Consensus document of the ORPHEUS PhD Candidates' Workshop
Friday 11th - Saturday 12th September 2015 in Cologne, Germany

"PhD Candidates' role within ORPHEUS: Current and future perspectives"

The ORPHEUS PhD candidates Workshop "PhD Candidate's role within ORPHEUS: Current and future perspectives" organized by the PhD candidates' representatives and the Center for Molecular Medicine Cologne (CMMC) of the University of Cologne held on September 11 - 12, 2015 focused on the implementation of the ORPHEUS standards in the CMMC. The PhD programs of the CMMC are generally in accordance with the basic standards of the ORPHEUS-AMSE-WFME standards. However, the participants agreed that there are specific topics that can still be improved. The points stated in this consensus document are the results of different experiences, opinions as well as the research environment of the participants.

3.) Admission policy and criteria

The financing of the planned PhD project should be discussed before the initiation of the PhD project. There should be transparency about the planned financing among the PhD candidate, the doctoral school and the thesis supervisor(s), to allow for timely acquisition of additional funding, if necessary.

The paragraph referring to external assessment of the PhD project prior to the enrolment in a doctoral school should be considered as a "Basic standard" instead of "Quality development".

4.) PhD training programme

There should be transparency about which courses are recognized with ECTS credits and with how many ECTS. This information should be published and up to date on the website of the PhD programme. However, formalized course work should be expressed in hours rather than months.

Courses in ethics and good conduct in research should be obligatory.

PhD candidates should have the opportunity to present their results themselves at international conferences and meetings of their field of research at least twice during their PhD programme.

Confidential conflict counselling concerning the PhD programme, supervision, etc. as well as personal matters should be offered by the graduate school.

To ensure efficient and valuable feedback on the PhD candidate's progress performance and research perspective, the existing annual meeting with the tutors should be modified to include supervisor(s). A written report by the PhD candidate
should be submitted to the tutors and supervisor(s) at least 2 weeks prior to the meeting.

This report should include:
• A summary and discussion of the results obtained over the year(s)
• Further perspectives and plans for the next year(s)
• Previous and future activities/coursework

During the meeting, the content shall be discussed by all parties and constructive feedback and advice should be given to the PhD candidate. At some point during the meeting, a comfortable environment for the PhD candidate, in the absence of the supervisor(s), should be created in order to give feedback about the supervision or any other pressing matter.

5.) Supervision
Supervisors should have obligatory training in supervision. This training should include topics such as intercultural differences to facilitate work in an international research environment.

Tutors should follow an open door policy and should treat PhD candidates' issues as confidential.

6.) PhD thesis
At least one article accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal should be obligatory for graduation. In case the PhD candidate does not have a publication at the time of his/her thesis defence, the supervisor(s) has to justify this to the assessment committee, but the student should be allowed to pass.

To make it accessible for the international scientific community, the thesis preferably should be written in English and an abstract has to be included in the national language.

7.) Assessment
The thesis supervisor(s) should not be member(s) of the assessment committee to avoid conflict of interest.

The doctoral school should provide a list of (external) experts from which the thesis supervisor(s) and the PhD candidate will choose the experts for the assessment committee.

8.) Structure
PhD supervisors should be assessed regularly based on:
• PhD thesis completion rates
• Frequency of conference attendance of their PhD candidates
• Number of publications of their PhD candidates

In addition, PhD candidates should be given the opportunity to evaluate their supervision e.g. in form of an exit survey upon interruption or successful completion of their PhD program.
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