

A PhD – the right thing for me?

Decision-making aids for and against a doctorate



Agenda

- General facts and figures on doctorate studies in Germany/University of Bielefeld
- Legal framework for a doctorate; specifics Uni Bielefeld
- Decisions that need to be made
- Personal requirements
- General procedure of a doctorate
- Dimensions of the doctorate
 - Goals
 - Type of doctorate
 - Topic of the doctorate → Content of the Dissertation
 - Supervision of the doctorate
 - Structure of the doctoral phase
- Counselling and support services for young researchers

General facts and figures on the doctorate in Germany / Uni Bielefeld

Phd / doctorate figures

- Doctorate duration between 4 - 4.5 years
- The average age of doctoral graduates is 30 years at graduation
- On average, every 5th drops out of the doctorate
- Approximately 15 per cent of doctoral researchers have one or more children.



Legal framework for a doctorate; specifics Uni Bielefeld

The formal Admission requirements are regulated by the general regulation of doctoral studies of the university and the doctoral regulations of the respective faculties.

- An above-average university degree is required
Master, Diploma, State Examination, Magister
(special attention to the grade of the final paper)
- Admission to a doctorate with a degree from a university of applied sciences is subject to further conditions
(specific "aptitude testing procedures" are formulated in the doctorate regulations in each case)
- In the case of degrees obtained outside Germany, it is essential to have the legal acceptance checked.
- There is no age restriction

Enrolment does not automatically mean that funding has been arranged...

Decisions that need to be made:

- **Decisions before the doctoral phase:** Why do I want to do a doctorate? What are the professional and personal requirements for a phd, doctorate? How do I finance the transition from studies to a phd, doctorate? Under what other conditions do I want to and can I complete a phd, doctorate? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a phd / doctorate on the labour market?
What happens after the phd? Do I want to pursue an academic career? What alternative career paths will then be open to me?
- **Decisions during the doctoral phase:** type of phd, environment, supervision, (further) funding, changes in the content of one's own research with an impact on the history of the phd phase
What happens after the phd? Do I want to pursue an academic career? What alternative career paths will then be open to me?

Personal requirements for a doctorate

In addition to specialist knowledge and a pronounced interest in scientific work, including research and writing skills, other interdisciplinary or personal skills and competences are important for a doctorate

- ✓ Discipline
- ✓ Endurance
- ✓ Perseverance
- ✓ Organisational skills
- ✓ Structured way of working
- ✓ Networking skills
- ✓ Self-motivation
- ✓ Frustration tolerance
- ✓ Independence
- ✓ Stress resistance
- ✓ Time and self-management
- ✓ Communication and presentation skills
- ✓ Willingness to travel/mobility
- ✓ Foreign language competence
- ✓ Intercultural competence
- ✓ Ability to work in a team

Test: Are you the type for a doctorate?

<https://www.academics.de/angebote/promotion-test-soll-ich-promovieren>

General procedure of a doctorate

1. Choice of the doctoral topic
2. Search for a supervisor
3. Admission as doctoral student by the doctoral committee and enrolment
4. Preparation of the dissertation
5. Opening of the doctoral procedure (submission of the (doctoral) thesis)
6. Acceptance of the (doctoral) thesis and delivery
7. Oral examination (disputation)
8. Publication
9. Presentation of the doctoral degree certificate

The phases can vary greatly in length and intensity over months or years

Dimensions of the doctorate as a qualification step: This needs to be clarified at an early stage

- Goals of the doctorate: career paths, research interests, alternative career paths
- Type of doctorate: individual or structured? Bi-national? In cooperation with a university of applied sciences or HAW? Part-time?
- Topic of the phd, dissertation: Key exposé
- Supervision of the doctorate: At least the first supervisor must be determined at an early stage.
- Structure of the doctoral phase: monographic or cumulative?
- Financing: PhD positions, scholarships, part-time income

➤ **Goals of the doctorate**

- Classical academic career with the goal of professorship
- Established position among non-professorial academic staff (not yet very widespread or in the process of being established)
- Higher entry / improved opportunities in business and industry or public administration
- Purely non-material value of the phd, doctorate

