

Information on doctoral studies at the Medical University of Vienna

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1 Range of studies and target groups

Two doctoral programmes are offered at the Medical University of Vienna (MedUni Vienna), the "Doctor of Philosophy" doctoral programme UN094 (PhD programme) and the doctoral programme in Applied Medical Science UN790.

The PhD programme UN094 serves to further develop the ability to carry out independent scientific work as well as train and promote young scientists with a scientific attitude in accordance with the Good Scientific Practice guidelines of the Medical University of Vienna. Special emphasis is placed on the interdisciplinary character of the subject matter. PhD students are regarded as "early stage researchers".

The PhD programme UN094 is designed as a full-time programme and can therefore not be completed alongside an existing full-time clinical position at MedUni Vienna as a specialist or a doctor in specialist training. However, admission to the UN094 PhD study programme for specialists or doctors in specialist training is possible with at least one year's release from clinical work for purely scientific, non-medical work (usually as a project staff member). During this time, medical work is not permitted, apart from the activities permitted to "medical students" pursuant to Section 49 (4) and (5) ÄrzteG (Act on the Medical Profession) 1988. Any further employment in clinical routine, particularly the performance of journal duties, is therefore not possible during this period.

The **doctoral programme in Applied Medical Science UN790** focuses on independent scientific work in medical and medicine-associated professions. It aims to cultivate and enhance the University's performance in applied research through the symbiosis of research and practice. The doctoral programme in Applied Medical Science aims to combine biomedical and clinical practice development through research. The doctoral programme in Applied Medical Science UN790 is also compatible with an already existing full-time clinical position as a specialist or doctor in specialist training at MedUni Vienna.

It is possible to transfer from the PhD programme UN094 to the doctoral programme in Applied Medical Science UN790 – and vice versa. In this case, the provisions laid down in the respective curriculum regarding the creditability of already absolved academic achievements must be observed (see footnote).¹

¹ **Section 9** (1) Courses (propaedeutic course, basic lecture, basic seminar, basic course, dissertation seminars, journal clubs and participation in the PhD/dissertation symposium as well as defence of the work plan/dissertation plan) completed in one of the doctoral programmes of the Medical University of Vienna shall be mutually recognised in full.

(2) In the case of a transfer from the PhD programme (N094) to the doctoral programme in Applied Medical Science (N790), students who have successfully completed all courses according to study plan N094 and whose dissertation has been approved are fully recognised for the achievements they absolved.

(3) The achievements of students who have successfully completed all courses according to study plan N790 and whose dissertation has been approved, shall be fully recognised when transferring from the doctoral programme in Applied Medical Science (N790) to PhD studies (N094), provided that the following requirements are met:

- The student must have published a first-author paper in a top journal (ISI ranking) in the field of the dissertation topic.
- Employment from a research project for at least one year (without any involvement in possible routine clinical activities).

2 Admission requirements

a. Basic studies

The admission requirements for the PhD programme UN094 and the doctoral programme in Applied Medical Science UN790 at MedUni Vienna are regulated in the respective curriculum in Section 2. In addition to appropriate basic studies, which are evidenced by the completion of a diploma programme in Human or Dental Medicine or the completion of a natural science/technical, relevant or related diploma programme or the completion of a recognised domestic or foreign master's programme equivalent to the above-mentioned diploma programmes, the applicant has to submit a dissertation topic, a thesis concept and a confirmation of supervision for the thesis at the time of admission.

b. Dissertation topic, dissertation concept and research project

The topic of the dissertation shall be taken from one of the scientific disciplines represented by MedUni Vienna or in the curriculum or shall be meaningfully related to one (Section 17b (4) of Section II of the Statutes).

For admission to the PhD programme UN094, evidence of a dissertation topic within the framework of an *evaluated* research project must be provided (Section 2(1) lit b of Curriculum N094). This refers to a research project subject to international, scientific peer-review with third-party funding (FWF, EU, WWTF, or similar).

This also includes projects whereby the scope is comparable to that of a WWTF grant and which are selected through a competitive recruitment process, taking into account the opinion of international reviewers.

