



European Council of Leading Business Schools

ECLBS

ECLBS Accreditation Handbook — Doctoral Programmes

Third Cycle · QF-EHEA Cycle 3 · EQF Level 8

To be read together with the ECLBS Accreditation Handbook (General)

1. How to use this Handbook

This Handbook contains the **assessment criteria** applied by ECLBS to doctoral programmes, doctoral schools and structured or individual doctoral routes at third-cycle level. It is the drafting template for the institution's self-assessment report (SAR) and the reporting template for the review panel.

Procedure, eligibility, membership, decision rules, appeals and publication are governed by the **ECLBS Accreditation Handbook (General)**. This Handbook does not repeat them.

Each criterion is presented in three parts: **The institution is asked to** (what must be described and evidenced), **Meets quality requirements** (threshold benchmark) and **Exceeds quality requirements** (enhanced benchmark; *n/a* where none is defined).

Rating scale: Exceptional · Exceeds quality requirements · Meets quality requirements · Does not meet quality requirements · Not relevant.

2. Why the third cycle is assessed differently

The doctorate is not a taught programme with a longer thesis attached. Its defining product is an **original contribution to knowledge**, generated by a candidate working under supervision within a functioning research environment. The variables that determine quality are therefore different from those in the first and second cycles: the strength and critical mass of the research environment, the competence and availability of supervisors, the integrity of the examination, and the institution's capacity to bring candidates to completion.

For this reason ECLBS applies a **distinct criteria set** to doctoral provision, organised in **six chapters** and comprising **47** criteria, of which 35 are essential (*), with one further criterion essential where the programme type applies.

Non-negotiable criteria. Three criteria are non-negotiable. Conditions may never be imposed on them, and failure of any one results in refusal of accreditation:

- **D1.1** — Objectives of the doctoral programme
- **D3.2** — Supervision arrangements
- **D5.1** — Thesis requirements and originality

Decision thresholds for doctoral procedures. The ECLBS Quality Seal is awarded where a maximum of **five** essential criteria are not met and D1.1, D3.2 and D5.1 are all met. Accreditation is refused where more than five essential criteria are not met, or where any of D1.1, D3.2 or D5.1 is not met; a one-year blocking period then applies before a new application for the same programme.

3. Third-cycle reference points

Reference	Expectation
QF-EHEA	Third cycle; Dublin Descriptors for the third cycle
EQF	Level 8
Normative texts	Salzburg Principles and Salzburg II Recommendations; European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers; European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity; ESG 2015
Duration	Normally 3–4 years full-time, or a documented part-time equivalent normally not exceeding 6–8 years
Credit	Where the national system applies ECTS to the third cycle, normally 180–240 ECTS in

Reference	Expectation
	total; where it does not, the institution describes duration, workload and progression in equivalent terms. Credit may be attached to the structured component even where the research component is not credit-rated
Structured component	Normally 20–60 ECTS or equivalent of taught research methods, discipline-specific training and transferable skills
Outcome	A qualification attesting the capacity to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity, and to make a contribution that extends the frontier of knowledge and merits national or international refereed publication

Where the institution operates an **individual (non-structured) doctoral route**, every criterion in this Handbook still applies. The institution must show how the functions of a structured programme — training, monitoring, peer community, quality control — are discharged for individually supervised candidates.

Professional doctorates (for example DBA) are assessed against the same criteria. The originality requirement is satisfied by an original contribution to professional practice grounded in rigorous research; the standard of methodological rigour and independent examination is not reduced.

Chapter D0 — General information

Descriptive; not rated.

D0.1 Programme identification

Item	Entry
Higher education institution (HEI)	
Awarding institution(s), if different	
Doctoral programme / doctoral school name (English and original language)	
Title/degree awarded (e.g. PhD, DBA, Dr.)	
Qualifications framework reference (EQF / NQF level)	
Doctoral model	Structured programme / Individual route / Doctoral school / Co-tutelle / Joint doctorate
Research field(s) and ISCED-F classification	
Normal duration, full-time and part-time	
Credits attached to the structured component, where applicable	
Mode of study	Full-time / Part-time
Delivery mode	On-campus / Blended / Distance (with residency requirements specified)
Delivery location(s) and any partner or franchise arrangement	
Language(s) of research and examination	
Initial start of the programme	
Current number of enrolled candidates and of active supervisors	
Type of accreditation sought	Interim / Initial / Re-accreditation
For re-accreditation: last accreditation period	

D0.2 Institutional and research context

Describe the institution, its legal status and state approval or authorisation to award doctoral degrees, its research mission, and the units, centres or groups hosting the doctorate. Explain the relationship of the doctoral provision to the institution's second-cycle portfolio. Attach an organigram showing the doctoral school or committee, its reporting lines and its decision-making powers.

D0.3 Development of the programme and cohort data

For initial accreditation where candidates have graduated, and for re-accreditation, describe the evolution of the provision and supply data for the last five years or since inception, whichever is shorter:

Indicator	Y-5	Y-4	Y-3	Y-2	Y-1
Applications received					
Candidates admitted					
Total candidates enrolled					
Percentage of international candidates					
Percentage of candidates with funding or employment contract					
Candidates per active supervisor (mean and maximum)					
Theses submitted					
Degrees awarded					
Median time to degree (years)					
Completion rate within normal duration + 1 year					
Attrition/withdrawal rate					
Theses failed or referred for major revision					
Peer-reviewed publications by candidates					
Confirmed academic / non-academic destinations of graduates					

For re-accreditation, describe the measures taken to implement recommendations issued at the last ECLBS accreditation.

Chapter D1 — Objectives, research profile and positioning

D1.1 Objectives of the doctoral programme * (*non-negotiable*)

The institution is asked to state and substantiate the qualification objectives of the doctoral provision and align them with the third-cycle descriptors and the national qualifications framework.

