

Supervision Agreement

1. Introduction

The Leibniz Institute of Plant Genetics and Crop Plant Research (IPK) hosts scientists who perform research to ensure sufficient and sustainable plant production for a growing population and under challenging environmental conditions. Its mission of combining scientific excellence and societal relevance is implemented by a multidisciplinary and transformative research agenda ranging from fundamental science to applied research.

During their thesis work, Doctoral Candidates will obtain opportunities to acquire professional skills and develop expertise to deliver significant contributions in their scholarly field. Doctoral Candidates are expected to commit themselves to scientific excellence and implement their research projects by adhering to the scientific standards of the institute.

Based on this mindset, the Doctoral Candidate and her/his Supervision Team enter into the following Supervision Agreement. It is meant to ensure adequate supervision and scientific formation in the frame of a productive and successful research project to support the timely conferral of the doctoral degree.

In Germany, only universities and certain universities of applied sciences can award doctoral degrees. Thus, the dissertation at the IPK will be conducted in association with a partner university (usually affiliated with the First or Second Supervisor). The doctoral regulations including any university-based Supervision Agreement of the respective partner university and faculty still apply independently of this Agreement and in case of conflict supersede it.

The Supervision Team should consist of 3 members who support the personal and professional development of the Doctoral Candidate during the dissertation period: The group/project leader acts as the First Supervisor and is directly involved in the research project and everyday life; he/she is the first contact person. The Second Supervisor should be a scientist with relevant expertise for an aspect of the research project (can be complementary to the First Supervisor). If the First Supervisor is not affiliated with a university, it is recommended that the Second Supervisor is, in order to have a university reviewer (who will also be important for the evaluation of the thesis) involved in the project from the beginning. The team also includes a third member, who can be a group leader or postdoc e.g. from a collaboration partner in the project, mentoring programs, other IPK groups or the First Supervisor's working group. At least one of the members of the Supervision Team must be outside of the group of the First Supervisor in order to allow for independent scientific feedback. The Doctoral Candidate and First Supervisor select the Second and Third Supervisors together.

2. Dissertation Project and Supervision Team

Name of the Doctoral Candidate and IPK Department + Work Group

(Preliminary) Title of the Dissertation Project

Beginning and (planned) end of the Dissertation Project (as per work contract at the IPK)

University and Faculty

(planned) Date of Registration

Supervision Team

Name of the First Supervisor (Group Leader)

Name of the Second Supervisor

Name of the Third Supervisor

3. The Doctoral Candidate and First Supervisor both commit to...

1. adhere to the Principles of Good Scientific Practice¹ and agree on a structured management of research data according to FAIR principles and in implementation of the Research Data Management Policy (FDMP)² throughout the whole dissertation period.
2. plan and design the dissertation project in such a way that the doctorate can be completed within the term of the work contract or fellowship. This also includes the submission of the dissertation and the preparation of the associated manuscripts for publication. Initially, the First Supervisor should clearly define the direction and scope of the project, with increasing duration of the doctorate, the Doctoral Candidate participates in the design of the research him-/herself.
3. discuss progress on a regular basis. The Doctoral Candidate informs the First Supervisor about the status of the work and the supervisor gives feedback. Research progress should be discussed individually at least every 3 months, preferably more frequently. Once a year, this meeting can also be combined with an IPK employee appraisal meeting.
4. discuss at least six months before the end of the contract whether the remaining time is sufficient to complete the dissertation project or whether more time is needed, and whether it is necessary to extend the contract or scale down the project. Possibilities such as doctoral completion fellowships can be explored as a last resort but both parties should decidedly strive for the dissertation including preparation of associated manuscripts to be completed during the work contract.

4. The First Supervisor commits to...

1. provide appropriate supervision in accordance with the rules of good scientific practice. This includes the availability and verifiability of all steps and results of the experiments and studies until the completion of the dissertation.
2. enable and support the Doctoral Candidate to participate in workshops and seminar series that are relevant to the dissertation or broaden the Doctoral Candidate's scientific and personal horizons. This should include at least two courses during the whole doctorate phase that focus on technical skills and two courses that focus on social/transferable skills.
3. support the Doctoral Candidate's interest in acquiring skills beyond his or her field of work. This includes enabling the supervision of Bachelor's and Master's students. If there is interest and opportunity to participate in other forms of teaching, this should also be encouraged.
4. facilitate the opportunity for the Doctoral Candidate to present research results to a wider audience. This should include attending at least one international and one national conference throughout the dissertation period, in addition to internal seminars and the Plant Science Students Conference (PSSC). For each conference, the Doctoral Candidate is expected to apply for a poster or an oral contribution.

