

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in
Higher Education



Specific quality standards
for activities related to doctoral study domains,
at higher education institutions
in the Republic of Moldova

Bucharest
2026
www.aracis.ro

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I. Legal Framework

The legal framework of the relationships concerning the design, organisation, operation and development of the education system in the Republic of Moldova is set forth in the *Education code of the Republic of Moldova, no. 152 of 17 July 2014*, as further amended and supplemented, hereinafter the *Code*¹.

Higher education institutions may organise doctoral studies in line with the provisions of the Code, **art. 76** para. (2) letter c and para. (3), **art. 78** para. (2), **art. 82** para. (3) letter c, **art. 92** para. (1) letter a, **art. 92** para. (7), **art. 94**, **art. 107** para. (4), **art. 116** para. (3) and (4), **art. 119** para. (1) letter b) and c), **art. 121** para. (3), **art. 122** para. (7), and the provisions of the *Regulation on organising doctoral studies, cycle III*, approved by Government Decision no. HG1007/2014 of 10.12.2014, as further amended and supplemented, hereinafter the *Regulation*². The *framework plan for doctoral studies*, hereinafter the *Framework Plan*³, is approved by Order no. 1036/2020 of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research of the Republic of Moldova.

The general framework for the evaluation and classification of doctoral theses is described in the *Regulation on assigning grades to doctoral theses*⁴ approved by Order no. 514/2017 of the Minister of Education, Culture and Research of the Republic of Moldova. The stages, requirements and responsibilities in the process of conferring and confirming scientific titles are established in the *Methodology for conferring and confirming scientific titles*, approved by Government Decision no. 497/2019, hereinafter the *Methodology*⁵.

According to the provisions of **art. 32** of *Law no. 199/2023*⁶, as further amended and supplemented, ARACIS drafts **specific learning-outcome-centred quality standards** for how the activities pertaining to higher education studies are carried out, differentiated per modes, study domains and education cycles.

II. Study duration and qualification level

Doctoral studies are finalised with a **level 8** qualification according to the National Qualifications Framework (CNC)⁷.

According to the *Regulation*, as a rule, the duration of the doctoral programme in full-time and distance learning is **3 years**. As an exception, for human medical studies, veterinary medicine studies, agriculture, biological sciences, and pharmaceutical sciences, as a rule, the duration of doctoral programmes is **4 years**. The duration of part-time doctoral studies is **one year longer** than the duration of full-time or distance learning. Para. 87 – 91 of the *Regulation* stipulate the requirements for extending or suspending doctoral studies.

¹ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=153378&lang=ro

² https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=154189&lang=ro

³ https://new.mec.gov.md/sites/default/files/2026-05/plan_cadru_doctorat.pdf

⁴ https://new.mec.gov.md/sites/default/files/2026-05/ordin_regulament_calificative.pdf

⁵ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=144338&lang=ro

⁶ <https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/lege-199-2023.pdf>

⁷ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=137990&lang=ro

III. Admission

Admission into doctoral studies shall follow the *methodology for admission into doctoral studies* of the institution organising doctoral studies, based on a competition. Doctoral candidates shall be selected for a vacancy by the PhD supervisor who will supervise them. PhD supervisors shall participate in a scientific project competition, based on which the places covered by the state budget shall be allocated as per **para. 126** of the *Regulation*.

The admission competition is only opened to **graduates holding a master (cycle II) diploma** or an equivalent document **in the vocational training domain that matches the doctoral study domain**.

Admission shall observe the principles of fairness, inclusion, equality and non-discrimination.

Information on the selection and admission procedures, evaluation criteria and other information relevant to the admission into doctoral studies shall be published on the institution's official website.

IV. Content and organisation of the education process

Doctoral programmes shall be delivered in **doctoral schools** organised within **higher education institutions** or in national and international **consortia or partnerships**, including those in which science and innovation organisations participate, hereinafter called institutions organising doctoral studies (IOSD).