Meets quality requirements. The objectives are clearly articulated and persuasively justified in relation to the research fields addressed, the candidate profile and the societal and professional context. They are unambiguously set at third-cycle level: the systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge at the forefront of the field, the capacity to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial research process with scholarly integrity, and the production of work meriting refereed publication. The objectives are clearly differentiated from second-cycle objectives. Objectives for both academic and non-academic career destinations are addressed.

Exceeds quality requirements. The objectives are systematically derived from an analysis of the research field and of candidate destinations, are documented, reviewed regularly and adjusted, and are demonstrably known to and shared by supervisors and candidates.

D1.2 Research profile and critical mass *

The institution is asked to describe the research profile of the hosting unit and demonstrate that the doctorate is embedded in an active research environment.

Meets quality requirements. The doctoral provision is located in identifiable research groups with a coherent profile, active projects and a continuing record of peer-reviewed output in the fields in which candidates are admitted. Candidates are admitted only in fields where this environment exists.

Exceeds quality requirements. The research profile is nationally or internationally recognised, evidenced by competitive external funding, editorial and reviewing roles, and a sustained publication record; doctoral candidates are visibly integrated into it.

D1.3 International orientation *

The institution is asked to describe the international dimension of the doctoral provision.

Meets quality requirements. The provision takes appropriate account of international standards in the field. Candidates are enabled to engage with the international literature, to present work at conferences and to publish internationally.

Exceeds quality requirements. Internationality is structurally embedded through joint supervision, co-tutelle arrangements, research secondments, international summer schools or visiting researcher schemes, and is evidenced in candidate outputs.

D1.4 Integration into the institutional strategy

The institution is asked to explain how the doctoral provision fits the institution's research and development strategy.

Meets quality requirements. The integration is persuasively demonstrated and the objectives align with the institution's mission and strategic planning.

Exceeds quality requirements. The doctoral provision is a cornerstone of the institutional research strategy, with dedicated governance, resourcing and multi-year planning.

D1.5 Societal relevance and knowledge transfer

The institution is asked to describe how doctoral research engages with societal, economic or professional needs and how findings are transferred.

Meets quality requirements. Mechanisms exist for disseminating results beyond the academy where the field permits.

Exceeds quality requirements. Knowledge transfer, impact and public engagement are systematically supported, recorded and reflected in candidate training.

Chapter D2 — Admission and the status of the doctoral candidate

D2.1 Admission requirements *

The institution is asked to specify where the admission requirements are defined and to justify them.

Meets quality requirements. Admission requirements are defined, published and comprehensible, and comply with national requirements for entry to doctoral study. They specify the prior qualification required — normally a second-cycle qualification at EQF level 7 — and any additional requirements as to field, grade, research training or research proposal. Any route admitting candidates without a second-cycle qualification is regulated, exceptional, individually assessed and documented.

Exceeds quality requirements. Admission requirements are systematically derived from the objectives of the provision and are periodically reviewed against candidate outcomes.

D2.2 Selection procedure *

The institution is asked to describe the selection procedure, including who decides, on what evidence and against what criteria.

Meets quality requirements. Selection is transparent, criteria-based and documented. It assesses the research proposal or research capability, the fit with available supervisory expertise, and the feasibility of the project within the normal duration and available resources. Decisions are taken by more than one person, are reasoned, are communicated in writing and are open to appeal. **A candidate is not admitted unless a qualified supervisor and an adequate research environment have been confirmed.**

Exceeds quality requirements. The procedure is periodically reviewed for effectiveness and predictive validity against completion and attrition data, and adapted accordingly. Recruitment follows the principles of open, transparent and merit-based recruitment.

D2.3 Recognition of prior qualifications *

The institution is asked to describe how foreign and prior qualifications are recognised for admission.

Meets quality requirements. Recognition is regulated in binding rules, applied consistently and documented. Where the state has ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention, recognition is conducted in accordance with it; otherwise an analogous approach is applied. Decisions are reasoned and open to appeal.

Exceeds quality requirements. Staff involved in recognition are trained, use national information-centre resources, and the procedure is periodically reviewed.

D2.4 Language proficiency *

The institution is asked to describe how proficiency in the language(s) of research, supervision and examination is ensured.

Meets quality requirements. Requirements are defined and verified so that candidates can conduct research, engage with the literature, be supervised, write the thesis and defend it in the language(s) concerned. Language support is available where needed.

Exceeds quality requirements. *n/a*

D2.5 Counselling for prospective candidates

The institution is asked to describe the information and counselling offered to applicants.

Meets quality requirements. Applicants receive accurate information on requirements, supervisory capacity, funding, duration, expected workload and examination standards, and can obtain individual advice before applying.

Exceeds quality requirements. Prospective candidates are given structured opportunities to meet potential supervisors and current candidates before committing.

D2.6 Transparency and documentation of the admission decision *

The institution is asked to describe how the admission procedure and decision are documented and communicated.

Meets quality requirements. The procedure is described, documented and accessible. Decisions are based on transparent criteria and communicated in writing, identifying the supervisor(s), the working title, the registration date and the expected completion date.

Exceeds quality requirements. The decision additionally records the outcome of the assessment against each selection criterion.

D2.7 Status, rights and obligations of the doctoral candidate *

The institution is asked to describe the formal status of doctoral candidates and the rights and obligations attaching to it.

Meets quality requirements. The status of the candidate — student, employee, scholarship holder or a combination — is formally defined. Rights and obligations, including access to facilities, entitlement to supervision, workload where the candidate also teaches, intellectual property and authorship rules, leave and interruption of studies, and grounds and procedure for termination of registration, are set out in writing and communicated at the outset. Where candidates undertake teaching or other duties, these are capped, remunerated or credited, and do not compromise progress.

Exceeds quality requirements. The institution applies the principles of the European Charter for Researchers, recognises candidates as early-stage researchers, and provides representation of candidates in the governance of the doctoral provision.

