University and the strategic action plan in higher education of the Hungarian Government* ('Shifting of Gears in Higher Education: Mid-Term Political Strategy 2016–2021), particularly with the goals of improving PhD training, i.e. making it international and strengthening the scientific characteristics of the doctoral programmes. Programme learning outcomes are claimed to be in accordance with the Hungarian Qualification Framework (Level 8) concerning knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy, although programme-level learning outcomes exist only in a generic form in section 1.2.4 of the SAR. Current programme course syllabi in English were not made available to the Site Visit Team, nor were any associated course-level learning outcomes, or teacher lists for each of the 10 programmes. Courses cover both theoretical background and lab or field skills and experience. Training emphasizes practical skills: the majority of credits are earned for supervised research work under personal tutoring by leading researchers.

Although there is an elected PhD Student Representative on the CDS, there are no student representatives on the individual programme councils, where final course lists are decided. This sentiment of not having a forum to contribute to programme design and improvement was echoed in the student survey, and some students claimed that the course topics are too

disparate from their research topics and hinder their programme. As it is hard to find classes related to their fields of study, they often have to take up courses of the master programme to get the required number of credits.

According to section 7 (16) of the *Regulation of the Faculty of Natural Sciences*, „the Doctoral Students shall perform lecturing duties over the course of the doctoral programme”. The self-assessment report states that „students with state scholarship are expected to participate as teaching assistants in delivering practical courses for undergraduate students as part of their normal training programme. They are also participating in supervising MSc students, and evaluating BSc theses.” Presently, however, they get neither credit nor a work contract and payment. During the interview, the head of the DS confirmed that there are plans to change this policy and practice within the DS.

Recommendations

Appoint/elect PhD student representatives to sit also on individual programme councils. This will facilitate more nuanced contribution of relevant PhD students to their individual programmes, not simply to the DS level.

ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

The actual course list is accepted by the Programme Council, in which there is no student representative. Most of the courses in the PhD programme are available during the master program, too. The students are not satisfied with the diversity of the courses. On the other hand, the goal with the accepted course list is to help foreign students, who arrive with different backgrounds in knowledge, and bring them onto the same level as Hungarian students. The students find the ratio of theoretical and research courses adequate, so they can spend more time on their own research project.

The DS doesn't have a system or a well-regulated process to handle student complaints. PhD students do not know where they can share their opinion or problems to achieve some change.

The process of the complex exam is very well regulated, but the students do not receive enough information about it. The supervisors and students find the complex exam very useful, because it is a good chance for the students to practice presenting their work, and both supervisors and students get feedback from the committee. The language of the exam depends on the nationality/language choice of the students.

International students do not receive enough information from the doctoral school about their duties and opportunities, they rather get help from colleagues in their laboratories and from teachers.

There is a student representative on the Council of the DS, who is elected by students. According to the current regulation of the DS, the student representative participates in the work of the council with consultative rights. The main communication channel between the representative and the students is a Facebook group, in which only 50% of the students are present. Information about the council's decisions is shared in this group and there is no other communication channel. The students can communicate their problems and suggestions to the representative only through this online group. A good thing is that the information is available in both Hungarian and English in the group. On the negative side, the students mostly don't know this group or the student representative.

The students can contact the head of the Doctoral Students' Union is through their webpage or e-mail. The impression of the Site Visit Team was that neither the head of Doctoral Students' Union, nor the student representative are fully aware of their duties and responsibilities. They do not call the attention to themselves, so the students don't know them or their function.

Recommendations

Communication between the DS and students needs to be more effective (by involving the students in more processes).

To support the representation of the students, it might be useful to organize a training for the student representative and the head of the Doctoral Students' Union to educate them about their duties, responsibilities and about how they can work more effectively.

ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

The general rules of the admission procedure are described in the ELTE Doctoral Regulations. The self-assessment report states that "the maximum score a student can get for the performance is 10. Each member of the committee gives a mark between 1 (min) and 10 (max), and their average will be the final value. Additional points can be obtained if the candidate has published a peer-reviewed research paper as a co-author, presented an abstract at national or international conferences, and for the qualification on a Students' Scientific Research Conference (TDK). Finally, marks of selected courses during her/his MSc period will be calculated and added to the evaluation score of the entry exam." This rule, however, does not appear either in the official regulations or on the website. In contrast to this statement, the website states only that "The applicant's performance may be measured by points as well".

