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189. Curriculum for the Joint PhD Programme Medical Systems Biology
within the CIVIS University

Curriculum 2026

**Curriculum for the Joint PhD Programme Medical Systems Biology
within the CIVIS University Alliance**

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Abbreviations

- amU – Aix-Marseille Université
- EKUT – Eberhard-Karls Universität Tübingen
- ECTS – European Credit Transfer System
- PhD – Doctor of Philosophy
- USBG – Universität Salzburg

Preamble

The Senate of the University of Salzburg, in its meeting of 23.06.2026, enacted the curriculum for the doctoral programme “Medical Systems Biology” in the version adopted by the members of the Curriculum Committee for the Doctoral Program, Faculty of Natural and Life Sciences of the University of Salzburg by circular resolution on the 17.06.2026.

The legal basis is the Federal Act on the Organisation of Universities and their Studies (Universitätsgesetz – UG, BGBl. I Nr. 120/2002), as well as the study regulations section of the Statute of the University of Salzburg, each in the currently applicable version. Particular reference is made to the following provisions:

- Concerning admission to the doctoral programme: § 64 (4), § 63a (7) UG
- Concerning the admission deadline: § 61 (1) UG
- Concerning the drafting, assessment and evaluation of the dissertation as well as the doctoral committees: § 83 UG and § 24 of the Statute
- Concerning the dissertation defence: § 13 and § 18 of the Statute

With regard to the implementation of doctoral studies, reference is made to the “Standards & Recommendations of the Rectorate and Senate on Quality in Doctoral Studies” (Official Bulletin No. 35 of 5 December 2014).

The Joint PhD Programme is implemented jointly by the participating universities while remaining subject to the applicable legal and regulatory framework of each institution. Representatives serving on the Joint PhD Programme Committee are appointed by the legally competent authorities of their respective universities and are entrusted with ensuring the lawful implementation, quality assurance, and fulfilment of the study programme. In carrying out their duties, representatives act in accordance with the regulations, policies, and decisions of their home institution and may not act independently of these obligations. The governance structure of the Joint PhD Programme is therefore designed to balance efficient joint decision-making with the legal responsibilities retained by each participating university.

For all decisions under this curriculum, the Joint PhD Programme committee is responsible for academic coordination, scientific assessment, selection, recommendation, and quality assurance within the Joint PhD Programme. Where a decision requires legal effect under the applicable law, statutes, or institutional regulations of a participating university, the legally binding decision, appointment, approval, admission, or recognition shall be made by the legally competent authority of the respective participating university in accordance with its applicable local regulations. In such cases, the Joint PhD Programme committee’s decision shall be understood as a selection, recommendation, or academic assessment, unless the committee itself is the legally competent authority under the applicable local regulations.

§ 1 General

- (1) The total scope of the Joint PhD Programme in “Medical Systems Biology” is 180 ECTS credits. This corresponds to a planned duration of study of 6 semesters, which corresponds to a minimum of 3 years study duration. Conversion from ECTS credits to ‘ amU Training Hours’, specific to the amU Doctoral Training Department (DFD), will be performed at the time of graduation for students hosted at amU.
- (2) Upon successful completion and passing of the PhD examination, graduates are awarded the academic title Doctor of Philosophy, abbreviated as “PhD”.
- (3) The Joint PhD programme offers multiple advantages over national programmes, such as (i) an enhanced curriculum and networking opportunities through collaboration and mandatory co-supervision, (ii) facilitated access to resources in participating institutions, (iii) multicultural experience and enhanced language skills through collaborative learning, leading to improved possibilities for personal growth, and (iv) high international recognition of the Joint PhD degree, resulting in improved employability and career opportunities for graduates of this Joint PhD Programme.
- (4) Students with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses must not face discrimination in their studies. The principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Federal Equal Treatment Act, the principle of equalisation of disadvantages, and the inclusivity goals of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) apply.
- (5) The doctoral thesis is prepared in a doctorate school within a research unit approved as host unit, under the responsibility of PhD supervisors (see § 3 (2)). It must be part of a scientific, professional, and personal project clearly defined in its objectives and requirements (see § 7).