Chapter D3 — Structure, supervision and doctoral training

D3.1 Structure and duration of the doctoral provision *

The institution is asked to describe the structure of the doctorate and the milestones from registration to award.

Meets quality requirements. The structure is documented and comprises defined stages — registration, confirmation or upgrade, progress review, submission, examination, award — with expected timings. The normal duration is stated for full-time and part-time routes, and the design makes completion within that duration realistic given the workload, funding and supervision available.

Exceeds quality requirements. The structure is supported by a published candidate handbook, a milestone calendar and an early-warning mechanism, and its effectiveness is evidenced by completion data.

D3.2 Supervision arrangements * (*non-negotiable*)

The institution is asked to describe the supervision model, including allocation, composition of the supervisory team, minimum contact and the arrangements for changing supervisor.

Meets quality requirements. Every candidate has a named principal supervisor with the required qualification (see D4.2) and, as a rule, at least one further supervisor or a supervisory committee, so that supervision does not depend on a single individual. Minimum frequency and form of supervisory meetings are defined, and meetings are recorded. Continuity is assured: procedures exist for the absence, departure or incapacity of a supervisor, and for a candidate-initiated or supervisor-initiated change of supervision, without detriment to the candidate. Conflicts of interest in supervision are regulated.

Exceeds quality requirements. Supervisory teams are deliberately composed to combine methodological, disciplinary and, where relevant, practice expertise; supervision quality is monitored through candidate feedback and acted upon; co-supervision with external or international institutions is used where it strengthens the project.

D3.3 Supervisory agreement and progress monitoring *

The institution is asked to describe the written agreement governing the doctorate and the progress review mechanism.

Meets quality requirements. A written supervisory or doctoral agreement is concluded at the outset, setting out the research topic, the supervisory arrangement, mutual obligations, meeting frequency, milestones, training requirements, authorship expectations and the procedure in case of dispute. Progress is formally reviewed at least **annually**, in a documented process involving at least one person independent of the supervisory team, resulting in a written outcome — continue, continue with conditions, or terminate — communicated to the candidate with a right to comment and to appeal.

Exceeds quality requirements. Progress review includes a written report by the candidate and by the supervisor independently, an oral element, and a forward plan; outcomes are aggregated and used to manage risk across the cohort.

D3.4 Structured training component and transferable skills *

The institution is asked to describe the taught or structured component and the transferable skills provision.

Meets quality requirements. Candidates receive structured training beyond their individual project, covering research methods, discipline-specific advanced content, and transferable skills such as academic writing and publishing, presentation, research data management, project and time management, funding acquisition, teaching skills where candidates teach, and career development. Requirements are defined, monitored and recorded; where credit is used, it is allocated on the basis of workload consistently with the ECTS Users' Guide.

Exceeds quality requirements. The training offer is systematically derived from an analysis of

candidate needs and destinations, is regularly evaluated by participants, is open to candidates from partner institutions, and includes provision for non-academic career paths.

D3.5 Credit allocation and workload (*where the national system applies credit to the third cycle*)

The institution is asked to describe how credit and workload are calculated.

Meets quality requirements. Credit is allocated on the basis of realistic student workload and is consistent with the ECTS Users' Guide. The relationship between the credited component and the research component is transparent.

Exceeds quality requirements. Workload assumptions are validated against candidate feedback and revised where necessary.

D3.6 Research methods and disciplinary training *

The institution is asked to describe how candidates acquire the methodological competence required by their projects.

Meets quality requirements. Methodological training appropriate to the field is required, available and documented, covering research design, the methods actually used by candidates, and the critical appraisal of alternatives. Candidates whose prior training is insufficient are required to make up the gap before confirmation of the project.

Exceeds quality requirements. Advanced and specialised methods training is available, including access to external schools, networks or consortia; methodological competence is formally assessed at the confirmation stage.

D3.7 Research integrity, ethics and data management *

The institution is asked to describe the arrangements for research ethics, integrity and data management.

Meets quality requirements. A binding research integrity policy and an ethics approval procedure are in place, consistent with the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. Every project requiring ethical clearance obtains it before data collection, from a body independent of the supervisor. Training in research integrity, authorship, plagiarism, **the acceptable use of Generative AI**, conflicts of interest and data protection is compulsory and recorded. A research data management plan is required where the field involves data. Procedures for investigating alleged misconduct are published and applied.

Exceeds quality requirements. Integrity training is recurrent rather than a single induction event; ethics review capacity is proportionate and timely; open science practice, including data availability statements and pre-registration where appropriate, is actively promoted.

D3.8 Mobility, networks and research exposure

The institution is asked to describe opportunities for mobility, secondment, conference participation and integration into research networks.

Meets quality requirements. Candidates have the opportunity and, where feasible, the financial support to present their work externally and to engage with researchers beyond the host unit.

Exceeds quality requirements. Mobility and network engagement are structurally embedded and funded, with documented uptake and demonstrable effect on candidate outputs.

D3.9 Interdisciplinarity

The institution is asked to describe how interdisciplinary projects are supported and supervised.

Meets quality requirements. Where projects cross disciplinary boundaries, supervision and examination arrangements provide the necessary expertise.

Exceeds quality requirements. Interdisciplinary doctoral work is deliberately fostered through cross-unit supervision, joint seminars and shared infrastructure.

D3.10 Joint doctorates, co-tutelle and cooperation arrangements (*essential criterion*)

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where such arrangements exist)

The institution is asked to list and explain the cooperation agreements governing joint, double or co-tutelle doctorates and any provision delivered with a partner.

Meets quality requirements. Each arrangement is governed by a written agreement specifying admission, registration, supervision, minimum residency at each institution, language, training requirements, thesis format, examination composition and procedure, the degree(s) awarded, the wording of the certificate and Diploma Supplement, intellectual property, and fee and cost allocation. The awarding institution's responsibility for academic standards is unambiguous. Where a partner delivers part of the provision, the institution ensures ECLBS quality standards are met.