Career prospects in science

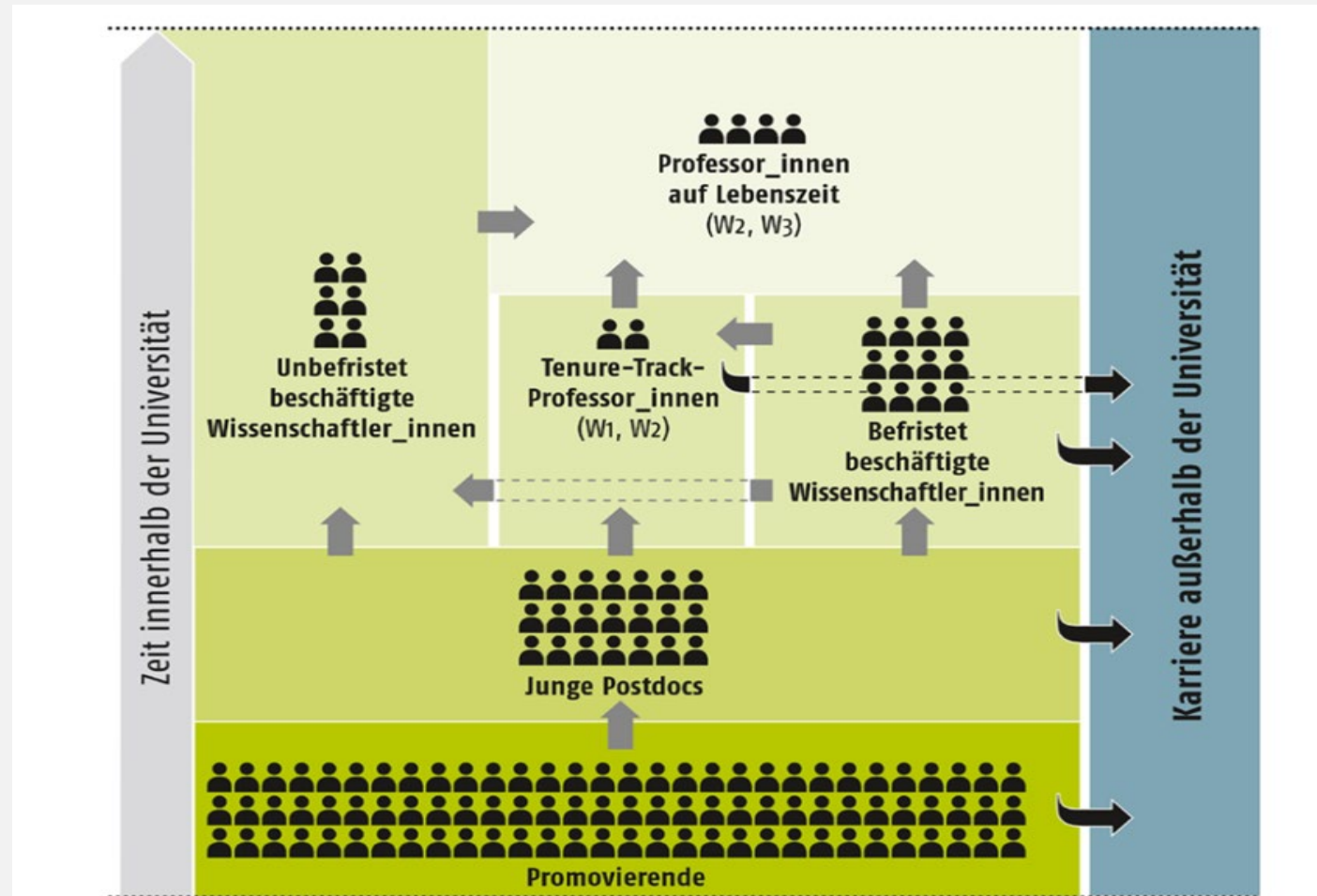


Abb 1. Übergangsmöglichkeiten zwischen Karrierestufen im Wissenschaftssystem und aus dem Wissenschaftssystem hinaus (↑ Übergang innerhalb der Universität, ↪ Übergang in außeruniversitäre Karrieren).