§ 2 Qualification profile of graduates

- (1) The Joint PhD Programme “Medical Systems Biology” provides project-oriented postgraduate training at the interface of systems biology and medical research. It is designed to support highly talented researchers by equipping them with the theoretical and methodological expertise required to analyse complex biological and medical systems. The Joint PhD Programme aims to enable participants to conduct independent scientific research and to prepare them for advanced careers in academia, industry, and other research-driven fields.

- (2) A key objective of the Joint PhD Programme is to provide highly motivated students in medicine, life sciences, computational technologies and related disciplines with advanced training in the field of medical systems biology. The curriculum integrates computational and experimental approaches to studying biological systems in health and disease.
- (3) Graduates of the Joint PhD Programme will demonstrate:
 - a) Interdisciplinary expertise: A deep understanding of molecular and cellular biology, systems-level approaches, and clinical research questions, combined with strong skills in computational modelling, bioinformatics, and data science.
 - b) Research independence: The capacity to formulate original scientific hypotheses, develop and manage research projects, critically evaluate results, and contribute novel knowledge to the field of medical systems biology.
 - c) International experience and perspective: Through structured opportunities for international exchange and collaboration, graduates gain exposure to diverse research environments, broaden their scientific networks, and acquire the intercultural competence necessary to thrive in global academic and industrial contexts.
 - d) Translational orientation: The capability to bridge fundamental systems biology with clinical applications, supporting the development of precision medicine, novel diagnostics, and therapeutic strategies.
 - e) Professional skills: Experience in scientific communication, grant writing, and publishing in high-impact journals, as well as the ability to present and defend research findings in international contexts.
 - f) Collaboration and leadership: Proven ability to work in interdisciplinary teams that span biology, medicine, computer science, and engineering, and to take on leadership roles in research projects or academic and industrial environments.
 - g) Career readiness: A qualification profile that enables graduates to pursue competitive academic positions, leadership positions in biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries, and impactful careers in healthcare-related innovation, data-driven enterprises, or policy-making sectors.

§ 3 Organization bodies

- (1) Joint PhD Programme committee
 - a) The Joint PhD Programme Committee is responsible for academic coordination, scientific assessment, selection, nomination, recommendation, and quality assurance within the Joint

PhD Programme. Legally binding decisions, appointments, approvals, admissions, or recognitions shall be made in accordance with the applicable local regulations by the legally competent authority of the respective participating university. Unless the Joint PhD Programme Committee itself is the legally competent authority under the applicable local regulations, decisions of the Joint PhD Programme Committee shall be understood as academic assessments, selections, nominations, or recommendations.

- b) The committee shall consist of three representatives from each participating university.
- c) The authority, responsibilities, and decision-making procedures of the Joint PhD Programme committee are further defined in the Consortium Agreement, taking into account the applicable legal and institutional frameworks of the participating universities.
- d) Committee members may participate in oral thesis defences.

(2) PhD supervisors

- a) The PhD supervisors are selected by the PhD student and appointed by the Joint PhD Programme committee.
- b) To align with the CIVIS regulations governing student education across at least three participating universities, the supervisory team must consist of one main supervisor from the hosting (first) CIVIS university and two secondary supervisors from a second and third CIVIS university.
- c) One supervisor must have at least habilitation or equivalent qualification, ideally the main supervisor. All supervisors must have a doctorate relevant for the subject of thesis. If local regulations require exceptions to this rule, the applicable local procedures must be followed.
- d) All three members of the supervisory team must be associated with a CIVIS university participating in the Joint PhD Programme for the full period of the thesis project. If a supervisor becomes unavailable (e.g. due to relocation or contract termination), the CIVIS university concerned must appoint a suitable and fully equivalent replacement. The nominated replacement must be submitted to the Joint PhD Programme committee for approval.
- e) The supervisors meet with the candidate at least once a year to scientifically review the progress of the dissertation project, discuss challenges and next steps, and provide guidance on both research-related and career development issues. The PhD supervisor meetings thus serve as a central forum for constructive scientific feedback and long-term strategic planning.
- f) The supervisors are responsible for ensuring that the doctoral project is coherent, feasible, and aligned with the standards and objectives of the Joint PhD Programme. They support the student in achieving scientific independence while maintaining high academic quality. The supervisors monitor compliance with ethical standards, good scientific practice, and the timely fulfilment of Joint PhD Programme requirements.