For admission to the doctoral programme in Applied Medical Science UN790, both an internationally peer-reviewed (FWF, EU, WWTF, etc.) or another evaluated or quality-assured research project (e.g. from contract research) can provide the framework for the dissertation topic (Section 2 (1) lit b of Curriculum UN790).

Persons who fulfil the admission requirements are entitled to select a supervisor from the registered PhD or doctoral supervisors available at MedUni Vienna in order to select a dissertation topic and prepare a dissertation concept with the supervisor – provided the latter has given his consent to the supervision. The selected supervisor and the chosen dissertation topic must be made known to the Curriculum Director prior to the admission to the doctoral programme by submitting a dissertation concept prepared in writing according to the specifications of the Curriculum Director (Section 2 (3) of the respective curriculum).

The dissertation topic or the dissertation must principally be integrated into a research project approved by a strict review system. If the supervisor does not have such a research project, a project proposal prepared in accordance with FWF guidelines may be submitted to the Curriculum Director, who shall conduct a review procedure in accordance with scientific quality, priority and available resources (Section 7 (3) of the respective curriculum). The content of the research project must be related to the dissertation topic. In any case, the available project funds or other resources must be sufficient to cover the material expenses required for the execution of the dissertation (Section 7 (4) of the respective curriculum). If the processing of a topic requires the use of the financial or material resources of MedUni Vienna institutions (organisational units), the topic may only be assigned to a student if the Head of this institution has been informed of the intended assignment and has not prohibited its execution within one month due to a significant impairment of teaching and research operations (Section 17b (5) of paragraph II of the Statutes).

c. Requirements for the dissertation supervisor

All members of the Medical University of Vienna (Section 94 (1) UG) with a *venia docendi* or equivalent qualification are entitled to supervise and assess a dissertation in the subject of their *venia docendi* within the framework of a doctoral study programme, provided they fulfil the required prerequisites and qualification criteria (Section 7 (6) of the respective curriculum).

The supervisors of dissertation projects are themselves scientifically excellent in the respective field (documented by the number of high-quality publications (see top publications according to the appendix) during the last 6 years), are proven in third-party funding during the last 6 years, have experience and commitment in supervising dissertation candidates and can prove the training of dissertation candidates during the last 6 years and publications with dissertation candidates/postdocs as first-authors (cf. on the criteria Section 5 (5) of the respective curriculum).

The qualification criteria for senior and junior dissertation supervisors can be found in the guidelines for dissertation supervisors (see appendix), which are adopted by the responsible curriculum commission on the proposal of the curriculum director (Section 17b para. 2 of Section II of the Statutes).

The qualification criteria for dissertation supervisors are considered to be met by project leaders whose scope is comparable to that of a WWTF grant and who are selected by way of a competitive recruitment process, considering the opinion of international reviewers.

The Curriculum Director is entitled to call upon persons without a teaching authorisation, who, however, fulfil the above-mentioned prerequisites and qualification criteria, to supervise and assess dissertations. Persons in the post-doc stage, from whom the fulfilment of the above qualification criteria can be expected based on their previous performance, may be called upon to supervise dissertations as junior dissertation supervisors. However, they should be assisted by experienced supervisors (senior dissertation supervisors) for promotion purposes (Section 7 (8) of the respective curriculum).

3 Employment and funding at MedUni Vienna

For the **purposes of structured doctoral training**, PhD programme UN094 requires at least **30 hours per week** of employment, and the PhD programme in Applied Medical Science (UN790) requires at least **20 hours per week** of employment at MedUni Vienna.

In order to carry out the dissertation in the PhD programme (UN094), sufficient project funds or other resources must be available to enable the doctoral student to be employed and paid at least in accordance with the collective agreement for university employees (employment group B1) (cf. Section 7 (4) of Curriculum UN094). It is irrelevant whether the employment of the doctoral student is financed from the global budget or from third-party funds of the dissertation supervisor's research project or from other third-party funds. These funds must be available to such an extent that the completion of the doctoral studies is possible in the duration of the employment relationship (generally at least 3 years). However, admission to a doctoral programme does not create any legal entitlement to employment beyond the fixed-term employment relationship.