The monitoring of the progress of the students is ensured through the

- yearly report
- comprehensive exam

- pre-defense.

The process and aim of the yearly report are described in the Quality Assurance Plan of the DS as follows: „The programme councils of the DS evaluate each student’s progress in their research activity each year. Doctoral students talk about their results, publications, future research plans in the presence of their topic supervisor and anyone interested.”

The process of the comprehensive exam is described in the Operational regulations of the DS. „In case of the theoretical part, the main and secondary subjects are counted at a ratio of 2:1, using a four-level grade (summa cum laude, cum laude, rite, insufficiente). The theoretical part is evaluated using a three-grade scale. The evaluation of the complex exam contributes to the final qualification of the doctoral degree.” This regulation contradicts the legal requirements, as does paragraph 8 of section 12 of the Regulation of the Faculty of Natural Sciences (“The Student shall not be allowed a second attempt in the form of a retake exam at a dissertation part of a comprehensive examination that is considered a fail.”) All regulations must be in compliance with the legal requirements. The main and secondary subjects of the comprehensive exam are listed in the Training Plan and the Operational Regulation of the DS, though the two lists are not entirely identical.

The publication requirements are defined in the Quality Assurance Plan of the DS as follows: “The prerequisite to submitting a PhD dissertation is the publication of a minimum of two research papers, one of which is first-authored or co-first-authored, based on the student’s results on his/her doctoral topic in English in an international peer-reviewed journal. The sum of the impact factors of the journals need to be at least 2, except in research areas where the average impact factor of research journals is lower than this number. Some areas of the 10 programmes of the DC of Biology do have respected journal without impact factors. In such cases the DSC accepts research articles as a publication to be considered for PhD degree if they appeared in a research journal suggested by the council of the particular program.”

Regarding the pre-defense, there is no standardized process. According to the Quality Assurance Plan of the DS “the appropriate programme council of the DS may choose from the following two procedures. 1. The head of the programme council, in agreement with the doctoral supervisor, may propose to hold an in-house dispute. In this case the dissertation is reviewed by an expert “opponent” who has a PhD degree. A record has to be made containing the discussion, especially suggestions and/or requests for any change. If considerable revision is requested, the academic dispute should be repeated. 2. The head of the programme council and an expert invited by the programme council will pre-evaluate the doctoral dissertation in line with the regulations of the faculty.” It is not clear what the choice between the two options may be based on.

The process of the defence is described in the ELTE doctoral regulations, all necessary details can be found here. According to the Quality Assurance Plan of the DS “The doctoral dissertation is evaluated by two referees, one from the Eötvös University and the other from

an external university or research institute. If strongly justified, the programme council could allow exemption from applying the last rule.” This is not in compliance with the legal regulations, as one of the evaluators must be external.

The opinions the Site Visit Team received regarding the monitoring of teaching activity of the students vary to a great extent. It seems that some supervisors monitor it intensively and help their students with continuous feedback, while others are less active.

Doctoral students are allowed to sign up for courses offered by other DSs. The recognition of these elected courses and the final evaluation of the students is decided by the programme councils.

Recommendations

Study requirements are specified partly in the Quality assurance plan and partly in the Operational regulation and in the ELTE/Faculty of Science doctoral regulations. It is recommended to present the same type of information in a single document; study requirements which apply only to this DS should be gathered in one document.

ESG 1.5: Teaching staff

Rules specifying (in terms of appointment and requirements) who might offer research topics, be a teacher, or be a programme leader are contained within the *Eötvös Loránd University Organisational and Operational Regulations, Vol. 2, Annex 6 to the Academic Regulations for Students Doctoral Regulations*. More specifically, the SAR states that the first level of accreditation of potential supervisors (both faculty members and external experts) is managed by the CDS, where a detailed check of the sustained scientific productivity (quantity and quality) of would-be supervisors is performed. Lecturers and supervisors are evaluated and accepted by the CDS upon the proposal of the selected programme leader. Supervisors must possess research grant(s) to cover the expenses of PhD training. They also must have first or last author papers in the relevant field, published in internationally peer reviewed journals within the last 5 years from the accreditation period. When a new PhD project is announced by a supervisor, the relevant programme leader examines her/his research activity in the last 5-year period. Insufficient levels of publication may lead to the rejection of the proposed PhD project until the supervisor meets the requirements.

