

# Statutes of the Doctoral School of Life Sciences at the University of Geneva

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The PhD School of Life Sciences at the University of Geneva brings together doctoral programs that are part of doctoral curricula delivering PhD degrees at the Faculties of Medicine and Science. These doctoral curricula are aimed at students with an excellent scientific training in any of the various research disciplines related to life sciences. The doctoral curricula are governed by doctoral study regulations, which can be accompanied by study plans; these documents are approved by the competent bodies, in agreement with the Statutes of the University of Geneva.

Doctoral programs, on the other hand, are defined as the activities required from PhD students in addition to their research work and the writing of a doctoral thesis. The principle of doctoral programs and their modalities are described in the study regulations of the doctoral degrees.

The present statutes of the PhD School of Life Sciences aim mainly to define the organisation and management of the School and the doctoral programs it encompasses.

Each member of these doctoral programs is committed to developing doctoral projects of a high scientific level while respecting the rules of the PhD as described in the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences at the Faculties of Medicine and Science (hereafter the “study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences”).

Each individual program enjoys a high level of independence with regards to its academic and scientific orientations.

# 1 Affiliations

## 1.1 Members of the PhD School

The members of the PhD School of Life Sciences are academic members of either of the two faculties concerned (except for rare exceptions described in 1.3) and fulfil two criteria.

Members must be:

- able to fund the doctoral student and his/her project
- scientifically active within the field of one of the doctoral programs

Members of the School are either full members or associate members of a program according to the rules delineated below (Sections 1.2, 1.3).

## 1.2 Full members of a program

Any person or associate member wishing to join a given program as full member must apply to the director of this program who will submit the application to the members of his/her program.

Any new full member must be elected by a two-third majority of the full members of the program.

Full members must be active within their program, taking part in the recruitment process of doctoral candidates (recruitment committee, selection committee, *ad hoc* committee), in the equivalence committees, in the Thesis Advisory Committees (TACs), in the thesis evaluation committees, and in the teaching organised by the program. They cannot ask to be substituted for any of these duties, except for the program director (see Section 2.2).

Thesis directors can be full members of two programs at most, provided they are elected independently by the members of each of these two programs.

If the commitment of a full member to the activities of the program is deemed insufficient or if his/her actions as thesis director are detrimental to the PhD students, the program director may propose that the member lose his/her full rights. This proposal is validated by a restricted council of five members: the program director; two full members, one chosen by the thesis director whose rights are being evaluated, the other one chosen by the full members; a representative of the Dean's Office; and a representative of the PhD students.

### **1.3 Associate members of a program**

A thesis director who is not a member of the School (according to Section 1.1) may become an associate member if his/her PhD student submits his/her thesis project to a program of the School and if this project is accepted by the director of the program in question.

The doctoral project will be co-directed by a thesis co-director who must be a full member of the PhD student's program and must satisfy the conditions for co-directorship of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences.

The status of associate member lasts only for the duration of the doctoral project.

It confers neither rights nor obligations, except for the obligation to abide by the working rules of the host program until the end of the PhD.

A thesis director who is already a full member of two programs can become associate member in additional doctoral programs.

In the exceptional case where a thesis co-director is not affiliated with the University of Geneva, he or she can become associate member for the duration of the thesis according to the conditions described above.

## 2 Directorship of a doctoral program

Each program has a director affiliated with one or the other of the concerned faculties.

Directors for the following programs are chosen among the Faculty of Medicine:

- The *Biomedical Sciences* program (Sciences biomédicales)
- The *Genomics and Digital Health* program (Génomique et Santé numérique)

Directors for the following programs are chosen among the Faculty of Science:

- The *Molecular Biosciences* program (Biosciences moléculaires), previously called International PhD program in Life Sciences
- The *Pharmaceutical Sciences* program (Sciences pharmaceutiques)
- The *Ecology and Evolution* program (Écologie et évolution)
- The *Physics of Biology* program (Physique du vivant)

If additional programs are to join the School, the directors of these programs will belong to the faculty of origin of the program.