- g) Beyond the scientific supervision, the supervision team provides mentorship on transferable skills, networking opportunities, and international exchange options. It encourages the candidate to publish in peer-reviewed journals, be present at international conferences, and engage in interdisciplinary collaboration.
- h) The outcomes of the annual meetings, including an assessment of progress and agreed future milestones, are documented in writing and submitted to the Joint PhD Programme committee. In cases where substantial difficulties or delays are identified, the Joint PhD Programme committee will propose measures to support the student and, if necessary, initiate corrective steps together with the head of the doctoral school.
- i) The supervisory team together with the Joint PhD Programme committee thereby ensure transparency, accountability, and consistency of supervision across the Joint PhD Programme and contributes to the overall quality assurance of doctoral training.

(3) PhD external guides

- a) The PhD external guides, comparable to the French “Comité de Suivi Individuel“, provide independent guidance of the doctoral trajectory. Their responsibilities include monitoring the candidate’s research progress and the fulfilment of training objectives, assessing the quality of supervision and working conditions, and serving as impartial points of contact for the doctoral candidate.
- b) The PhD external guides and doctoral candidate meet once a year and report to the Joint PhD Programme committee. In cases where substantial difficulties or issues are identified, the Joint PhD Programme committee will propose measures to support the student and, if necessary, initiate corrective steps together with the external guides and the head of the doctoral school.
- c) The PhD external guides must consist of at least three individuals:
 - i. The first guide must hold at least a habilitation or equivalent qualification. The guide is a specialist in the Life Sciences and must be a member of, or formally affiliated with, the doctoral school in which the candidate is enrolled.
 - ii. The second guide must hold a doctoral degree and shall not have a direct scientific connection to the thesis topic.
 - iii. The third guide must be a graduate student or early career post-doc associated with the doctoral school.
- d) External guides may not serve as supervisors of the doctoral candidate, nor may they act as reviewers of the thesis.

§ 4 Admission requirements

- (1) The general university entrance qualification for admission to a doctoral degree programme must be proven by the completion of a relevant diploma or master's degree programme or another relevant degree programme of at least the same higher education level at a recognised domestic or foreign post-secondary educational institution (see preamble).
Participating CIVIS universities recognize the following degrees in particular to qualify for admission to the doctoral programme:
 - a) Medicine or dentistry (final university degree)
 - b) Master's degree Medical Biology (USBG)
 - c) Master's degree Molecular Biology (USBG/Johannes Kepler Universität Linz)
 - d) Master's degree Biology and Health (amU)
 - e) Master's degree Immunology (amU)
 - f) Master's degree Integrative Biology and Physiology (amU)
 - g) Master's degree Molecular Medicine (EKUT)
- (2) Applicants with other master's degrees, including diploma from a university of applied sciences, are eligible if they comply with § 2 (3) and if a screening process confirms that they are qualified according to local legal guidelines (see preamble) to carry out academic work in the doctoral subject. Supplementary courses may be prescribed to compensate for significant subject-related differences and must be passed by the end of the second semester of the doctoral programme. The Joint PhD Programme committee may determine which of these supplementary examinations are a prerequisite for taking examinations provided for in the doctoral programme curriculum.
- (3) Applicants must demonstrate exceptional subject and methodological competence, meeting the standards expected of top-tier doctoral candidates in the relevant PhD programme and research area.
 - a) A minimum of 12 ECTS credits in life sciences, medicine, or subject areas relevant to the Joint PhD Programme must be presented to and acknowledged by the Joint PhD Programme committee. This shall include a minimum of 6 ECTS credits of practical laboratory courses.
 - b) If the minimum of 12 ECTS credits in subject areas relevant to the Joint PhD Programme are not met, the Joint PhD Programme committee shall determine the modules to be completed amounting up to 12 ECTS credits. These credits must be earned during the first year of the Joint PhD Programme.
- (4) Admission can also be granted based on the completion of a relevant Bachelor's degree programme if it was completed within the prescribed period of study and with particular academic success. The