An – at best temporary – change in the form of funding or the use in an ongoing employment relationship is possible. For example, an employment contract may be amended to the effect that – temporarily – there is a change from a medical assignment in the clinical area to a purely scientific third-party funded position without medical activity. This also applies when a position is awarded within the framework of the "Physician Researcher Pathway" programme.

Educational leave ("Bildungskarenz") cannot be agreed with MedUni Vienna for the preparation or completion of the dissertation, as the preparation of the dissertation is part of the employment relationship. However, it is possible to apply for a study completion scholarship for working students at MedUni Vienna.

Doctoral students who have commenced their studies at MedUni Vienna without a corresponding employment relationship may continue and complete their studies without an employment relationship. In any case, there is no legal entitlement to employment.

Employment at an external institution

4 Employment at an external institution

If the doctoral student is employed by an external institution other than MedUni Vienna, it has to be ensured that there is sufficient time – on average – for academic work in the doctoral programme at MedUni Vienna. It is the responsibility of each student to organise his studies accordingly and to reach appropriate agreements with his employer to ensure sufficient time for the studies. In order to ensure the pursuit of the dissertation or research project in the doctoral programme – in particular in the interest of the student himself – the student must submit confirmation from his employer or superior stating that the obligations arising from the employment contract do not prevent the completion or continuation of the studies.

5 Scholarship holders

As an alternative to employment, it is possible for doctoral students to work as scholarship holders at MedUni Vienna to execute their dissertation project (and *only* in this case).

The prerequisite is the receipt of a scholarship from a domestic or foreign **official funding body**. Private funding, e.g. by relatives (so-called "self-payers"), is not permitted.

Scholarship holders are not employees of MedUni Vienna. Simultaneous employment while receiving a scholarship is not permitted. The amount of the scholarship must be based on the remuneration agreed in the collective agreement. The amount of the scholarship must be based on the remuneration under the collective agreement for a corresponding position (employment group B1), whereby any additional research allowance granted to support scientific work must be taken into account. A research grant may be awarded upon application if a corresponding funding pool exists, provided that the requirements of the funding body are met.

6 Doctoral students' powers under medical law

In as far as students of a doctoral programme at MedUni Vienna are not already working as doctors in specialist training pursuant to § 8 ÄrzteG 1998, they shall also – like students of the diploma programme in human medicine – be deemed to be students of medicine in training pursuant to Section 49 (4) and (5) ÄrzteG 1998.

Students in the doctoral programme in Applied Medical Science UN790 or PhD programme UN094 at MedUni Vienna have – in as far as they have previously completed the diploma programme in medicine – already gained comprehensive practical medical experience and corresponding qualifications, particularly in the clinical internship year. The doctoral studies build on this, but the students continue to be regarded as medical students in training in accordance with Section 49 (4) and (5) ÄrzteG 1998.

They are therefore only allowed to perform medical activities in accordance with Section 49 (5) ÄrzteG 1998 (establishing medical histories, simple physical examinations including measuring blood pressure, taking blood samples from veins, administering intramuscular and subcutaneous injections and individual other medical activities, provided that mastery of these activities is absolutely necessary for the successful completion of medical studies and the medical students in training can prove that they already have the knowledge and experience required for the conscientious performance of these activities with regard to their degree of difficulty) under the guidance and supervision of the training physicians.

This also covers participation in clinical studies, the results of which are included in the research projects related to the dissertation. However, for reasons of medical law, liability law and insurance law, there must in any case be a connection between medical activity and the dissertation project. Any further use in clinical routine, in particular the performance of journal services, is therefore not possible. The extent, the intensity and the means of supervision depend on the student's level of training, experience, reliability and comprehension as well as the complexity and riskiness of the respective activity.

The liability insurance policies of MedUni Vienna and ÖH also cover medical activities carried out as part of the dissertation project.

Crediting possibilities for doctors in specialist training

7 Crediting possibilities for doctors in specialist training

Doctors in specialist training can have periods of doctoral studies within the framework of the "new medical training" (ÄAO 2015 (Medical Training Regulations) credited to the extent of up to nine months as a scientific module for the special subject specialisation training.