¹ https://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/principles_dfg_funding/good_scientific_practice/index.html; https://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Bilder_und_Downloads/%C3%9Cber_uns/Gute_wissenschaftliche_Praxis/Leibniz-Kodex_gute_wissenschaftliche_Praxis.pdf

² https://intranet.ipk-gatersleben.de/fileadmin/content_statategien/2025/2025-09_3-RDM-Research-Data-Management-Strategy_final.pdf

5. advise and support the Doctoral Candidate in presenting research seminars or posters, writing manuscripts and applying for external funding if relevant.
6. - in the event of a required extension of the contract - submit all necessary documents to the Human Resources Department up to 4 months before the expiry of the current contract. This is to ensure that any renewal contracts are ready to be signed ideally three, but at least two months before the end of the current contract. If it is not possible to complete this step by 4 months before the end of the contract, the situation must be discussed with the IPK Graduate Programme Coordinator.
7. give the Doctoral Candidate the opportunity to participate voluntarily in the PhD Student Board or in other doctoral-related committees.
8. provide the Doctoral Candidate with access to the generated results, data, and software until the completion of the dissertation.

5. The Doctoral Candidate commits to...

1. dedicate her/his working time to an efficient and successful completion of the dissertation project and final PhD degree.
2. attend the welcome event organized by the PhD Board and the IPK Graduate Coordinator within one month of starting the dissertation at the IPK.
3. attend the mandatory onboarding workshop IT-infrastructure and data management
4. address his/her project in depth at the beginning of the dissertation phase by:
 - a. preparing an exposé for the dissertation project including a literature review within the first three months of employment with the support of the first supervisor.
 - b. preparing a dissertation plan at the beginning of the dissertation period, which, in addition to the technical work in the form of experiments and evaluations, also includes proposals for workshops, seminars and conferences in accordance with the guidelines of the IPK graduate program.
 - c. considering technically important milestones as well as a basic contingency planning for the dissertation project in the dissertation plan.

The dissertation plan can be adjusted later by mutual agreement between the Doctoral Candidate and the First Supervisor. For significant changes, the entire Supervision Team should be consulted.
5. organize annual meetings with the entire Supervision Team to discuss the progress of the dissertation towards timely completion (e.g. 4 (kick-off), 12, 24 and 33 months after the start of employment). For this purpose, the Doctoral Candidate presents the progress and open scientific questions beforehand in written form or as a presentation during the meeting, depending on which form was agreed on with the Supervisors.

The results and next steps resulting from these meetings are documented in a protocol written by the Doctoral Candidate and shared with the entire Supervision Team.
6. make available and hand over all collected and generated results esp. data and material to the First Supervisor at the latest 2 weeks before the expiry or termination of the work or guest contract, in compliance with the Principles of Good Scientific Practice and the IPK data management guideline.

6. All members of the Supervision Team commit to...

1. adhere to and train the Doctoral Candidate in the scientific method and good scientific practice.
2. oversee the PhD project and dissertation by writing and comment on progress:
 - a. review and discuss the exposé and doctoral plan during the first meeting with the Doctoral Candidate. Be prepared to review and discuss any significant changes at a later date.
 - b. provide timely and constructive feedback during annual meetings and in response to enquiries by the Doctoral Candidate to ensure that the dissertation can be completed on time.
 - c. edit or comment on thesis drafts within 2 months
 - d. in case of unsatisfactory progress, call for a special meeting of the Supervision Team to discuss pertinent issues and give recommendations to the Doctoral Candidate and the First Supervisor.
 - e. advise the Doctoral Candidate on possible conferences/meetings/summer schools or workshops during the dissertation period and make recommendations for skill and career enhancing activities within and outside of academia.
 - f. in the case of caring for dependents and/or children, as well as in the case of pregnancy or prolonged absence due to illness on the part of the Doctoral Candidate, find individual solutions in accordance with the guideline to ensure the completion of the dissertation.

7. In Case of Conflicts

... between the Doctoral Candidate and a member of the Supervision Team (e.g. the First Supervisor) or among the members of the Supervision Team themselves, the other members of the team should first try to mediate and help solve the problem. If this is not possible, the problem is brought to the IPK Graduate Programme Coordination and finally, if all else has failed, to the IPK Board of Directors. In matters of good scientific practice, the IPK Ombudsperson or the Leibniz Ombudskommission are further points of contact. In the event of a premature termination of the dissertation, all parties involved will seek mutually agreeable, practicable solutions, if necessary with the support of the Ombudsperson.

8. Final Provisions

The Supervision Agreement ends with the completion of the PhD thesis and oral exam. The Supervision Agreement may also be terminated prematurely i) by written declaration of the Doctoral Candidate, or ii) by the First Supervisor, if the Doctoral Candidate violates the duties in Section 3 or 5. In the event of a premature termination, the Supervision Agreement will end three months after transferring the data and materials according to section 5 to the First Supervisor.

Place, Date

Doctoral Candidate

Place, Date

First Supervisor

Place, Date

Second Supervisor

Place, Date

Third Supervisor