Joint PhD Programme Committee shall evaluate the academic suitability of the applicant and may issue a recommendation. The decision as to whether a Bachelor's degree is sufficient for admission, and any admission based on this provision, shall require the explicit approval of the legally competent authority responsible for doctoral admissions at the hosting university (e.g. Rectorate, Dean, Doctoral Committee, or equivalent body) and must be in accordance with the applicable local regulations. The Joint PhD Programme committee shall issue more detailed academic admission requirements in accordance with the recommendations, conditions, and requirements established by the competent authority of the hosting university. This may include complementary courses to be completed within the PhD study period.

- (5) All applicants must demonstrate their motivation, scientific potential, and ability to integrate the project into a bio-medical research field at participating CIVIS universities, while actively contributing to the European CIVIS network (see § 5 admission details).

§ 5 Admission to the Joint PhD Programme

- (1) The Joint PhD Programme committee ensures that relevant local decision-making and regulatory bodies are formally included in the admission process and that their decisions are adhered to, in accordance with local guidelines.
- (2) Applicants must submit the following documents to the Joint PhD Programme committee when applying for admission to the Joint PhD Programme:
 - a) Master, Bachelor or other relevant diploma with detailed transcript of records
 - b) Curriculum vitae, including proof of previous scientific practice (for example publications and research activities).
 - c) Letter of motivation regarding the applicant's personal suitability for the Joint PhD Programme.
 - d) Description of the thesis project and planned connection to research within the CIVIS university alliance.
 - e) Written declaration of willingness by three persons from three distinct CIVIS universities participating in the Joint PhD Programme to supervise the prospective thesis project and form the student's PhD supervisors (see § 3 (3)).
 - f) Proof of sufficient English-language proficiency: Applicants whose native language is English, or who did not complete their qualifying degree in English must provide a certificate showing they have passed one of the following language tests: Test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL; ≥ 95), International English Language Testing System (IELTS; ≥ 6.5), or Cambridge Main Suite of English examinations ($\geq C1$). The Joint PhD Programme committee may grant an exemption from these standard entry scores and admit applicants who present a minimum

score of TOEFL 75 or IELTS 6.0. Such admission shall be conditional, provided that appropriate language support measures are undertaken and that the required C1 level (or equivalent test result) is achieved within 12 months of enrolment or by the end of the first academic year, as determined by the Joint PhD Programme.

§ 6 Structure and content of the Joint PhD Programme

The Joint PhD Programme in “Medical Systems Biology” comprises 4 modules. 8 ECTS credits are allocated to thesis seminars (see § 8). 12 ECTS credits are allocated to mandatory courses and 10 ECTS credits are allocated to elective courses (see § 8). 150 ECTS credits are allocated to the thesis. This includes the project proposal talk, which is worth 12 ECTS credits, including its presentation, and the thesis defence, which is worth 8 ECTS credits.

	1 st sem.	2 nd sem.	3 rd sem.	4 th sem.	5 th sem.	6 th sem.	ECTS
Module1: Thesis seminars	Seminar 1 1.25 ECTS	Seminar 2 1.25 ECTS	Seminar 3 1.25 ECTS	Seminar 4 1.25 ECTS	Seminar 5 1.25 ECTS	Seminar 6 including an extended progress report 1.75 ECTS	8
Module 2: Mandatory courses	Good scientific practice (1 ECTS; Lecture/works hop) Experimental design in Systems Biology (1.5 ECTS; Lecture/works hop) Statistics, Visualisation and More (0.5 ECTS; Lecture/works hop)	Scientific Writing and Presentation Skills (1 ECTS; Lecture/works hop) Bioinformatics for Life Scientists OR Introduction to Immunology, Neuroscience, and Tumourbiology (2 ECTS; Lecture/works hop)	Lab internship (6 ECTS ,workshop)				12
Module 3: Elective courses			Elective courses from hosting university, blended intensity programmes/workshops/lectures/... from CIVIS alliance.				10
Module 4: Thesis	Thesis project proposal talk (12 ECTS)					Thesis defence (8 ECTS)	150
Total							180