### 2.1 Nomination of the director of a doctoral program

The director of a given doctoral program is chosen among the full members of the program. The choice is validated by a two-thirds majority vote of the members of the program. He/she is assisted by a co-director who can substitute for the director in his/her absence, and who is chosen and elected in the same way as the director, in principle at the same time.

The director of a doctoral program is scientifically recognised in the field of the doctoral program and must be actively involved in research.

His/Her mandate lasts four years and is renewable once. Six months before the end of the mandate, the vice-deans in charge of the School, as defined by their respective Dean's offices and representing the faculties concerned, organise an election for the next mandate, with a call for applications and a deadline for voting. All members of a program, full and associate, elect their director and co-director together.

If the director quits before the end of their mandate, his/her co-director automatically takes over as director. If the co-director has taken over as director or quits before the end of his/her own co-director mandate, the director chooses a co-director whose nomination must be validated by a vote from the entire body of members of the program, as described in the first paragraph of Section 2.1.

## **2.2 Duties of the program directors and co-directors**

The program director is assisted by their co-director in all their task. He/she manages the different academic aspects of his/her program with the support of the coordinator (See Section 7).

The program director supervises the selection process (*ad hoc* and open call) of doctoral candidates organised by the coordinator: he/she assembles the committees involved in the selection process (see 4.1.1 and 4.1.2).

The program director provides recommendations on potential co-requisites defined by the thesis director, according to the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences (Art. 3.4 and 5.6), which must be validated by the Dean's office in the admission process (Art. 3.5 and 5.8). He/she provides recommendations on the equivalence requests, which are validated by the Dean's office.

The program director validates the composition of the Thesis Advisory Committees (TACs) and assesses the quality of the evaluation process based on the TAC report.

The program director approves the thesis defence proposal based on the thesis report of the thesis director and the endorsement of at least one external expert.

The program director contributes to the visibility of his/her program.

The program director manages the funds obtained by the program.

The program director makes him-/herself available to PhD students and members of the program.

The program directors manage conflicts in a spirit of neutrality, goodwill, and confidentiality. As far as possible, the program director develops and proposes solutions to resolve conflicts, which must be compatible with the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences and the statutes of the School.

The program directors are responsible for convening a TAC outside the regular conditions if they deem this necessary.

The program directors must report any abuse to the relevant faculty or university authorities.

### **3 Council of the PhD School of Life Sciences**

#### **3.1 Composition and functioning of the Council of the PhD School**

The PhD School is supervised by a Council which comprises a representative of each faculty and of each program.

According to article 2.2 of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences: *“The Council of the Doctoral School comprises an Associate Dean representing each of the Faculties, designated by the respective Dean’s Offices, the directors of each of the doctoral programs, and two doctoral students representing each of the Faculties (students currently pursuing a doctorate, designated by the respective Dean’s Offices, on proposal of current doctoral students). The term of the mandate of the members of the Council is based on the term of the mandates of the doctoral program directors, specifically 4 years, renewable once, except for the students, whose mandate is 2 years, renewable once.”*

The Council of the PhD School meets at least once per year to discuss structural and functional aspects of the School.

Regarding structural aspects, such as modification of the statutes, or the creation, merging, separation, or dissolution of programs, decisions must be voted on and accepted by two thirds of the council members.

- For votes in person, a quorum of two thirds of the council members as defined in article 2.2. of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences is required. In case a program director is absent, his/her co-director can replace them.
- If the quorum is not reached, the vote is done electronically.

Regarding functional aspects, no quorum is required, and decisions must be approved by a vote supported by two-thirds of the council members present.

Votes must be announced in the agenda, which must reach members seven days ahead of the Council meeting.

In case of conflict, a minority report can be submitted to the Deans for approval.

#### **3.2 Duties of the Council of the Doctoral School**

The Council establishes the ‘cahier des charges’ of the program coordinator(s) employed by the School.

The Council approves the nomination of the program coordinators proposed by the program directors.