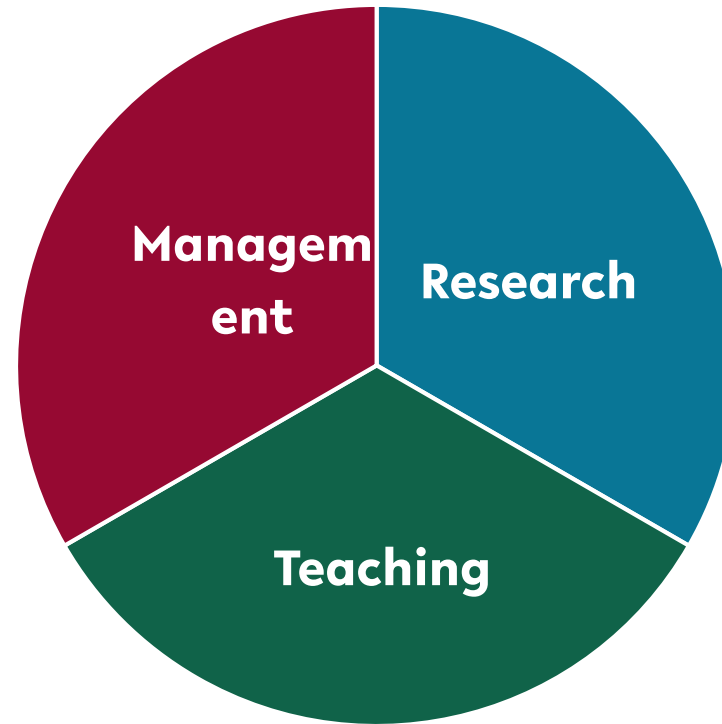
Requirements for a career in academia

E.g.

- ❖ Acquisition of third-party funding
- ❖ Organising conference
- ❖ Involvement in university committees

E.g.

- ❖ Teaching courses
- ❖ Supervision of students



E.g.

- ❖ Publications
- ❖ Talks
- ❖ (International) research cooperation

The requirements of academic vs. non-academic careers

Careers in academia

- PhD is a must.
- Excellent professional achievements in science (publications, third party funding, awards, etc.) as a measurement of success.
- Often long path with temporary contracts and (international) mobility until being offered a permanent position/professorship.

Careers outside academia

- PhD as a degree might not necessarily be required, practical experience is often more important, *i.e.* include PhD in your CV as education and work experience.
- Competencies and soft skills acquired in academia must be transferred to non-university fields of work, *i.e.* make them understandable for non-experts.
- Vital to present a convincing motivation for working outside of academia. Employers don't want to be seen as 2nd choice, they want to be sure that PhDs have said goodbye to science careers.

➤ Type of doctorate

- Internal (traditionally at a chair)
- External / Individual
- Structured
 - Doctoral programme
 - Research Training Group
 - Graduate school
- Abroad

In any case, a doctorate is only possible with a university supervisor (with the right to award a doctorate!).

➤ **Topic of the dissertation**

Many preparatory steps can help in choosing a topic:

- Capture own subject interest
- An open ear for the interesting discourses
- Early specialisation in studies
- Own master thesis
- Design the choice of topic with a view to later career aspirations
- Concretisation through exchange with first or second supervisor
- Writing an exposé! Keeping an eye on different variants and possibilities

➤ Supervision of the doctorate

How do I find a supervisor?

- In the department → Focus of research, projects
- Through university jobs or involvement in the subject
- Literature search
- Networks
- Symposia
- Collaborative Research Centres (SFB) (DFG)
- Sociability and networking

➤ **Structure of dissertation thesis**

A distinction is made between two types of dissertation

- Monograph
- Cumulative (doctoral) thesis

A doctoral thesis must (this is also stated in the doctoral regulations)...

- be written independently
- contain new scientific findings or be of scientifically noteworthy quality

➤ Financing the doctorate phase

Self-financing through

- Job, savings, loans, parents, spouse

Employment contract in a university environment

Employment in the public sector according to TV-L 13 (usually part-time between 50-67%)

- Coverage of health, unemployment and pension insurance

Scholarship

DFG, scholarship funds and foundations, DAAD [German Academic Exchange Service].

- Integration into funding networks, third-party funding experience

Other funding opportunities: Housing allowance, tax relief, general benefits for student status

Support at Bielefeld University

- **Graduate Centre**
- **Career Service**
- **Doctorate abroad: International Office**
- **Questions about writing: Writing Centre**
- **Disabled persons' representative or central contact point**

Accessibility

- **Family service**
- **PEP**
- **Equality**

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