Table 1. Modules and overview of the Joint PhD Programme. ECTS: ECTS credits

§ 7 Thesis project proposal

- (1) The written thesis project proposal and its presentation are worth 12 ECTS credits in the Joint PhD Programme in “Medical Systems Biology”.
- (2) The Joint PhD Programme committee ensures that relevant local decision-making and regulatory bodies are formally included in the project proposal approval process and that their decisions are adhered to, in accordance with local guidelines.
- (3) At the latest, 4 months after admission to the Joint PhD Programme, the PhD student must submit a 3-page proposal for the planned research project, the scientific background of the project, (if available) preliminary results, a working hypothesis, aims, methods, and a timeline for the thesis project to the Joint PhD Programme committee. This deadline may be extended if additional requirements must be fulfilled under § 4 (2) or § 4 (3).
- (4) The project proposal must be acknowledged by the main supervisor and submitted to the Joint PhD Programme committee and include the planned date and the format (in-person, hybrid or online) of the 1st PhD supervisors’ meeting.
- (5) Before the thesis project proposal is approved, an oral presentation and discussion of the thesis project has to be completed in front of 2 reviewers appointed by the Joint PhD Programme committee according to the hosting universities legal guidelines (see preamble). These reviewers report on the suitability of the proposed project in alignment with this Joint PhD Programme and local legal guidelines (see preamble). The presentation must be open to the public (in-person or hybrid) and can be part of the thesis seminars. During the discussion, the doctoral candidate should receive suggestions for their thesis concept.
- (6) The project proposal can be subject to revision in case it is not considered suitable by the reviewers.
- (7) After approval of the thesis project proposal, a supervision agreement must be concluded between the supervisors and the doctoral candidate in accordance with the requirements of the participating CIVIS universities.

§ 8 Thesis seminars

- (1) In the Joint PhD Programme “Medical Systems Biology”, at least six thesis seminars must be successfully completed, the first 5 seminars worth 1.25 ECTS credits each and the final seminar including an extended progress report by the PhD candidate worth 1.75 ECTS credits, for a total of 8 ECTS credits. The thesis seminars to be attended must be determined by the main supervisor in consultation with the doctoral candidate and the doctoral school. They must be related to the thesis and serve to regularly present the progress of the work.
- (2) Only one thesis seminar can be completed before the dissertation project proposal is approved. Approval of the thesis project proposal is a prerequisite for participation in all further thesis seminars. Decisions on exceptions are made by the Joint PhD Programme committee.

§ 9 Courses

- (1) As a rule, every doctoral candidate enrolled in the Joint PhD Programme “Medical Systems Biology” must pass the following mandatory courses at a total of 12 ECTS credits within the first year of study:
 - a) Good scientific practice: research ethics, scientific integrity and open science (1 ECTS credits; lecture/workshop; grading: exam)
 - b) Experimental design in Systems Biology (1.5 ECTS credits; lecture/workshop; grading: presentation and exam)
 - c) Statistics, Visualisation and More (0.5 ECTS credits; lecture/workshop; grading: homework)
 - d) Scientific Writing and Presentation Skills (1 ECTS credits; lecture/workshop; grading: presentation and homework)
 - e) Each doctoral student must complete one of the following elective courses (2 ECTS each). The choice should be made together with the PhD supervisors, based on the students previous academic background, to ensure complementary knowledge.
 - i. Bioinformatics for Life Scientists (lecture/workshop; grading: exam)
 - ii. Introduction to Immunology, Neuroscience, and Tumourbiology (lecture/workshop; grading: exam)
 - f) Students must complete an external lab internship. This includes at least 4 weeks of international mobility at a CIVIS university other than the host institution, earning a total of 6 ECTS credits and must be undertaken on a full-time basis (workshop; grading: report).

