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Joint press release

German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina

acatech – National Academy of Science and Engineering

Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities

1 August 2018

The German Academies of Sciences offer Recommendations for the Reform of Doctoral Practices

Institutional responsibility for the doctorate at universities must be strengthened. This is the recommendation offered in the statement “Doctorate in Transition”, now available in English, by the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, acatech – National Academy of Sciences and Engineering, and the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities. The statement analyzes the current situation in Germany in comparison with other countries, offering recommendations for improving doctoral practices.

The doctorate plays a central role in science. It is still a prerequisite for the academic careers of young scientists, and an indispensable element in making new discoveries and in reviewing continually the truths that have been passed down.

The understanding of what a doctorate is and the procedures towards obtaining a scientific doctoral degree are currently undergoing a period of transition. This is evident in recent developments and discussions in higher education policy in Germany, for instance, concerning the question of granting the right to award doctorates to universities of applied sciences or non-university research institutions, and also evident in the new orientation of scientific doctorates in medicine. Considerations regarding EU-wide standardisations in the context of the Bologna Process should also be mentioned. Moreover, the question concerning ethical and scientific standards and their review has taken centre stage, especially since the debate on plagiarism.

In their statement “Doctorate in Transition”, experts of the working group of the academies German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, acatech – National Academy of Sciences and Engineering, and the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities, offer a grounded analysis of the current situation in Germany; they identify deficits and put forward recommendations for reform for scientific and political actors. To improve quality assurance, they recommend, for instance, that the standards and admission requirements be harmonised across disciplines, that the awarding of grades be more differentiated and transparent and that the principle of joint supervision by two professors from different academic institutions be encouraged. By means of this principle, cooperative doctorates would acquire the status of normal cases. As the speaker of the working group, Professor Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer (University of Leipzig), explains: “If, for instance, a scientific project at a university of applied sciences or at a non-university research institution is defined such that it can be co-supervised as a doctorate project by colleagues at a university from a relevant discipline, then a quality assurance of the doctorate is built in from the outset”. Then there would be no need for specific cooperation contracts and other bureaucratic procedures.

The statement “Doctorate in Transition” is freely accessible here:

www.leopoldina.org/en/publications/detailview/publication/promotion-im-umbruch-2017

www.akademienunion.de/neuerscheinungen

www.acatech.de/publikationen

The German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, acatech – the National Academy of Science and Engineering, and the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities provide policymakers and society with independent, science-based guidance on issues of crucial importance for our future. The Academy's members and the other experts are outstanding researchers from Germany and abroad. Working in interdisciplinary groups, they draft statements that are published in the series of papers *Schriftenreihe zur wissenschaftsbasierten Politikberatung* after being externally reviewed and subsequently adopted by the Standing Committee of the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina. The Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities/Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities was lead coordinator of the project "Doctorate in Transition".

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Contact:

Dr Annette Schaefer, Head of Department Press and Public Relations
Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities
Phone: +49 (0)30 325 98 73-70
schaefer@akademienunion-berlin.de

Further Contacts:

Caroline Wichmann, Head of Department Press and Public Relations
German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina
Phone: +49 (0)345 472 39-800
presse@leopoldina.org

Christoph Uhlhaas, Head of Communications
acatech – National Academy of Science and Engineering
Phone: +49 (089) 52 03 09 60
uhlhaas@acatech.de