Doctoral schools shall be formed with at least **10 PhD supervisors**, as provided in **para. 24 - 48** of the *Regulation*. The general framework within which doctoral schools are organised and operated is established by the provisions of the *Regulation*, the *institutional regulation on the organisation and delivery of doctoral programmes*, and may be complemented by provisions of the *individual doctoral school's regulations*, in observance of the law.

To organise doctoral studies, the institution shall set up a **Scientific Council**, chaired by a president appointed according to the *institutional regulation* of the IOSD, in compliance with the provisions of **para.10 - 17** of the *Regulation*.

Doctoral studies may also be organised in **cotutelle**, in which case doctoral students work under the concomitant guidance of a PhD supervisor from the Republic of Moldova and a PhD supervisor from another country, or under the concomitant supervision of two PhD supervisors from different institutions from the country or from the same institution, but from different specialities/domains. Cotutelle doctoral studies may also be organised when PhD supervisors are from the same institution, consortium or partnership, but have different specialisations/study domains. If the participating institutions are different, they shall enter a partnership agreement on organising cotutelle doctoral studies.

Art. 94 para. (5) of the *Code* sets forth that “*Doctoral studies are delivered through three types of programmes*:

- a) *scientific doctoral studies, the purpose of which is to produce original, internationally recognised scientific knowledge. A scientific doctoral programme is a prerequisite for developing a professional career in higher education and research;*

- b) **vocational doctoral studies**, the purpose of which is to achieve development and innovation in vocational practices, and which focuses on applied research, including in arts and sports. A vocational doctoral programme can fulfil a prerequisite for developing a professional career in higher education and research;
- c) **industrial doctoral studies**, which focus on the connection between the doctoral student, the higher education institution, and the industrial sector. The purpose of industrial doctoral programmes is to promote research that can be capitalised on commercially; such doctoral programmes provide benefits, competences and research facilities in the industrial sector, leading to knowledge transfer between higher education institutions and companies of the industrial sector.”

Scientific doctoral studies in arts and sports can be delivered if the purpose of the research topic is to produce original, internationally relevant scientific knowledge based on scientific methods.

Furthermore, according to **art. 78** para. (2) of the **Code**, modes in which doctoral studies can be delivered are: a) **full-time** education; b) **part-time** education; c) **distance learning**. **Distance-learning doctoral studies** are a flexible mode of organising doctoral studies, where the activities pertaining to the advanced study programme and the scientific guidance activities are prevalingly delivered in **virtual learning environments**, using remote education technologies. The **attendance rate** required for a doctoral student may differ in different doctoral schools and for different students, and shall be decided by the PhD supervisor based on the particularities of the doctoral programme, and in compliance with the provisions of the *doctoral school's regulation* where the obligations related to attendance are stipulated.

IV.1. Curriculum and types of activities

Doctoral studies include **research, development and innovation activities**, the purpose of which, **depending on the type of doctoral studies**, may be *to produce original, internationally recognised scientific knowledge or to develop and innovate professional practices or to promote research that can be capitalised on commercially*.

Doctoral programmes are delivered in the doctoral school under the coordination of the PhD supervisor, and include an **advanced study programme** and an **individual scientific research or artistic creation programme**.

The **advanced study programme** is composed of activities delivered in institutionalised study groups – through courses, seminars, laboratory classes and other similar forms – and/or through individual learning, and may not exceed 1 year in duration. The **form, structure and content** of the advanced study programme shall be established in the *doctoral school's regulation*, and the choice of study elements in this programme that a doctoral student should learn is established solely and independently by the student's PhD supervisor.

Advanced studies shall be finalised by developing a **research programme**, to be further implemented during the **individual scientific research or artistic creation programme**.

The **Framework Plan** sets the basic requirements for developing, revising and changing cycle III study plans.

It is recommended that the advanced study programme include an ethics and academic integrity component, which should also cover aspects of scientific research ethics.

