

Board of the Agency for Quality Assurance and
Accreditation Austria
Franz-Klein-Gasse 5
1190 Wien

Salzburg, 10. Juli 2020

Re: Response to the Reviewers Comments on the Doctoral Program Medical Science

GZ:I/A04-40/2002; PU_04_PMU_Übermittlung zur Stellungnahme_ÄA MW_20200702

Dear Board Members,

First of all, we would like to take this opportunity to thank the experts and the AQ Austria for the very constructive review process of our application to amend the three year PhD program in Medical Science.

Please find below our replies regarding possible factual errors and the reviewers conditions and recommendations. We have also included a copy of the Study and Examination Regulations with the text sections highlighted that were amended in response to the two conditions below.

Factual Errors:

We did not find factual errors with the exception of the statement on page 14 that the „Courses are offered once a year in a `Summer School` format...“. Each module is offered twice every year, once in the winter term and once in the summer term as students can start the program in October or March, respectively.

Reviewers Conditions:

§18 (3) 2 on page 28 and §18 (4) 3 on page 30

Condition:

The experts consider the criterion to be partially fulfilled and suggest the following condition: The participation at a conference, summer school or course with international outreach or an international placement should be mandatory to provide every doctoral student with the opportunity to develop the networking and international skills inherent to and specific for a scientific career (see also § 18 (4) 3).

Response:

We have included this suggestion into our Study & Examination Regulations (Section 4.2 Curriculum).

The section has been changed as follows:

The remaining 19 ECTS collect students by completing tasks from the list of research activities. While students can select the activities listed below as appropriate for their individual research project, all students must obtain at least 6 ECTS through international engagements by attending conferences, summer schools and/or courses with international outreach and/or by completing an international placement. International outreach requires that a meeting, summer school or course is attended by European and/or overseas participants and is conducted through the medium of English.

The optional Research Activities include:

International Placement (2 ECTS / week) ≤ 8 ECTS
Conferences Level III ≤ 6 ECTS
Conferences Level II ≤ 4 ECTS
Conference Level I ≤ 2 ECTS
Professional Training (methods, digital & analytical skills) ≤ 6 ECTS
Publications & Third Mission ≤ 6 ECTS
Teaching & Supervision ≤ 4 ECTS
External Modules & Summer Schools ≤ 8 ECTS
Ring Lecture ≤ 4 ECTS
FWF or DFG Grant Writing Workshop 1,0 ECTS
Network Partner Fair 2,0 ECTS

It is mandatory for all students to acquire at least 6 ECTS for international engagements through an international placement and/or the attendance of a level II and/or III conference, a summer school and/or a course with international participants that is conducted through the medium of English.

§18 (4) 9 on page 31

Condition:

This concern applies specifically to the statement in the application that "students have no fundamental right to crediting". In addition, the wording of the statement is prone to distract students changing to PMU from another university and to jeopardize internationalisation efforts of PMU. The experts consider the criterion to be only partially fulfilled and request the following condition: The wording in the application need to be changed to comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (which in its summary states: "It provides that requests should be assessed in a fair manner and within a reasonable time. The recognition can only be refused if the qualification is substantially different from that of the host country – and the onus is on its educational institution to prove that it is"). It should also be analogous to § 78 (1) of the Austrian Universities Act 2002.

Response:

Recognition of prior academic qualifications and learning is well practiced throughout the PMU and this process is described in the process management system Signavio (Fig. 1). We consider the current regulations to be more than fair exceeding the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition

Convention and the Austrian Universities Act in that not only prior learning from other higher education institutions, but also non-formal learning and professional experiences are included in the recognition process.

The statement cited by the experts – „students have no fundamental right to crediting“ – is not meant to prevent recognition or distract students, but to point out that the university reserves the right to deny recognition if the requirements prescribed by the curriculum are not met.

However, to avoid this misunderstanding, we have changed the statement in section 7 of the study & examination regulations as follows:

Recognition refers to the crediting of already completed study or learning qualifications so that individual modules or courses do not have to be attended or exams do not have to be completed.

Credit is always based on the learning objectives (outcomes) of the module or course as described in the curriculum for which students request credit. It is essential for the credit that the learning objectives of the respective course or module have been demonstrably achieved. It is irrelevant whether these learning objectives have been achieved in one or more previous courses or modules, whether the learning goals are part of post-secondary teaching or they were obtained in the context of professional or voluntary activities, non-university teaching or advanced training events, and whether the workload needed to acquire these learning objectives corresponds to the quota of ECTS credits allocated for the respective course. It is also independent of the regional location of the institution where the qualifications were obtained.