Exceeds quality requirements. Arrangements are strategically aligned, actively managed through joint committees, and evaluated for their effect on candidate outcomes.

Chapter D4 — Research environment, supervisors and resources

D4.1 Research activity and output of the hosting unit *

The institution is asked to supply evidence of the research activity of the unit hosting the doctorate over the last five years.

Meets quality requirements. The unit demonstrates continuous research activity in the fields in which candidates are admitted, evidenced by peer-reviewed publications, funded projects, conference activity and research collaborations, at a level sufficient to sustain doctoral work.

Exceeds quality requirements. Output is of demonstrable national or international standing, with competitive external funding and a record of doctoral candidates co-authoring peer-reviewed publications.

D4.2 Qualification of supervisors *

The institution is asked to describe the requirements for appointment as a doctoral supervisor and to supply the list of active supervisors with their qualifications and outputs.

Meets quality requirements. Supervisors hold a doctoral degree, or, exceptionally and by documented equivalence decision, an equivalent standing; they are research-active in the field of the project, evidenced by recent peer-reviewed output; and their appointment as supervisor is by a formal, criteria-based institutional decision, not by informal allocation. A record of prior successful supervision, or co-supervision with an experienced supervisor for those new to the role, is required.

Exceeds quality requirements. Supervisor eligibility is periodically re-confirmed against continuing research activity and supervision outcomes, and the register of approved supervisors is maintained and published internally.

D4.3 Supervisory capacity and load *

The institution is asked to state the number of candidates per supervisor and the rules capping supervisory load.

Meets quality requirements. The number of candidates per supervisor is capped by a documented rule and is compatible with the required frequency of supervision and with the supervisor's other duties. Actual loads comply with the rule. Supervision is recognised in workload allocation.

Exceeds quality requirements. Load is actively managed against candidate progress data, and capacity is verified before each admission round.

D4.4 Development and evaluation of supervisors

The institution is asked to describe supervisor training and evaluation.

Meets quality requirements. Training on supervisory practice, examination standards, integrity and candidate wellbeing is available and required of new supervisors.

Exceeds quality requirements. Supervision is systematically evaluated, including candidate feedback, and results inform development, allocation and continued eligibility.

D4.5 Research infrastructure, facilities and data resources *

The institution is asked to describe the infrastructure available to candidates.

Meets quality requirements. Candidates have access to the workspace, laboratories, equipment, software, computing, archival or field resources required by their projects, and to secure, backed-up storage compliant with data protection law. Access arrangements, including for part-time, distance and externally based candidates, are defined. Facilities are accessible to candidates with disabilities.

Exceeds quality requirements. Infrastructure is of a standard supporting internationally competitive research, is maintained under a documented renewal plan, and includes dedicated doctoral workspace fostering a candidate community.

D4.6 Access to literature and databases *

The institution is asked to describe access to scholarly literature and databases.

Meets quality requirements. Candidates have access to the journals, books, databases and data sources required at the research frontier of their fields, including remote access, and to interlibrary loan or equivalent for material not held. Provision is current.

Exceeds quality requirements. Access is comprehensive, subscriptions are reviewed against actual doctoral needs, and specialist research-support librarians are available.

D4.7 Funding of candidates and of the doctoral provision *

The institution is asked to describe the financing of the provision and of the candidates, and to supply a multi-year budget covering at least the intended accreditation period.

Meets quality requirements. The financing of the doctoral provision ensures that every candidate admitted within the accreditation period can complete. The funding status of each candidate — employment contract, scholarship, self-funding, employer sponsorship — is transparent at admission, and the resources required by the project, including fieldwork, equipment and dissemination, are identified and secured or realistically planned.

Exceeds quality requirements. *n/a*

D4.8 Research cooperation and external networks

The institution is asked to list research cooperation agreements relevant to the doctorate.

Meets quality requirements. Relevant cooperation is documented and has a demonstrable effect on the research environment available to candidates.

Exceeds quality requirements. Cooperation is strategically selected and actively used for co-supervision, shared training, access to infrastructure and candidate mobility.

D4.9 Management of the doctoral provision *

The institution is asked to describe the governance of the doctoral programme or school.

Meets quality requirements. A named director or committee is formally responsible for the doctoral provision, with defined authority over admission, supervisor approval, progress decisions and examination arrangements. Responsibilities, decision-making processes and reporting lines are documented. Candidates are represented in the relevant bodies.

Exceeds quality requirements. The director or committee takes documented initiatives to develop the provision, monitors cohort data actively, and involves supervisors, candidates and external stakeholders in that development.

D4.10 Administrative support

The institution is asked to describe administrative support for candidates and supervisors.

Meets quality requirements. Sufficient administrative staff support registration, progression records, examination arrangements and award, with clearly defined responsibilities. Records are complete and retrievable.

Exceeds quality requirements. Administration operates as a service function with defined service standards, supported by an information system covering the candidate lifecycle.

Chapter D5 — Assessment, examination and award

D5.1 Thesis requirements and originality * (*non-negotiable*)

The institution is asked to state the requirements for the doctoral thesis, including format, scope, originality standard and any provision for publication-based theses.

Meets quality requirements. The requirements are published and binding. The thesis must constitute an **original contribution to knowledge** — or, for professional doctorates, to professional practice on a rigorous research basis — demonstrating systematic understanding of the field, mastery of research methods, critical analysis and evaluation, and work of a quality meriting refereed publication. Where a publication-based (cumulative) thesis is permitted, the rules specify the minimum number and status of the papers, the candidate's required contribution to each, the required authorship declaration, and the requirement for a substantial integrating text.

Exceeds quality requirements. *n/a*

D5.2 Examination procedure and defence *

The institution is asked to describe the examination procedure from submission to award.