The Council of the Doctoral School is tasked with supporting exceptional requests for waivers of researchers holding an MD but not a PhD and wishing to direct a thesis, according to Article 6, paragraph 4, letter c of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences. This recommendation is then passed on for approval to the Dean's Office of each faculty.

The Council manages the funds obtained by the Doctoral School.

The Council is tasked with ensuring adherence to the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences and the statutes of the Doctoral School.

Any member or PhD student can report to the Council if a conflictual or abusive situation arises within the Doctoral School.

Members of the Council who are contacted in such a situation endeavour to lend a neutral, kind, and confidential ear. As far as possible, members develop and propose solutions to resolve the conflict(s), solutions which must be compatible with the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences.

The vice-deans are responsible for transmitting information to the relevant hierarchies in their faculties and to guarantee a follow up.



## 4 Selection process of PhD students

### 4.1 Recruitment of candidates

Candidates are selected based on their application file according to article 5.2 of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences. Applications can be submitted through an open call (Section 4.1.1) or by individual request to a recruiter and subsequent *ad hoc* interview (Section 4.1.2). The composition of the committees is described below.

The PhD School commits to organising the selection process in such a way as to allow candidates to apply to several distinct programs of their choice.

#### 4.1.1 Recruitment through an open call

This recruitment involves two selection committees composed of independent and different members. Only full members can participate; associate members must be represented by a full member.

- *The recommendation committee*, consisting of program members who are not recruiting any student during this round of selection.
- *The recruiting committee*, consisting of professors offering one or more PhD positions.

#### Step 1: Selection of applications of candidates to invite

The program coordinators evaluate applications based on the diplomas, the reference letters, and the research experience. The recruiting committee selects, on the basis of application documents, those candidates that will be shortlisted for interview. The recommendation committee validates the list of candidates to invite. The practical aspects of these two committees are to be delineated in specific implementing regulations. The two committees produce a single consensus list.

#### Step 2: Recruitment of candidates

*The recruiting committee* (the recruiters) evaluates the level of the candidates based on their scientific presentation and individual interviews and submits a proposal to the recommendation committee.

*The recommendation committee* evaluates the level of the candidates based on their scientific presentation and the feedback from the recruiters. This committee makes recommendations on the applications to be submitted to the Dean's office of the relevant faculty. The latter, according to article 5.8 of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences, decides on the admissibility of the candidate(s).

#### **4.1.2 Recruitment by *ad hoc* committee**

This type of recruitment is proposed by a member of the program, outside open calls.

The program director evaluates and approves the request of recruiting by *ad hoc*. This type of recruitment requires an *ad hoc* committee.

*Ad hoc* committees are composed of the recruiter and of at least two full members of the program, at least one of which must not belong to the same department or equivalent as the recruiter. One of the two members can be the program director, or a substitute designated by the director him-/herself. One or several external experts can be added.

The program director validates the composition of the *ad hoc* committee.

The *ad hoc* recruitment process includes a scientific presentation by the candidate followed by a question & answer session and a one-on-one meeting with the recruiter. The committee proposes the candidate to the Dean's office of the relevant faculty, which will decide on the admissibility of the candidate according to article 5.8 of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences.

## **4.2 Finalisation of the recruitment**

The recruiter is free to offer a position to any eligible candidate.

The coordinators ensure that candidates receive all necessary administrative information about the PhD School and have a chance to visit the laboratories and discuss freely with the current PhD students of the School.

The program directors ensure that for each recruited candidate adequate funding and supervision is in place for the duration of the thesis (see Section 5).

## 5 Supervision

Each recruiter must demonstrate that funding is secured in principle for the duration of the thesis (minimum four years), except in cases of force majeure.

For recruiters whose position is not guaranteed for the full duration of the thesis, a replacement thesis director who could scientifically supervise the student in case of premature departure of the recruiter must be identified from the beginning of the thesis. This person must guarantee the scientific continuity of the thesis in case the recruiter leaves their position. This person can potentially be nominated thesis co-director in agreement with article 6, paragraph 4 of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences.