IV.2. Number of hours and transferable credits

Doctoral study programmes are credited with **180 transferable credits (ECTS)**. A study credit is a confirmation that part of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of learning outcomes, was evaluated and validated by a competent authority according to an established standard. A study credit expresses the study load, based on defined learning outcomes, and the workload associated with it. A study credit equals 30 hours of activities specific to doctoral studies.

According to **para. 143** of the *Regulation*, completing the advanced study programme results in the awarding of a number of transferable study credits established by the doctoral school according to the laws in force. *The Framework Plan* sets out that **120 credits** shall be awarded for the scientific research programme and **60 credits** for the advanced study programme. At least **70% of the credits** shall be awarded for course elements focusing on the **specialisation**.

The doctoral school's Board shall establish the way in which credits are to be allocated for the amount of work done by the doctoral student, namely for publishing scientific papers, developing and presenting research reports, participating in scientific conferences with papers/communications, and other relevant activities.

IV.3. Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are statements of what a doctoral student knows, understands, and can do at the end of their learning programme, defined as knowledge, abilities/skills, responsibility, and autonomy.

In the case of doctoral study programmes, learning outcomes match level 8 in the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Moldova, as follows:

CNC level	Knowledge	Abilities/Skills	Responsibility and autonomy
Level 8	Knowledge at the highest level in a work or study domain, and knowledge at the frontier between different domains.	The most advanced and specialised abilities and techniques, including the ability to synthesise and evaluate, required for critical research and/or innovation problem solving and expanding and redefining the existing knowledge or professional practices.	Demonstrating a high level of authority, innovation, autonomy, scientific and professional integrity, and a sustained commitment to developing new cutting-edge ideas or processes in work or study, including research.

The **competences** acquired through doctoral programmes are set by the *Regulation* in para. 137 – 139.

V. Evaluation

The learning outcomes of doctoral students shall be evaluated: a) throughout the semester; b) at the end of the semester; c) at the end of the study programme.

When completing advanced studies, doctoral students shall deliver a public presentation of the **research project** developed by them, in front of the supervising panel and the PhD supervisor. At least once in 12 months, doctoral students shall deliver a **public presentation of their progress** in the scientific research programme.

Doctoral studies are finalised by developing and presenting a doctoral thesis, in compliance with para. 156 – 178 of the *Regulation*. The doctoral thesis shall be developed according to the requirements set forth in the *doctoral school's regulations*. The public presentation of the thesis may only be given after the consent of the PhD supervisor and the supervising panel.

If **violations of good conduct in research and development** are found, such as plagiarising the results or the publications of other authors, fabricating results or replacing results with fictitious data, undeclared and/or uncontrolled use of artificial intelligence, the doctoral student shall be expelled. Thus, before being presented publicly, doctoral theses shall undergo a mandatory verification of their originality using specialised digital tools, according to the Order of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research of the Republic of Moldova no. 635/2019 on *Anti-plagiarism measures in higher education institutions*⁸.

The evaluations envisaged in the individual study plan and the presentation of the research project may be done **in person or online**. **The public delivery of the doctoral thesis shall be done in person** by the doctoral student at the institution organising doctoral studies, where the student was enrolled.

The thesis shall be delivered before the public presentation (doctoral) panel⁹, composed of at least **5 members**, out of which at least 2 working outside the institution where the doctoral student was enrolled.

Throughout a year, the doctoral school shall make sure to engage different members from outside the organisation on the public presentation panel, who work in the research and innovation domains in which the candidate's thesis was written. Both the organising institution and the doctoral school may impose **minimal scientific performance standards** that the members of the public presentation panel must meet to be allowed to be on the panel.