Meets quality requirements. The procedure is published and binding. It comprises independent written assessment of the thesis by the examiners followed by an **oral defence** (viva voce or public defence). The possible outcomes — pass, pass subject to corrections, major revision and resubmission, referral to a lower award where the national system provides one, fail — are defined, together with the time allowed for revisions and the number of resubmissions permitted. Outcomes are reasoned in writing. Where the defence is conducted remotely, identity verification, examiner independence and recording arrangements are regulated.

Exceeds quality requirements. The procedure includes a pre-submission review or mock defence, and plagiarism and text-similarity screening is applied to every thesis before examination.

D5.3 Composition and independence of the examination board *

The institution is asked to describe how examiners are appointed and how independence is assured.

Meets quality requirements. The examination board includes at least one **external examiner** who is independent of the institution, of the supervisory team and of the candidate, and who is qualified and research-active in the field. Appointment is by a formal institutional decision, not by the supervisor alone. The supervisor may not be the sole assessor and, where the supervisor sits on the board, the rules define the supervisor's role and voting rights. Conflict-of-interest rules are published and applied, covering prior co-authorship, close collaboration, family relationships and financial interest.

Exceeds quality requirements. More than one external examiner is appointed, at least one from outside the country where the field permits, and examiner reports are used as an input to programme-level quality assurance.

D5.4 Assessment criteria and transparency of grading *

The institution is asked to supply the assessment criteria applied to the thesis and the defence.

Meets quality requirements. Criteria are published in advance, applied consistently, and used by examiners in a structured written report. Where a grade or distinction is awarded, the basis is defined. Candidates receive the substance of the examiners' reasoning.

Exceeds quality requirements. Criteria are supported by calibration or moderation across boards, and consistency of outcomes is monitored over time.

D5.5 Deposit, publication and open access of theses *

The institution is asked to describe the deposit and publication requirements.

Meets quality requirements. Every approved thesis is deposited in an institutional or national repository and is publicly accessible, subject only to justified, time-limited embargoes for confidentiality, third-party rights or commercial exploitation, granted under a documented procedure. Bibliographic

metadata are published for every award.

Exceeds quality requirements. Theses are made openly accessible with persistent identifiers, and candidates are supported in publishing derived work.

D5.6 Academic appeals and complaints by candidates *

The institution is asked to describe the routes by which candidates may appeal academic decisions and raise complaints.

Meets quality requirements. Published procedures allow candidates to appeal progress, termination and examination decisions, and to raise complaints including complaints against supervisors, to a body independent of the persons whose decision or conduct is challenged. Time limits, grounds and outcomes are defined. Candidates are protected against detriment for raising a matter in good faith.

Exceeds quality requirements. An independent ombuds or mediation function is available, and anonymised outcome data are used to improve the provision.

D5.7 Degree title, certificate and Diploma Supplement *

The institution is asked to supply specimens of the certificate and Diploma Supplement.

Meets quality requirements. The degree title corresponds to the field, the level and the national legal framework, and is not misleading. The certificate identifies the awarding institution and any joint award partner. A Diploma Supplement is issued, where applicable, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language, stating the level, the field, the research topic and the nature of the examination.

Exceeds quality requirements. *n/a*

Chapter D6 — Quality assurance, outcomes and documentation

D6.1 Quality assurance system for the doctoral provision *

The institution is asked to describe how the internal quality assurance system covers doctoral provision specifically.

Meets quality requirements. A documented procedure systematically and continuously monitors and develops the quality of the doctoral provision in respect of admission, supervision, training, progression, examination and outcomes. It defines responsibilities, uses the cohort data in D0.3, and produces documented decisions. Supervisors and candidates participate in the relevant committees.

Exceeds quality requirements. External stakeholders and alumni participate; measures are (a) implemented, (b) reviewed and evaluated for quality and faithfulness to the original objective, (c) modified where necessary, and (d) documented; and the effectiveness of the system itself is periodically reviewed.

D6.2 Evaluation by doctoral candidates *

The institution is asked to describe how candidates evaluate supervision, training and the research environment, and how results are used.

Meets quality requirements. Candidates are surveyed regularly under a prescribed procedure covering supervision quality, training, resources and the research environment, with responses handled so that candidates are not identifiable to their supervisors. Results are communicated and feed the development process.

Exceeds quality requirements. Results are translated into a published action list, tracked to closure, and reported back to candidates.

D6.3 Evaluation by supervisors, examiners and external stakeholders

The institution is asked to describe how supervisors, examiners and external parties contribute to evaluation.

Meets quality requirements. Supervisor and examiner feedback is collected regularly and feeds the development process.

Exceeds quality requirements. Examiner reports are systematically analysed at programme level for signals about standards, supervision and preparation.

D6.4 Monitoring of completion, duration and attrition *

The institution is asked to present and interpret the completion, time-to-degree and attrition data in D0.3.

Meets quality requirements. The institution monitors these indicators by cohort, supervisor and funding status; analyses causes of attrition and of overrun; and takes documented, evaluated action where the indicators fall short of the intended performance.

Exceeds quality requirements. Targets are set and published, risk is identified at the level of the individual candidate through early-warning indicators, and interventions are shown to be effective.

D6.5 Career tracking of graduates *

The institution is asked to describe how graduate destinations are tracked and used.

Meets quality requirements. Destinations are tracked systematically for a defined period after award, covering academic and non-academic careers, and the results inform training provision and programme development.

Exceeds quality requirements. Tracking is longitudinal with a good response rate, published, and demonstrably used in the design of training and in the information given to applicants.

D6.6 Programme documentation and public information *

The institution is asked to describe how the doctoral provision is documented and published.

Meets quality requirements. Regulations, admission requirements, supervision and progress rules, training requirements, examination procedure and appeal routes are documented and publicly accessible. Public information is accurate as to level, duration, requirements, delivery locations, language, the awarding institution and any partner arrangement.