Students apply for the recognition by submitting the required documentation that allows for the evaluation of whether the learning objectives are met. The evaluation of previously achieved learning objectives by the course director may involve teachers on the relevant course or modules to assess the request for crediting. Upon a positive evaluation, the corresponding ECTS are recognised in the curriculum but no mark is allocated. All recognised ECTS are listed in the certificate with the note „credited“. In case the learning objectives are not fully met, the course director may decide in discussion with the lecturers on the module or course, for which recognition was applied for, that only parts of the module are credited. The remaining parts of the module or course must then be completed as stipulated in the curriculum.

This change of the regulations has already been ratified by the Leitungsteam Studium & Lehre and approved by the Dekan für Studium & Lehre. Since the regulations for recognition are the same for all study programs, this new statement applies to all study programs of the PMU.

Reviewers Recommendations:

§18 (1) 2 on page 26

Recommendation:

In the annual supervisor evaluation, the quality of supervision should be closely watched, especially with increasing group size. In the taught module PhD Novice, aspects of good scientific practice other than plagiarism (e. g. authorship criteria, data documentation, copyright issues and confidentiality) should be accounted for in more detail.

Response:

As stated in the application, we will monitor closely the quality of the supervision at both locations, Salzburg and Nürnberg. The suggestion to correlate the results with group size and research time of the lead supervisor is very good and will be implemented directly into the annual survey.

We agree on the high importance of good scientific practice with the reviewers and will incorporate the information on authorship criteria, conflicts of interest, data documentation, copyright issues and confidentiality in the first year module PhD Novice. The current content research conduct, plagiarism, data ownership, and patient anonymity in the teaching unit "Ethics & Diversity" will be extended by the inclusion of confidentiality and conflicts of interests. The new content authorship criteria, data documentation and copyright issues will be incorporated into the teaching unit "Research Funding & Project Management".

§18 (2) 1 on page 27

Recommendation:

At the same time, the experts strongly encourage PMU to further develop the doctoral programme with thematic clusters in line with the development plan of PMU and with the goal to further enhance the visibility of the research profile.

Response:

As discussed in the video conference with the reviewers, the PhD program is designed to support research clusters in line with the development strategy of the PMU. We strongly support the suggestion by the reviewers to use the structure of doctoral schools within this program to enhance the visibility and research content of such clusters.

§18 (2) 2 on page 27

Recommendation:

Nevertheless, the doctoral programme would benefit from a more stringent thematic structure that might increase international visibility and add value to the students' identification with the goals of the programme. The expert panel strongly endorses a strategy with defined core areas within an overarching programme.

Response:

As explained above, the PMU favours the development of defined core areas. The ability to develop such clusters was one important reason to amend the PhD program. In cooperation with the PMU Nürnberg and the new research management & technology transfer office, we will start this process as soon as possible.

§18 (2) 4 on page 27

Recommendation:

....but encourage PMU to establish further structured cooperations with national and international research institutions.

Response:

Further structured research cooperations will be formed as the research clusters develop within the PhD program.

§18 (2) 5 on page 28

Recommendation:

.....the expert panel recommends to establish internal funding programmes providing seed funding for innovative projects and to provide funds for prolonged support of doctoral students in order to ensure completion of the programme by all doctoral students.

Response:

As mentioned in the video conference, we strongly support the need for PhD project seed funding and for a new PhD stipend that supports students in all years of the program. The latter developments will be taken forward jointly with the Dean for Research, colleagues at the PMU Nürnberg and the research management & technology transfer office.

§18 (2) 6 on page 28

Recommendation:

..... recommend the establishment of shared infrastructures for defined high-end technologies (core facilities) and of a structured process for access to high-end research equipment by doctoral students.

Response:

The university launches a new infrastructure system this summer. All research instruments and high-facilities can be digitally identified and are online bookable for all researches across the PMU.

§18 (3) 2 on page 28

Recommendation:

In addition, the experts recommend that an information structure regarding stays abroad and funding opportunities for all students should be established. They advise that PMU sets up a travel fund within PMU-FFF and encourages supervisors to support their students spending some time at a research institution abroad.