## 6 Milestones of the thesis

The milestones of the PhD degree are defined in article 7.1 of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences: *“To earn the doctorate, an oral exam is required in addition to earning the course credits required for the doctoral training concerned and, if applicable, credits for other courses, seminars, and advanced training set forth in Article 3 (co-requisites), the thesis project, and its oral defense.”*

This oral exam is called TAC (“Thesis Advisory Committee”) exam.

According to article 7.2 of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences, *“the oral examination must take place at the end of the first year. If the doctoral student has not taken the exam after 15 months, he or she is eliminated from the doctoral program.”*

The composition of the TAC is described in article 7.5 of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences: *“The TAC comprises a minimum of 2 members, and if applicable the thesis co-director, approved by the director of the doctoral program concerned. In principle, the members of the TAC are Professors or Research and Teaching Associates (‘MER’) and must hold a doctorate. At least one of the members must hold a doctorate in the sciences. At least one of the members must be from a department other than that of the doctoral student. The thesis director, and if applicable the thesis co-director, participate in the TAC in an advisory capacity.”* The conditions of the TAC exam are described in articles 7.6 and 7.7 of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences.

The presence of one or several external experts is strongly encouraged. From a practical point of view, the physical presence of all jury members is not required. Videoconference use is allowed.

The study plans of each program describe the modalities of obtaining a minimum of 20 ECTS in the respective PhD program. In addition to the mandatory ‘core training’ in certain programs, students are encouraged to gather the remaining ECTS (to reach 20 ECTS) within and outside their program. The program director validates the activities that can give rise to ECTS during the thesis.

The thesis defence must be organised according to article 11 of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences, with a jury whose composition is defined in article 10 of the study regulations: *“...the thesis jury, composed of at least three members, or four in the case of co-direction, meeting the following criteria: i) all members of the jury must hold a doctorate, ii) the thesis director, and co-director, if applicable, are members of the jury, iii) one member of the jury belongs to the doctoral program concerned, iv) one member of the jury is external to the University of Geneva and*

*not directly involved in the thesis project, v) preferably, one member of the jury belongs to the other Faculty than the one at which the doctoral student is registered, vi) at least one member of the jury, not directly involved in the thesis project, must hold a doctorate in the sciences.”*

Thus, the thesis jury must comprise at least the thesis director (and the co-director(s) if they exist), one external jury member and one internal jury member. The internal jury member must be a full member of the PhD School, hold a PhD, and not be directly involved in the thesis. He/she will preside over the defence and in this role lead the session and ensure it runs smoothly. He/she can preside over the jury deliberations behind closed doors and publicly announces the proposed outcome that will be submitted to the Dean’s offices of the Faculties of Medicine and Science.

According to article 11.6 of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences, the possible outcomes the jury can confer on defence of the thesis are ‘accepted’ or ‘rejected’. For an accepted thesis, potential corrections to the manuscript can be requested by the jury members and must be fulfilled by the candidate, supervised by the thesis director, and validated by the president of the jury. The ‘mode de publication’ is decided on by the thesis director in agreement with the candidate.

In principle, the Dean’s offices of the faculties concerned deliver the imprimatur with a thesis number on reception of all required documents (article 11.7 of the study regulations of the PhD in Life Sciences).

## 7 Role of the PhD School coordinators

The coordinators support the program directors in the academic management of the programs. Each coordinator is responsible for the students of one faculty.

The coordinators organise the recruitments (open calls).

The coordinators ensure coordination between the different bodies of the PhD School: the thesis directors, the students, the administrative body, and the lecturers in charge of courses and training.

The coordinators ensure all procedures run smoothly and are continuously improved, from recruitment to the thesis defence, and are uniformly applied, as far as possible, across programs, faculties, sections, and departments.

The coordinators are responsible for promoting the PhD School of Life Sciences and its visibility among other PhD schools.

*The present statutes have been accepted by the 'Collège des professeurs' of the Faculty of Science on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the 'Conseil participatif' of the Faculty of Science on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the 'Collège des professeurs' of the Faculty of Medicine on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, and the 'Conseil participatif' of the Faculty of Medicine on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021.*

*The French version of these statutes is binding.*

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