Exceeds quality requirements. Documentation is consolidated in a candidate handbook, kept current, version-controlled and available in print and digital form.

D6.7 Information on activities during the academic year

Meets quality requirements. The institution regularly publishes information about doctoral activity — seminars, defences, appointments, outputs.

Exceeds quality requirements. A doctoral research seminar series and an annual doctoral colloquium are established, documented and reported.

D6.8 Handling of academic misconduct *

The institution is asked to describe how allegations of misconduct in doctoral work are handled.

Meets quality requirements. Published procedures govern the investigation of plagiarism, **unauthorized use of AI**, fabrication, falsification and other misconduct, with defined roles, evidential standards, rights of defence and sanctions up to revocation of the degree. Text-similarity screening is applied. Procedures are applied consistently and outcomes are recorded.

Exceeds quality requirements. Preventive training, clear authorship rules and a confidential advice route are in place, and anonymised case data inform training.

Part II — Guidance on evidence and common shortcomings

Doctoral assessment turns on four things that cannot be established from documents alone: whether the **research environment is real**, whether **supervision actually happens**, whether the **examination is independent**, and whether candidates **finish**. Panels test each directly.

G1. The four determinative questions

Is the research environment real? A doctoral programme cannot be created by regulation. The panel examines the five-year output of the hosting unit, the funded projects, and whether candidates are admitted only in fields where that activity exists. A unit admitting candidates in fields where no member has published in five years does not meet D1.2 and D4.1, whatever the quality of the doctoral regulations.

Does supervision actually happen? The panel does not ask whether supervision is provided; it asks for the **meeting records**. Where a regulation requires monthly supervision and the records show three meetings in two years, D3.2 and D3.3 are not met. Candidates are interviewed without supervisors present and asked how often they meet, how long they wait for feedback on written work, and what happened when a supervisor was absent.

Is the examination independent? The panel examines who appointed the examiners, whether the external examiner is genuinely external, whether prior co-authorship or collaboration was screened, and whether the supervisor voted. A viva chaired by the supervisor, with an “external” who has co-published with the supervisor, does not meet D5.3.

Do candidates finish? Completion rate, median time to degree and attrition are read together. High attrition with no analysis is a finding under D6.4 regardless of the quality of everything upstream.

G2. Evidence normally examined, by chapter

Chapter	Documentary evidence	Tested at the visit by
D1 Objectives and research profile	Doctoral regulations; five-year publication and funding record of the unit; field list against supervisor expertise	Asking which fields the unit can supervise and comparing with the fields candidates are actually registered in
D2 Admission and status	Admission rules; selection records; supervisor and environment confirmation at admission; supervisory agreement specimen; candidate status documentation	Asking candidates what they were told at admission about funding, duration and expectations, and comparing with the documents
D3 Structure, supervision, training	Milestone schedule; supervision meeting records ; annual progress review files; training catalogue with attendance records; ethics approvals; data management plans	Interviewing candidates without supervisors present; reading a sample of progress review files
D4 Environment and resources	Supervisor register with qualifications, output and current load; infrastructure inventory; database subscriptions; budget; candidate funding overview	Inspecting workspace and facilities in use; checking actual loads against the institution’s own cap
D5 Assessment and award	Thesis regulations; examination regulations; examiner appointment records and conflict screening; three recently examined theses with examiner reports ; repository policy	Reading theses and examiner reports; testing the repository for deposited theses
D6 Quality	Cohort data; candidate survey instrument	Asking candidates whether they can

Chapter	Documentary evidence	Tested at the visit by
assurance and outcomes	and results; career tracking; misconduct procedure and cases; all public information on the doctoral provision	raise a concern about a supervisor safely

G2A. Review of public information

Under D6.6 the panel reviews the institution's public information as a prospective candidate encounters it, and checks in particular **whether the institution represents itself, rather than the doctoral programme, as ECLBS-accredited**. The sources examined include website footers and "about us" pages, letterhead and email signatures, social media bios and profile descriptions, prospectus and brochure copy, and material published by recruitment agents, partners and co-tutelle partners.

ECLBS offers programmatic accreditation only. A statement that the institution is ECLBS-accredited, or an ECLBS seal displayed without reference to the accredited programme and delivery locations, misrepresents the accreditation and is a finding under D6.6, whatever the accuracy of the SAR. Material published by an agent or partner is within the institution's responsibility. The panel pays particular attention to the way a doctoral offering is advertised internationally, where the risk of an accreditation claim being read as institutional recognition is highest.

G3. Common shortcomings

- **Supervisory load exceeding the institution's own rule.** The rule exists in the regulation; the register shows supervisors carrying two or three times the cap. This fails D4.3 and usually D3.2 with it.
- **Progress review without an independent element.** An annual review conducted by the supervisory team alone is self-assessment, not monitoring. D3.3 requires at least one person independent of the team.
- **Progress review with no possible adverse outcome.** Where every review in five years recorded "satisfactory progress" and attrition is 40%, the review is not functioning.
- **The supervisor as sole or dominant assessor.** No external examiner; the external appointed by the supervisor; the supervisor voting on the outcome; no written examiner report.
- **No conflict screening for examiners.** Prior co-authorship between examiner and supervisor, or between examiner and candidate, unchecked.
- **Ethics approval obtained after data collection**, or obtained from the supervisor rather than an independent body.
- **No text-similarity screening**, or screening performed without any procedure for acting on the result.
- **Structured training offered but not required, monitored or recorded.** A catalogue is not a training requirement.
- **Candidate status undocumented** — no written agreement, no statement of rights, no rule on teaching load, no intellectual property or authorship rule.
- **Publication-based theses without rules** on the number and status of papers, the candidate's contribution, authorship declarations, or the integrating text.
- **Theses not deposited or not publicly accessible**, with indefinite embargoes granted informally.