- (2) In the Joint PhD Programme “Medical Systems Biology”, doctoral candidates must successfully complete elective courses amounting to at least 10 ECTS credits. Eligible electives include local and/or CIVIS courses within the CIVIS focus areas of e.g. Health and/or Digital and Technological Transformation, which may involve mobility to another CIVIS university. The Joint PhD Programme committee shall be responsible for the formal recognition of these courses as fulfilling the elective requirement. Course type and grading procedure depends on selected courses and is described individually in the currently valid course portfolio.

§ 10 Thesis

- (1) The thesis must be written in English.
- (2) The thesis must include a statutory declaration in which the candidate affirms the independent authorship of the thesis, the proper acknowledgment of all sources, and the originality of the submitted work. In addition, the candidate acknowledges the principles of scientific integrity that guide doctoral research—intellectual rigor, ethical responsibility, transparency in methods and results, and respect for established standards of academic conduct. By completing the doctorate, the candidate commits to upholding these principles in their future professional activities, regardless of field or sector. The declaration is signed within the thesis and may be cited during the thesis defence.
- (3) Regardless of the thesis format, as a rule, each doctoral candidate must normally demonstrate scientific output through at least one first-author original research publication. Any deviation from this requirement must be justified by the candidate and their supervisors and approved by the Joint PhD Programme committee. In such cases, the candidate and supervisors must propose appropriate alternative indicators of research quality, which are subject to approval by the Joint PhD Programme committee. In justified cases, an accepted patent may be considered in place of a first-author publication. In such cases, the main supervisor must submit a written justification to the Joint PhD Programme committee demonstrating the patent’s scientific quality, originality, evidence of appropriate evaluation or review, its significance for the field, and the candidate’s leading contribution of the patent, its contribution to the field, and the candidate’s leading role.
- (4) In addition to the general thesis requirements defined in paragraph (3), a thesis in the form of a collection of scientific publications (cumulative thesis) is permissible, provided that it contains a detailed introduction and discussion. A doctoral candidate is eligible for a cumulative thesis if they fulfil the following prerequisites:

- a) At least one publication as first author that is either published, in print or accepted for publication. Any deviation from this requirement must be justified by the candidate and its supervisors and approved by the Joint PhD Programme committee.
 - b) A second first authorship has been submitted (confirmation by the journal) or uploaded to a preprint server. As an alternative to a second first authorship, two submitted co-authorships can be part of the cumulative thesis.
 - c) Shared first authorships are considered equivalent to a full first authorship.
 - d) In addition, review articles can be submitted as part of a cumulative thesis. However, review articles do not replace any of the above-mentioned minimum requirements.
- (5) The progress of the thesis must be presented at least three times during the Joint PhD Programme to a specialist audience in the form of a lecture (including a thesis project presentation, e.g. in the context of thesis seminars (see § 8) or departmental colloquia).
- (6) Regarding the appointment of thesis reviewers, a ranked list of potential reviewers can be submitted by the doctoral candidate and the respective supervisory team to the Joint PhD Programme committee. If no consensus is achieved, individual proposals can be submitted.
- (7) The Joint PhD Programme committee appoints two reviewers for the thesis evaluation, who must possess habilitation or equivalent qualification. The reviewers must not be a member of the supervising team and must not be affiliated with the same institute as the main PhD supervisor. Ideally, the reviewers have not collaborated with the supervisors and/or candidate within the last 5 years.
- (8) Reviewers are expected to submit their reports to the Joint PhD Programme committee within two months of receiving the thesis. If a review is not completed within this timeframe, the Joint PhD Programme committee may appoint a new reviewer.
- (9) If a reviewer finds weaknesses in the thesis without rejecting it altogether, the Joint PhD Programme committee may return the thesis for one round of revisions within a set deadline. The doctoral examination process is suspended until the thesis is resubmitted. If the thesis is resubmitted, the thesis in its reworked form then becomes the subject of the process, even if the recommendation for a reworking was not met or was only partially met. If the candidate does not comply with the time limit, the process will be continued with the thesis in the form which has been submitted, unless the candidate is not at fault for the time limit being exceeded.