The publication activity of supervisors is monitored only by the Faculty Doctoral Council. The Doctoral School doesn't have a quality control process for the continuous monitoring of the scientific and teaching activity of the supervisors.

According to the SAR, most of the (21) core members deliver courses and participate in the evaluation committees, although teacher lists for the various programs were not forthcoming. All interviewed colleagues described overly excessive workloads which left

little to no time for professional development, nor opportunities for sharing best practices (this is, however, occasionally carried out informally). Interviewed teachers also indicated minimal financial support, and limited access to the most important subscription-based online research journals.

The teaching and supervisory activity of teachers is not tracked, there is no strategy which guarantees that the head of the DS can overview these processes. However, the reports of doctoral students give feedback not only about their own performance but also about their supervisors’.

Recommendations

Assess the workload of the supervisors, and if necessary, change it in order to enable professional development in supervisory skills training, and to facilitate more regular cross-programme sharing of best practices in supervision.

Initiate discussions and develop guidelines on how *Student Learning Experience* and *Supervisor Quality* might be factors by which supervisors are assessed, rather than only on the basis of available funding and scientific output.

ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support

On the website of the doctoral school, most of the information is available in both Hungarian and English. Most of the administrators speak English. The administration processes have no written SOP, but the processes are under the regulation of the DS. The students would prefer to have less paper-based administration, because it takes a long time. It is possible to scan the necessary documents and send them by e-mail, but there is no special platform (webpage) for electronic administration. At faculty level, there are regulations about which processes can be used electronically. The administration office doesn’t get feedback from the students, but a questionnaire is being planned, which concentrates on administration processes.

PhD students can be members of the library free of charge. Online electronic services, such as online books are available to them. The library offers the MTMT services, collecting publications and ensures open accesses. There are 2000 books, applications and a bookshop for the students. If a student needs something special, he/she can communicate via e-mail with the library about it. A new application is under development to enable students to give a feedback about their satisfaction or their needs. All of the information about the library can be found on the website, which is available in Hungarian and in English as well.

The DS attends to students with handicaps and special needs. There are special operators responsible for delivering special training. There are wheelchair accessible buildings for students with physical handicap. If necessary, the lessons can be relocated into these

buildings. In the DS, the students with handicap can turn to their supervisors with their needs and special problems.

The SAR purports that many research groups are part of international cooperation networks, therefore students receive 'first-hand experience with new research trends and methodologies, leading to new research ideas and topics'. Another important way to provide competitiveness for students is to send them to international workshops, trainings, and conferences, although student interviewees felt that this was under-utilized (primarily due to financial constraints).

Recommendations

The administration processes need to be improved (they are mostly paper-based), there are many factors that justify the use of electronic administration (environmental considerations, cost and flexibility).

The administrators have an English language exam, but a special training in English about the administration processes could be useful for them.

ESG 1.7 Information management

The DS does not set formal strategic and quality goals, nor does it use indicators to monitor progress. Therefore, there is no organized data collection to determine progress towards its goals.

Each year, the DS presents the number of applicants and enrolled students and the number of students at different phases of the training in its annual academic report. In addition, it would be worth regularly analysing any changes in the average time of obtaining a degree, in the ratio of those who obtained a degree within a given time period (e.g. in 5 years), and the changes in the proportion of students dropping out over time. It is advisable to present and analyse the most critical indicators in a time series.