- **Attrition unanalysed.** The data are collected and reported; nobody has asked why candidates leave.
- **Distance or externally based candidates** with no defined access to infrastructure, no residency requirement and no community of practice.
- **No route to complain about a supervisor** other than to the supervisor's line manager, who is often a co-supervisor.
- **The institution described as ECLBS-accredited** in a website footer, on letterhead, in a social media bio or in agent material, where only a programme is accredited.

G4. What the panel asks candidates

Interviewed without supervisors or management present, and told that nothing will be attributed:

- How often do you meet your supervisor, and how long since the last meeting?
- How long does written work take to come back, and is the feedback usable?
- Who else, besides your supervisor, has read your work in the last year?
- What happened at your last progress review, and who was in the room?
- What training were you required to do, and what did you actually attend?
- Do you know what is expected of you to submit, and by when?
- If you had a serious problem with your supervisor, who would you go to, and would it be safe?
- Do you have the space, equipment, data access and funding your project needs?
- Do you teach? How much, is it capped, and are you paid or credited?
- Do you know the rules on authorship of work you contribute to?

Divergence between these answers and the regulations is the principal evidence base for Chapter D3.

Annex A — Index of doctoral criteria

No.	Criterion	Essential
D1.1	Objectives of the doctoral programme	* (non-negotiable)
D1.2	Research profile and critical mass	*
D1.3	International orientation	*
D1.4	Integration into the institutional strategy	
D1.5	Societal relevance and knowledge transfer	
D2.1	Admission requirements	*
D2.2	Selection procedure	*
D2.3	Recognition of prior qualifications	*
D2.4	Language proficiency	*
D2.5	Counselling for prospective candidates	
D2.6	Transparency and documentation of the admission decision	*
D2.7	Status, rights and obligations of the doctoral candidate	*
D3.1	Structure and duration of the doctoral provision	*
D3.2	Supervision arrangements	* (non-negotiable)
D3.3	Supervisory agreement and progress monitoring	*
D3.4	Structured training component and transferable skills	*
D3.5	Credit allocation and workload	
D3.6	Research methods and disciplinary training	*
D3.7	Research integrity, ethics and data management	*
D3.8	Mobility, networks and research exposure	
D3.9	Interdisciplinarity	
D3.10	Joint doctorates, co-tutelle and cooperation arrangements	* if applicable
D4.1	Research activity and output of the hosting unit	*
D4.2	Qualification of supervisors	*
D4.3	Supervisory capacity and load	*
D4.4	Development and evaluation of supervisors	
D4.5	Research infrastructure, facilities and data resources	*
D4.6	Access to literature and databases	*
D4.7	Funding of candidates and of the doctoral provision	*
D4.8	Research cooperation and external networks	
D4.9	Management of the doctoral provision	*
D4.10	Administrative support	
D5.1	Thesis requirements and originality	* (non-negotiable)
D5.2	Examination procedure and defence	*
D5.3	Composition and independence of the examination board	*

No.	Criterion	Essential
D5.4	Assessment criteria and transparency of grading	*
D5.5	Deposit, publication and open access of theses	*
D5.6	Academic appeals and complaints by candidates	*
D5.7	Degree title, certificate and Diploma Supplement	*
D6.1	Quality assurance system for the doctoral provision	*
D6.2	Evaluation by doctoral candidates	*
D6.3	Evaluation by supervisors, examiners and external stakeholders	
D6.4	Monitoring of completion, duration and attrition	*
D6.5	Career tracking of graduates	*
D6.6	Programme documentation and public information	*
D6.7	Information on activities during the academic year	
D6.8	Handling of academic misconduct	*

Total: 47 criteria. 35 essential in every doctoral procedure; a further 1 essential where applicable (D3.10).

Annex B — Appendices to be submitted with the doctoral SAR

Appendix	Reference
Organigram of the doctoral school / committee with reporting lines	D0.2
Cohort data table (five years)	D0.3
Evidence of state approval to award doctoral degrees; ECLBS membership	Eligibility
Doctoral regulations (admission, progression, examination, award)	D2 / D3 / D5
Specimen supervisory / doctoral agreement	D3.3
Annual progress review form and specimen completed reviews (anonymised)	D3.3
Structured training catalogue with credit and workload	D3.4
Research integrity policy, ethics approval procedure, data management template	D3.7
List of active supervisors: qualification, field, current load, five-year output	D4.2 / D4.3
Five-year research output list of the hosting unit; external funding record	D4.1
Infrastructure and facilities inventory; database subscription list	D4.5 / D4.6
Multi-year budget for the doctoral provision; candidate funding overview	D4.7
Co-tutelle / joint doctorate / partner agreements	D3.10
Thesis regulations, including rules on publication-based theses	D5.1
Examination regulations; examiner appointment and conflict-of-interest rules	D5.2 / D5.3
Specimen examiner report forms and assessment criteria	D5.4
Repository policy and embargo procedure	D5.5
Appeals and complaints procedure	D5.6
Specimen certificate and Diploma Supplement	D5.7
Quality management regulations for doctoral provision	D6.1
Candidate survey instrument and most recent results	D6.2
Graduate career tracking instrument and results	D6.5
Public information on the doctoral provision, including agent and partner material	D6.6
Misconduct procedure and text-similarity screening policy	D6.8
Sample of three recently examined theses with examiner reports (anonymised)	D5

Annex C — Third-cycle level reference

C.1 Dublin Descriptors — third cycle, in summary

Dimension	Expectation
Knowledge and understanding	Systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field
Applying knowledge	Ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity
Making judgements	Capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas; has made a contribution that extends the frontier of knowledge by an original body of work, part of which merits national or international refereed publication
Communication	Can communicate with peers, the wider scholarly community and society about their field of expertise
Learning skills	Expected to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge-based society

C.2 EQF level 8 descriptors, in summary

Dimension	Level 8
Knowledge	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field and at the interface between fields
Skills	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice
Responsibility and autonomy	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity, and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts, including research

Annex D — Supervisory agreement: minimum content

Required under D3.3. The agreement is concluded at registration and signed by the candidate, each supervisor, and the director of the doctoral provision.

