



Université libre de Bruxelles

PhD Charter

Approved by the Board on the 12th of November 2012
and amended by the Academic Council on the 30th of June 2014 and the 19th of October 2015.

PREAMBLE

A PhD thesis is both a contribution to scientific research and a personal training acquired by carrying out research. Seen in this way, writing a thesis is a demanding personal and professional project, and its objectives and the resources needed to achieve them must be clearly established through an agreement between the candidate and the thesis supervisor, and monitored by a supervisory committee.

Current regulations at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*¹ establish the institutional framework for a PhD, and this Charter specifies the reciprocal commitments made between the candidate, their promoter, and the supervisory committee. Before signing the charter, those involved should hold a detailed discussion of the doctoral research project, the conditions in which it is completed, the support and supervision mechanisms, and the candidate's place within the research team.²

1. COMMITTING TO A THESIS

The future thesis supervisor vouches for the candidate's scientific skills and sense of initiative.

The supervisor helps the candidate to outline the doctoral research project, and ensures that it is original and in line with current knowledge, as well as confirming that the thesis can be completed within the planned (and clearly defined) period. Together with the Candidate, the supervisor outlines the conditions for doctoral training, research supervision, and integration into the research team, including the equipment that can be made available to the student.

The supervisor commits to monitoring the candidate's work with his full attention. The supervisor must also inform the candidate of the number of theses he is overseeing.

The supervisor meets with the candidate to discover the financial context within which the research will be carried out, makes any pertinent suggestions (assistant contracts, PhD grants, etc.), and takes care to ensure that the candidate can complete their PhD in acceptable conditions. The supervisor must inform the candidate that the University is unable to guarantee any income.

Finally, the supervisor informs the candidate of the general opportunities available in their field, while clearly stating that the vast majority of opportunities are found outside the ULB.

The candidate commits to: following the subject-based and transferable skills training suggested by their supervisor and supervisory committee, doing their utmost to integrate into the research team and to demonstrating team spirit and ethical practice, giving their full attention to any advice on the progress of their research from their supervisor and supervisory committee, accepting all invitations extended to them, providing regular progress updates, and informing the supervisor and committee in a positive and timely fashion of any difficulties that may be faced, both in terms of scientific matters and relationships within the team.

¹For any questions about the regulatory aspect of the PhD, the signatories of the charter are instructed to consult the *ULB PhD Regulations*, as well as any additional provisions that may be required by the Department.

²The ULB complies with the *European Charter for Researchers*, compiled by the European Commission in 2005.

2. INTEGRATION IN TO THE RESEARCH TEAM

The candidate becomes a full member of the research team. Depending on the resources available and the progress made, the host team may provide access to the facilities required to move the PhD research forward (equipment, computer resources, operational and documentary resources, attendance at seminars and conferences, presenting work at science conferences, etc.). If necessary, the supervisor submits external funding requests or, if they are not obtained, discusses the possibility of restructuring part of the candidate's research. Besides, the supervisor informs regularly the Candidate about the statement of funds which have been granted to them (operating costs...).

The Candidate commits to complying with the regulations in force with the host team, as well as scientific ethics and intellectual property rules at the ULB³. The possible contractual and statutory obligations may not include excessive responsibilities for tasks unrelated to thesis research and training.

3. THESIS SUPERVISION AND MONITORING

The thesis supervisor will meet with the Candidate as often as necessary to monitor the progress made, discuss any difficulties encountered and their potential solutions, and put forward any new directions that research could take in light of the results obtained. The supervisor will inform the candidate of any positive or negative assessments of their work, as well as any objections or criticism that their work may incur. The supervisor will also suggest that a co-supervisor be appointed when appropriate, particularly when, at any time and for whatever reason (prolonged stay abroad, etc.), the supervisor would be prevented from supervising and monitoring the thesis.

Members of the supervisory committee, and the Chairperson in particular, will also monitor progress closely; at least once per year. The committee meets with the Candidate at the beginning of the thesis, and then annually thereafter to state their opinion on re-enrolment. The supervisor and candidate describe the thesis project to the committee, detailing its context, the progress made in relation to the established objectives, and any difficulties encountered. Based on this information the committee, together with the supervisor and candidate, sets the objectives for the coming year, both in terms of subject-specific and transferable skills, as well as scientific objectives. This information is also used to set the doctoral training programme. The committee takes special care to monitor the feasibility of the research programme and the thesis writing phase in light of the defence taking place within the established period. If necessary, the committee may enter an in-depth discussion on the possibility of redefining the thesis objectives given a realistic submission date. At the end of the thesis, the committee should state its opinion on its submission for defence.

The candidate must demonstrate their own initiative and independence in carrying out their research, and is responsible completing the thesis within the established deadline. In addition to this, the candidate must provide the supervisor and supervisory committee with information on any difficulties encountered, and any assistance that they may be called upon to request.

The supervisory committee is responsible for resolving any conflicts that arise between the supervisor and the candidate. If the conflict goes unresolved, the candidate or their supervisor may call in a mediator by following the procedure detailed in the PhD Regulations.

³Unless otherwise stated, the ULB holds full and exclusive intellectual property rights over the research carried out, and any income gained is governed by the University Board.

4. LENGTH OF STUDY

A PhD is the first step in a high level professional career in academic research, extra-academic research, and a range of other fields. This first stage must be long enough so that the necessary skills may be developed, but also to enable the doctor to begin their professional career as soon as possible, in whatever field, nationally or internationally.

The candidate, supervisor, and supervisory committee are therefore committed, in normal financial conditions, to making every effort to ensure that this initial stage of professional life, including doctoral training, does not exceed four years for those receiving research grants (who are working on their theses full-time), and six years for full-time assistants (who also have teaching responsibilities). Ideally, the schedule set with the supervisory committee should enable the candidate to apply for postdoctoral research contracts available in spring of the fourth year of their thesis (in the sixth year for assistants). Therefore, the scheduled deadline for the defence should be set by the supervisory committee and the candidate no later than when enrolling for the final year of the thesis.

In order to avoid wasting time unnecessarily, the supervisory committee will state its opinion on whether the student should continue or desist their thesis upon completion of the “intermediate evaluation”. For Candidates with a full-time research grant, this “intermediate” evaluation will be held no later than the end of the second year (third year for assistants); in other circumstances, the supervisory committee may choose to extend this deadline, in compliance with the PhD regulations. If serious shortcomings are observed, then the supervisory committee must advise the Candidate not to re-enroll.

5. BEYOND YOUR Ph.D

In order to facilitate the candidate’s insertion into the professional world, the supervisor and supervisory committee either suggest or assign any transferable skills training that may be of use. Furthermore, during the final year of the thesis, they discuss the candidate’s career prospects and provide all available information on this matter. Together with the University’s specialist departments, they will help the candidate to market the general skills they acquired during their studies, so that the candidate can recall these skills when seeking employment. If the candidate wishes to continue their career in academic research, particularly abroad, then the supervisor and supervisory committee should allow them access to their own networks, while of course remaining objective about their scientific merit.

All students that complete their PhD at the ULB commits to providing the university with their email address for the ten years following the defence of their thesis, so that they may be used as an example for new candidates, and to answering all queries from the university regarding professional career.

SIGNED

in *(place)* , in triplicate, on *(date)*

The candidate

Full name:

Signature:

The supervisor

Full name:

Signature:

Chair of the supervisory committee

Full name:

Signature:

Each signatory keeps a signed copy of the present document.