The students can complete a satisfaction survey about courses, teachers and administration processes. Some students do not know about this survey, so the doctoral school only receives feedback from a small portion of students. Neither the Organisational and Operational Regulations nor the quality assurance plan covers the regular survey of the satisfaction of stakeholders, and the measures based on them. Although the University Quality Office regularly conducts comprehensive analyses on incoming students, subject and faculty opinions (OHV), and the result of graduate tracking (DPR), the results of these surveys are of little use due to the small number of doctoral students. Therefore, the management of the DS only occasionally and informally receives meaningful feedback from students.

The DS does not carry out independent data collection in addition to university data collection activities. The collection of information about the operation of training is mainly informal. For example, graduate career tracking and the reasons for dropping out are explored informally: due to the relatively small number of students, it is usually known where PhD holders work, but this information is scattered, difficult to compare, and the monitoring of trends is time-consuming. Former students “obtain postdoctoral positions throughout the world, and a large portion get tenure or tenure track positions at universities or research institutes”. However, interviews with the DS leadership indicate that this tracking is sporadic at best and needs to be institutionalized more systematically.

Recommendations

It would be useful to plan data collection procedures appropriate to the number of students in cooperation with or independently of the Quality Office. For example, it may be worthwhile to regularly organize focus group discussions with students instead of questionnaire surveys. It is also advisable to involve doctoral students in the analysis of the results.

ESG 1.8 Public Information

The Hungarian website of the DS can be reached from the faculty website and also from the website of the Institute of Biology, but the content of the two websites is not exactly identical (<https://ttk.elte.hu/biophd>; <https://biologia.elte.hu/bioPhD-hu?m=1781>).

When arriving from the faculty website, one first sees the introduction of the DS. It starts with the clearly described mission and the subprograms. It's very useful that the basic information about applying to the DS is available on this main page, while further details can be found by clicking on the provided link (doktorifelveteli.elte.hu). However, it is somewhat confusing that right below the above mentioned link is another link, called “Honlap”, which leads to another page (Pótfelvételi). The next menu option is alumni tracking. The provided links show - instead of the expected data - the main page of the ELTE alumni with such a wide range of information that it's almost impossible to find anything about the DS. The tab with the documents shows all the regulations related to the doctoral studies. The last menu item “Information in English”, is not entirely identical to the Hungarian content.

In the “Information in English” tab appears the button “Apply now”, which leads to another site of the DS (<https://www.elte.hu/en/doctoral-school-of-biology>) with several menu items; under “contact” we find the name of the former head of the DS. When clicking on „More information”, a new window appears with the same information. The link “More information about ELTE” leads to the same link as “Apply now”. Instead of “documents” “Training plan”



and “Regulation” appear, the latter link leads “outside” the DS, to a university site. The regulations of the DS are not listed here.

Further, very important information can be accessed only from the faculty website, following the path A Karról > Szervezet > Hivatalok > Doktori, Habilitációs és Nemzetközi Ügyek Csoportja. Here we find the documents related to the complex exam and doctoral procedure, as well as information about the Stipendium Hungaricum and the Erasmus programs, news, and defense dates. It’s not clear if the documents listed under the menu item „PhD procedures” apply to students in the old (until 2016) or the new system (from 2016). Unfortunately, there is no link on the homepage of the DS which would lead to this information.

Based on the feedback the Site Visit Team received from the students, the main communication channel is Neptun. In most cases students learn about deadlines, changes in the schedule etc. via Neptun messages. It seems to be a general problem for students to find the necessary information about study requirements. As on the website of the DS and faculty, there are too many sources with often contradictory content, the students usually turn to their fellow students in higher semesters.

According to the students, the DS doesn’t organise any meetings where the head of the DS, the programme leaders, the lecturers and the students would have the opportunity to ask one another questions or to exchange experiences. Information arrives often from the departmental and university levels.

Several of the international students expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of information in English.

Recommendations

- The DS should ensure that it has control over the flow of information, and create its own platform where students can turn to regardless of their subprogramme or department.
- It is recommended to hold annual meetings where students can raise their problems, or to give them such opportunities in any other form.
- All information related to the doctoral studies should be available from the website of the DS.
- The DS must ensure that international students don’t miss out on any information.

ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Since its establishment, the DS has asked that the HAC perform the assessment of its quality assurance.



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Date of the online interviews: 22nd of October 2020