Element	Content
Parties	Candidate; principal supervisor; co-supervisor(s) or committee members
Project	Working title; field; brief description; expected scope
Registration	Date; mode (full-time / part-time); expected submission date; maximum registration period
Supervision	Minimum frequency and form of meetings; who records them; expected turnaround for feedback on written work
Milestones	Confirmation or upgrade; annual review dates; submission
Training	Required structured training, with credit or hours, and the deadline for completion
Ethics and data	Requirement for ethics approval before data collection; data management plan; data ownership and retention
Authorship and IP	Rules on authorship of joint publications; ownership of intellectual property; confidentiality where industry-funded
Teaching and other duties	Maximum hours; remuneration or credit; relationship to progress
Resources	Workspace, equipment, data access, fieldwork and dissemination funding committed
Absence and interruption	Grounds and procedure for interruption; effect on the registration period
Change of supervision	Procedure for change initiated by either party, and continuity where a supervisor departs
Dispute	Route for raising concerns, including a route not passing through the supervisor
Termination	Grounds and procedure for termination of registration; right to be heard; right of appeal
Review	Date on which the agreement is reviewed and, if necessary, revised

Annex E — Annual progress review: minimum content

Required under D3.3.

Element	Requirement
Candidate's written report	Prepared independently of the supervisor: work completed, difficulties, plan and timetable, training completed, outputs
Supervisor's written report	Prepared independently of the candidate: assessment of progress, concerns, resources needed
Independent element	At least one reviewer who is not a member of the supervisory team
Oral element	Meeting or presentation, with the independent reviewer present
Assessment of supervision	The candidate is asked, in the absence of the supervisor, whether supervision has been adequate
Outcome	One of: proceed; proceed subject to specified conditions with a review date; recommend change of registration; recommend termination
Reasons	Recorded in writing
Communication	Outcome given to the candidate in writing, with a right to comment and a right of appeal
Aggregate use	Outcomes aggregated and reported to the director of the doctoral provision for risk management

Annex F — Examination: minimum requirements

Element	Requirement under D5.2 and D5.3
Appointment of examiners	By a formal institutional decision, not by the supervisor
External examiner	At least one, independent of the institution, the supervisory team and the candidate; research-active in the field
Conflict screening	Documented check for prior co-authorship, collaboration, joint funding, family relationship, financial interest
Supervisor's role	Defined in the regulations; the supervisor may not be the sole assessor; where present, voting rights are stated
Written reports	Each examiner produces an independent written report before the defence, against the published criteria
Defence	Oral, with the possible outcomes defined in advance
Outcomes	Pass; pass subject to corrections (period stated); major revision and resubmission (period and number of attempts stated); referral to a lower award where the system provides one; fail
Reasoning	Outcome reasoned in writing; substance communicated to the candidate
Remote defence	Identity verification, examiner independence and recording arrangements regulated
Integrity	Text-similarity screening applied before examination, with a defined procedure for acting on the result

Annex G — Definitions of the doctoral indicators

Indicator	Definition
Candidates enrolled	Registered candidates at the census date, including those on approved interruption, which is stated separately
Candidates per active supervisor	Total registered candidates divided by supervisors with at least one candidate; report the mean and the maximum
Median time to degree	Median elapsed years from registration to award for those awarded in the reference year, excluding approved interruption
Completion rate	Candidates awarded the degree within the normal duration plus one year, as a percentage of the registered cohort, with the cohort year stated
Attrition rate	Candidates leaving without award, as a percentage of the registered cohort, with the stage of departure recorded
Theses referred	Theses receiving an outcome of major revision and resubmission, or fail, as a percentage of those examined
Candidate publications	Peer-reviewed outputs with the candidate as author or co-author, published or accepted during registration
Destinations	Confirmed position 12 months after award, classified as academic research, academic teaching, industry research, professional practice, other, unknown; state the response rate

Annex H — Interview guide for the doctoral visit

Group	Duration	Lines of enquiry
Institutional management	45 min	Authority to award doctorates; resourcing of the doctoral provision; how doctoral quality reaches senior level; how public information and agent material are controlled
Director of the doctoral school / committee	60 min	Powers over admission, supervisor approval, progress and examination; how loads are managed; how attrition is analysed
Supervisors (without management)	60–75 min	Appointment as supervisor and on what basis; current loads; how progress concerns are escalated; what training they received
Doctoral candidates (no supervisors or management present)	75–90 min	The questions in Part II §G4
Examiners or examination board members, where available	45 min	Appointment; independence; what the pass standard is in practice
Administrative staff	30 min	Records, registration, examination arrangements
Facilities tour	45–60 min	Workspace, laboratories, equipment, library and database access
Documentation session	90 min	Progress review files; supervision records; three theses with examiner reports; supervisor register with loads; public information review

Annex I — Panel assessment report template (Doctoral)

Section	Content
1	Procedural record — see General Handbook §48
2	Profile of the doctoral provision as established by the panel, including registered candidates, active supervisors and fields
3	Findings and ratings, chapter by chapter, D1 to D6
4	Summary table of all 47 criteria ; count of essential criteria not met; express statement on D1.1, D3.2 and D5.1
5	A distinct section recording the panel's findings from reading theses and examiner reports: how many were read, in which fields, and against what standard
6	A distinct section recording the panel's findings on supervision, drawn from meeting records and candidate interviews
7	A distinct section on public information , recording every source reviewed and whether the institution represents itself, rather than the programme, as ECLBS-accredited
8	Conditions, drafted to the standard in General Handbook §44
9	Recommendations; strengths
10	The institution's statement and the panel's response
11	Recommendation to the EACC: outcome, period, reasons