
Reforming CEU doctoral programs – approved proposal

This memo sets out the broad contours of change as proposed by the Senior Leadership Team, following consultations with, and incorporating feedback from, the University Doctoral Committee; the Academic Forum, the heads of doctoral programs; the Senate as well as the doctoral student members of the Student Union board. The proposal also relies on a survey by the Institutional Research Office where 74 supervisors provided their opinion about the factors that affect doctoral program completion and time to degree.

The main objective of the proposals below is to increase completion rates, decrease time to degree, simplify burdensome administrative procedures and help with visa/residence problems for students from third countries. The main plank of change is to align program duration with funding, improve the monitoring of student progress and build a more supportive environment for doctoral students in residence, as follows:

1) Program duration: 4 (+1+1) years

The standard duration of doctoral programs is 4 years. Up to one additional year (i.e., no more than 12 months) may be granted by doctoral program committees (DPCs) in case of (i) extensive fieldwork, extensive archival research or other discipline-specific requirements, on the condition that the extra time is supported by external financial sources (e.g., external scholarship or grant). and (ii) multiple TA-ships, Global Teaching Fellowships, or participation in externally funded research projects (activities that enable the student to cover costs of living).

Additional extensions for up to one more year and in every case beyond 5 years of enrolment are to be decided by the University Doctoral Committee (UDC).

If an extension is not granted on the above grounds and in case of repeated unsatisfactory progress, the students' enrolment is terminated; MPhil degrees and reenrollment to submit the thesis remain possible.

Parental leave, illness or bereavement remain grounds for a leave during which enrolment (time to degree) and stipend payments are suspended by the DPC/UDC (depending on year of enrolment).

Doctoral students will have the right to appeal DPC extension and termination decisions to the UDC; DPCs will similarly have the right to refer cases to the UDC.

Doctoral Program Committees will report annually to the UDC on all extension and termination decisions. The UDC will have the competence to review these reports and/or require corrective action.

Reports on the students' progress will be filed following the supervisory panel meetings twice a year to the DPC (unless the doctoral program committee itself reviews and approves progress); the progress reports will be made available to the UDC.

2) Financial aid:

All grants are replaced with a 4th year stipend. (Exception: OSUN-funded write-up grant for doctoral students who were in residence in spring 2020). A fixed-sum 'top-up' is available for each student in a flexible manner for whatever purpose the doctoral program committee considers justified: fieldwork, conference participation, summer school, data set etc. (see Annex).

Students may continue to go on a study abroad term; doctoral programs should support this by maintaining links with partner institutions and providing letters of recommendation but there is no financial aid earmarked for this purpose (the top-up or stipend savings can be used).

Continued stipend payments are conditional on satisfactory progress. The first unsatisfactory progress report is a warning; if the follow-up report shows unsatisfactory progress again the stipend is suspended and/or enrolment is terminated.

3) The profile of doctoral programs and doctoral students:

Doctoral programs should only accept candidates that apply with a reasonably well-articulated, realistic project that is feasible to complete in 4 (+1+1) years and have sufficient grounding in the discipline so that coursework can be limited to year 1. Applicants who would need a lot of coursework are to be redirected to one or two-year MA programs, with the anticipation that in case of good performance they will be admitted to the doctoral program a year (two years) later.

Coursework and comprehensive exams should be concluded by the end of the first year of doctoral studies.

Students are expected to be in residence in Vienna with the exception of fieldwork, a semester abroad, or an approved leave so that they can stay in close contact with their peers and supervisors and attend departmental colloquia.

4) Supervision and monitoring progress:

Supervisory panels should be introduced in all doctoral programs where faculty numbers would support it: one main supervisor and one or two panel members take joint responsibility for the student (small departments may be exempted in case extra supervision would put undue pressure on faculty members).

Supervisory panels -- or where supervisory panels are not viable, the doctoral program committee -- meet and formally approve progress reports at least twice a year (satisfactory progress is a condition of continued stipends/enrollment).

Implementation

The new program duration and regulations would take effect for the 2023/24 cohort of doctoral students so that doctoral programs can be advertised with a 4-year long stipend in fall 22/23. However, doctoral students in years 1-3 should be allowed to opt to receive a 4th year of stipend provided that doctoral program committees assess the student's progress satisfactory for submission at the end of year 4. For all others the current financial aid structure (grants on application basis) remains in effect until the last student currently in enrollment graduates.

If this proposal is approved by the Senate, corresponding modifications will be made to the text of the relevant policies (CEU Doctoral Regulations, Financial Aid Policy, Write-Up Grant Guidelines, Student Travel and Research Grant Policy), with differentiation by cohort (pre- and post 2023/24). The new financial aid structure will also be submitted for approval to the CEU Board of Trustees. Recruitment materials for the upcoming recruitment cycle will be revised accordingly.

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Annex:

Current financial aid to doctoral students

Stipends: 1.300 per month x 36 months

Write-up grants: 1.300 per month x 6 months (plus OSUN funded grant in the same amount for students in enrollment in spring 2020)

Doctoral Research Support Grant – 1 time during studies (non-competitive grant and max. request is 5,000 EUR per student).

Summer School Grant – 2 times during studies (competitive and max. request is 1,500 EUR per student).

Winter School Grant – 1 time during their studies (competitive and max. request 1,500 EUR per student).

Conference grant – 1,500

Field & Archival grant – 2,000

Total (max): 67,600

Proposed financial aid to doctoral students

Stipends: 1.300 per month x 48 months = 62,400

Fund flexibly allocated by the doctoral program committee for various expenses: 5,200

Total: 67,600