Response:

We will provide information regarding stays abroad and funding opportunities for all students through the new web page of the Doctoral Service Centre as explained at the video conference. To support international networking by our students, we will consult with the Dean for Research, colleagues at the PMU Nürnberg and the research management & technology transfer office to add a designated PhD travel fund to the PMU-FFF.

§18 (3) 3 on page 29

Recommendation:

The experts consider the criterion to be fulfilled but make two recommendations: PMU should advertise vacant PhD positions to enhance transparency and ease student-project matching. In addition, PMU should establish a statistical counselling centre (or service), either alone or in cooperation with the Data Science Centre at the University of Salzburg, and ensure that the service is also accessible for students based in Nuremberg.

Response:

The PMU will ensure that all research vacancies including the PhD vacancies are internationally advertised as this is also a requirement by external sponsors.

We strongly support the idea of a statistic counselling service that should be free of charge for all students and researcher. We will liaise with colleagues at the PMU Nürnberg, their Centre for Clinical Studies and the research management & technology transfer office here at the PMU Salzburg to identify the best means to provide such a service through the new Doctoral Service Centre.

§18 (4) 3 on page 30

Recommendation:

In addition, the experts recommend that thesis projects are subjected to a rigorous quality control to ensure their completion within a three-year period, that thesis projects are announced publicly and internationally, that international graduates are recruited into the doctoral programme, and thematic doctoral schools related to research clusters are implemented.

Response:

The quality control measures for the submitted research proposals are outlined in sections 5.2 and section 6.3 of the Study & Examination Regulations. As a new measure we will list all active PhD research projects in a database that will be freely available through our web page. The submitted PhD dissertations are already openly accessible through our library and PhD webpage. As stated above, we will implement doctoral schools representing the research clusters as they are being established.

§18 (4) 4 on page 30

Recommendation:

The experts consider the criterion to be fulfilled but strongly recommend PMU to secure enough time and funds for all PhD candidates to enable them to complete their PhD study within a reasonable time frame.

Response:

As explained at the video conference, the PMU is already in talks with the state of Salzburg to secure funding for PhD research sabbaticals for medical doctors who work in the University hospital. The Klinikum Nürnberg offers already 4 such sabbaticals with a duration of 3 months. To support

all students across all years of the program, we work on removing the current limitation of the PhD Discite! stipend that only sustains students in the first year.

§18 (5) 2 on page 32

Recommendation:

They recommend that the supervisor training programme should be implemented at the earliest opportunity. In addition, supervision performance and English teaching should be monitored by the use of quantifiable parameters.

Response:

The PMU will implement the planned supervisor training program as soon as possible. The PhD Kick-off event for the new PhD supervisors at the PMU Nürnberg is the first step of this process. Both, supervision performance and teaching quality will be continuously monitored at both locations through the Evasys software. We will liaise with our survey experts regarding quantifiable parameters.

§18 (5) 3 on page 32

Recommendation:

They recommend that the course director keeps an eye on the student-supervisor ratio to maintain an adequate level of high quality supervision.

Response:

The evaluation results will be analysed and discussed at the meetings of the curriculums committee which is chaired by the course director.

§18 (5) 4 on page 33

Recommendation:

The experts consider the criterion to be fulfilled but offer the recommendation that the number of doctoral students per supervisor must be compatible with the supervisor's workload allocation to research and teaching.

Response:

To monitor this, we will include questions on the supervisor's workload allocation to research and teaching in the annual Evasys evaluation.

§18 (5) 5 on page 33

Recommendation:

The experts emphasize that continuous education is a relevant task to enable supervisors to cope with the challenges in supervising, mentoring and educating doctoral students, and recommend more efforts to be laid on personnel development in this respect. The expert panel also suggests

that the doctoral students should have the opportunity to propose topics and themes that should be included in the supervisor training programmes.

Response:

We will include this very good suggestion in our supervisor development program.

§20 (2) 1 on page 34

Recommendation:

They recommend PMU to consider reimbursement for travels between the sites for the participation in events at the respective other PMU site.

Response:

We will reimburse the travel costs for journeys between both PMU sites. We have currently budgeted € per annum for 2020/21 increasing over a period of 5 years to € (Table 17 in the application). We will review this budget as the number of traveling students evolves.

Sincerely yours,

Rector

Chancellor

Figure 1: Process: Application for the Recognition of Previous Academic Achievements (Antrag auf Anrechnung von Vorleistungen)