Based on the public presentation of the doctoral thesis and the reports of the official reviewers (minimum three, out of which one from the supervising panel), and observing the *Regulation for grading doctoral theses* approved by Order of the Minister of Education, Culture and Research of the Republic of Moldova no. 514/2017, the public presentation panel shall grade the doctoral thesis by awarding one of the following qualifications: "Excellent", "Very good", "Good", "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory". The scientific papers published by doctoral students shall be relevant for that domain, and contain

⁸ https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/ordin_antiplagiat.pdf

⁹ According to para. 169 of the *Regulation*: *The public presentation panel includes at least 5 members: the president, who represents the institution where the doctoral student was enrolled; the PhD supervisor, and at least 3 official reviewers, national or international, who specialise in the domain in which the doctoral thesis was written, out of which at least 2 work outside the institution where the doctoral student was enrolled.*

contributions that indicate progress in scientific research - development-innovation for the evaluated domain.

The doctoral panel shall **propose awarding of the scientific doctor title** if the thesis is graded “Excellent”, “Very good”, “Good” or “Satisfactory”, and if no serious misconduct against good scientific conduct and against academic activity was identified in the development and presentation of the thesis.

VI. Study documents

The IOSD where the student was enrolled, which approved the doctor title to be conferred after the public presentation of the thesis, shall submit the file for the confirmation of the doctoral title to the national authority responsible for **confirming** scientific titles, according to the *Methodology*. Based on the confirmation, the IOSD shall issue the doctoral diploma, by observing the Order of the Minister of Education, Culture and Research of the Republic of Moldova no. 1341/2019 on *Approving and implementing the new type of Doctor's Diploma*¹⁰.

At least **90%** of the doctoral titles in a domain, submitted for confirmation in the last 5 years received a positive endorsement.

If doctoral studies are finalised without a public presentation of the doctoral thesis, a **certificate** is issued, certifying that the student attended doctoral studies in that domain.

VII. Doctoral students

Research, development and innovation activities performed in doctoral study programmes are based on the principles of student-oriented education. Doctoral students are engaged in deciding about their own individual study plan.

The Regulation, in **para. 187** and **188**, describes the **rights and obligations** of doctoral students. These are included in the **doctoral study contract** signed by each doctoral student, the PhD supervisor and the representative of the institution enrolling the student. The contract also includes at least the elements described in **para. 71** of the *Regulation*. In the case of cotutelle doctoral studies, doctoral students shall sign one contract, with the institution where they are enrolled.

Doctoral students may independently choose to take any course of any education level delivered by the IOSD.

Doctoral students may file a reasoned application asking for the **PhD supervisor to be replaced** if the PhD supervisor is found in default regarding their legal or contractual obligations or for other reasons related to the supervising relationship between the PhD supervisor and the doctoral student, and when the PhD supervisor is found unavailable.

Doctoral students enrolled in full-time education shall receive an **individual scholarship**, and may be employed at the IOSD cumulatively for no more than **0.5 of a teaching quota** or up to **0.75 of a research quota**, so that their work activity does not interfere with the activities included in the individual study plan.

¹⁰ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=124087&lang=ro

Doctoral students shall comply with the *Code of ethics and integrity* developed by the IOSD according to Government Decision no. HG337/2026 approving the *Framework regulation on academic integrity in higher education institutions*¹¹, as per art. 107¹ para. (3) letter a) of the *Code*.

Each doctoral student shall participate in **at least one international mobility**: scientific conference, cotutelle doctoral research, doctoral student exchanges with internationally prestigious universities or participation in international consortia, the purpose of which shall be to include the specific doctoral research topics in international scientific projects.

VIII. Faculty (PhD supervisors)

Doctoral studies are coordinated by a **PhD supervisor** assisted by a **supervising panel**¹² appointed by the supervisor and endorsed by the doctoral school's Board. The PhD supervisor is directly responsible for the scientific pathway of the doctoral student, and has the obligation to take all the necessary steps to provide the conditions, knowledge and information that will maximise the doctoral student's changes to complete the doctoral programme.

The rights and obligations of the PhD supervisor arise from the institutional regulation on the organisation and delivery of doctoral studies of each IOSD, the regulation of the doctoral school, and the PhD supervisor's employment contract. *The Regulation*, in **para. 190 and 191**, describes the **rights and obligations** of the PhD supervisor.