- (10) The processing, storage, and publication of the thesis shall be organized by the hosting university and shall follow the local legal guidelines. Where the hosting university requires publication prior to the dissertation defence, the doctoral candidate must comply with this requirement. Where later publication is permitted, the doctoral candidate is generally obliged to publish the thesis within two years of the defence date. The doctoral candidate may apply to the Joint PhD Programme committee for an extension of this deadline, providing justification, which may include, for example, publisher-related delays, intellectual property or confidentiality constraints, legal or regulatory requirements, substantial post-defence revisions, documented personal circumstances, or other delays beyond the doctoral candidate's control - with the extension process formally including the relevant local decision-making and regulatory bodies and adhering to their decisions, in accordance with local guidelines. Failure to comply with the applicable publication requirements or to provide the required number of archive copies within the deadlines defined by the hosting university may result in the loss of all rights acquired as a result of the examination.

§ 11 Thesis defence

- (1) Admission to the thesis defence requires the positive completion of all thesis seminars and mandatory courses, lab internship(s), sufficient elective courses, and a positive assessment of the thesis by both reviewers.
- (2) The defence of the thesis is public.
- (3) The public thesis defence is conducted by a defence jury. The main supervisor chairs the defence jury but does not participate in the decision making (§ 11 (6)). Where local regulations require a different chair, the main supervisor may delegate the role. The two co-supervisors can participate as panellists. At least two additional panellists, with at least one of them outside the CIVIS alliance must be appointed additionally. At least half of the jury members must be external to the research unit where the doctorate was prepared. At least half of the jury must consist of individuals of rank A, professors, research directors, or equivalent.
- (4) The thesis defence begins with the presentation of the contents and results of the thesis project by the doctoral candidate, which usually lasts around 30 minutes.
- (5) The presentation is followed by a general, public discussion moderated by the chairperson of the defence jury.

- (6) After the public discussion, the members of the defence jury conduct a public oral examination with the doctoral candidate. Drawing on the written thesis and the referees' reports, they question the candidate to assess their command of the subject area (e.g. neurosciences, immunology, tumour biology). The examination lasts no longer than one hour.
- (7) The thesis is evaluated by the jury based on the reviewers' reports and the defence examination. The jury then assigns one of three outcomes: 'failed', 'passed', or 'passed with distinction'.
- (8) After completion of the examination procedure, the doctoral candidate shall, upon application, be granted access to the reviewers' and examiners' reports relating to the thesis and to the examination records. The application is to be submitted to the head of the Joint PhD Programme committee, who shall determine the time and place for access. The retention period and availability of the records shall be governed by the data protection regulations and legal requirements applicable to the hosting university.

§ 12 Conferral of the title of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

- (1) After the Joint PhD Programme has been successfully completed and the required archive copies of the thesis have been submitted, the participating universities jointly confer the academic degree "Doctor of Philosophy" (PhD) on the doctoral candidate.
- (2) A certificate of conferral is issued in English. It contains the title and the grade of the doctorate and is dated on the day of submission of the deposit copies. In agreement with local legal guidelines (see preamble), the certificate is signed by the President/rector and/or responsible Vice-president/Vice-rector and/or Dean of the hosting university and bears the seal of the participating universities.
- (3) The conferral carries with it the right to use the academic title Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

§ 13 Invalidity of doctoral qualification process and revocation of doctoral degree

- (1) The doctoral process may be refused if information provided in the required documentation turns out to be untrue and liable to mislead the Joint PhD Programme committee regarding the facts, particularly the applicant's qualifications, the required academic qualifications or doctoral qualification processes begun but not completed at other universities.

- (2) If the candidate attempts to influence the result of his/her assessed work using deception or resources which are not permitted, the relevant work will be rejected with a grade of “failed”. This is to be decided by the defence jury, according to local regulations. In grave cases of attempted deception in the oral defence, any repetition of the exam may be ruled out.
- (3) If it becomes clear after notification of the assessment of doctoral work that the candidate has used deception to produce this work, that significant requirements for the doctorate were erroneously believed to have been met, or that other statutory violations exist, the relevant decisions may be cancelled. If the doctoral degree certificate has already been issued, it will in this case be recalled. The doctoral degree may also be withdrawn on the basis of relevant legal provisions.

§ 14 Entry into force

The curriculum shall enter into force on 01.10.2026.