A scientific module is a module for qualification in the field of scientific activity that is basically designed in the same way for all special subjects. If the criteria are fulfilled, it is possible to credit up to nine months of scientific work within the framework of a scientific doctoral or PhD programme towards the special subject specialisation. It is permissible to complete the scientific module already after completing the basic training. This interrupts any basic training in a special subject that may have been started and the training time is to be credited to the duration of the special subject specialisation training. PhD or doctoral studies or parts thereof already completed after completion of the medical studies may also be credited to the extent of 9 months towards the scientific module without being entered in the list of doctors (Section 3 (5) ÄAO 2015); cf. on this: <https://www.aerztekammer.at/aeao-2015>.

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Appendix

Senior dissertation supervisors for PhD programme UN094:

1. Integration in an active research group or in a research network (documented on the basis of publications in the last 6 years)
2. Experience in training doctoral students (documented by at least 2 first-author publications by 2 previously personally supervised PhD students, also as junior dissertation supervisor), alternatively experience in training other collaborators (documented by at least 3 first-author publications by 3 previously personally supervised collaborators, each at least in so-called "standard journals". The applicant must appear as last or corresponding author of these publications).
3. Experience in obtaining internationally evaluated external funding during the last 6 years.
4. In addition, availability of internationally evaluated third-party funds, acquired as PI or co-applicant, through which at least one doctoral candidate can be employed.
5. Successful participation in the seminar "Legal and organisational aspects of dissertation supervision" at MedUni Vienna.

Junior dissertation supervisors for PhD programme UN094:

1. Integration into an active research group or into a research network (documented on the basis of the publications of the last 6 years; documented scientific environment of the supervisor with regular "journal clubs", organised seminars, science meetings with presentations of the results by post-docs and PhD students at the respective institution).
2. Availability of internationally evaluated third-party funds, acquired as PI or co-applicant, through which at least one doctoral candidate can be employed.
3. Successful participation in the seminars "Motivation and leadership of diploma students" and "Legal and Organisational Aspects of Dissertation Supervision" at MedUni Vienna.

Senior Dissertation Supervisor for the Doctoral Programme in Applied Medical Science UN790:

1. Integration in an active research group or in a research network (documented based on publications during the last 6 years)

2. Experience in the training of doctoral students (documented by at least 2 first-author publications by 2 previously personally supervised doctoral students, also as junior dissertation supervisor) Alternatively, experience in the training of other collaborators (documented by at least 3 first-author publications by 3 previously personally supervised collaborators, each at least in so-called "standard journals". The applicant must be listed as the last or corresponding author of these publications).

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3. Experience in the organisation and implementation of (clinical) research projects.
4. Availability of financial resources within the framework of own research projects that ensure the implementation of a dissertation project.
5. Successful participation in the seminar "Legal and organisational aspects of dissertation supervision" at MedUni Vienna.

Junior Dissertation Supervisor for the Doctoral Programme in Applied Medical Science UN790:

1. Integration into an active research group or a research network (characterised by e.g. joint publications over the last 6 years, regular "journal clubs", organised seminars, science meetings with presentations of results by postdocs and PhD students).
2. Availability of financial resources within the framework of own research projects that guarantee the implementation of a dissertation project.
3. Experience in supervising diploma theses (documented by at least 2 completed diploma theses and at least one related publication with the diploma student as author, each at least in so-called "standard journals". The applicant must be listed as the first, last or corresponding author of these publications.)
4. Successful participation in the seminar "Motivation and guidance of diploma students and dissertation candidates" and "Legal and organisational aspects of dissertation supervision" at MedUni Vienna.

Definition of standard journals:

1. The evaluation basis is the journal rankings based on the impact factors from the unaltered ranking lists of the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI).

2. Some journals appear in several categories. In principle, the category with the best ranking of a journal can be used if the title of this category fits the applicant's field of work in a meaningful way.
3. The journals within the first 20% of the ranking list are considered "top journals", the other 40% (between 20% and 60%) are considered "standard journals", the last 40% are not considered for qualification.