A PhD supervisor can be a person who holds a **doctor** title (in no more than 3 scientific specialities belonging to a scientific profile¹³) or a **habilitated doctor** title (in no more than 5 scientific specialities belonging to 2 scientific profiles). The stages, requirements and responsibilities in the process of granting the right to supervise PhDs are set forth in Government Decision no. HG23/2023 on the *Methodology for approving PhD supervisors*.

Doctoral schools may require **minimum scientific performance standards** that exceed the nationally established standards¹⁴, which PhD supervisors must fulfil in order to become members of that doctoral school. In case of cotutelle doctoral studies, one main PhD supervisor shall be appointed.

PhD supervisors in the evaluated domain shall present **publications** indexed in Web of Science, ERIH or other internationally recognised databases, in impact-factor journals, or **other achievements** of relevant significance for that domain, which include **international contributions** that indicate progress in scientific research - development-innovation for the evaluated domain.

PhD supervisors shall have **international visibility**, which could consist, for example, of:

¹¹ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=155036&lang=ro

¹² According to [Government Decision no. HG23/2023](#) on the *Methodology for approving PhD supervisors*. Para. **42**: During the doctoral studies, the doctoral student is supported by the PhD supervisor and the **Supervising Panel**, which includes 3 more members of the PhD supervisor's research team or other people affiliated with the doctoral school or professors and research staff not affiliated with the doctoral school. One of the members of the Supervising Panel serves as an **official reviewer** of the doctoral thesis.

¹³ According to the *List of study domains and specialities in higher education*, approved by [Government Decision no. HG 412/2024](#).

¹⁴ According to the [Annex](#) to Government Decision no. HG23/2023 on the *Methodology for approving PhD supervisors*.

- membership on the scientific boards of international publications and conferences.
- membership on the boards of international professional associations.
- guest in conferences or expert groups abroad, or
- membership on doctoral panels in foreign universities or in cotutelle with a foreign university.

For Arts and Sports, PhD supervisors shall prove their **international visibility**, for example, through membership on:

- boards of international professional associations,
- organisation committees of international arts events and competitions, or on
- juries or arbitration teams in international arts events or competitions;
- working groups (WG) that operate within professional networks or in projects funded by international grants.

The professors teaching in the advanced study programme in the domains related to the respective professional competences shall hold a doctor or habilitated doctor title and have a bachelor, master, and/or doctoral background, and have scientific research activity in the study domain or other domains similar to the domain related to the subject matter they are teaching.

PhD supervisors, together with the IOSD and the doctoral school, have the obligation to provide the resources required for carrying out the scientific research or artistic creation projects in which their doctoral students are engaged. PhD supervisors have funds from research projects in which they engage their doctoral students.

PhD supervisors shall comply with the *Code of ethics and integrity* developed by the IOSD according to Government Decision no. HG337/2026 approving the *Framework regulation on academic integrity in higher education institutions*, as per art. 107¹ para. (3) letter a) of the **Code**.

The activity of PhD supervisors shall be evaluated regularly, every 5 years, within the doctoral school, according to the procedure established in the IOSD *regulation* and against the scientific performance indicators established by Government Decision no. HG23/2023 on the *Methodology for approving PhD supervisors*.

IX. Material resources

The **material resources** allow the activities included in the doctoral programme to be carried out in optimal conditions. The doctoral school shall provide spaces for individual and collaborative study activities for the doctoral students, computer devices and access to broadband internet, specific licensed computer programmes, as well as adequate learning resources (course materials, laboratory guides, books, documentation — including publications of the last 5 years — and access to databases of scientific papers).

Doctoral students in full-time education shall receive **scholarships** according to Government Decision no. 1009/2006 **on the quantum of scholarships, other types of social support for students in higher education institutions, pupils in speciality mid-level education, secondary vocational education, and students in post-graduate education**.¹⁵

¹⁵ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=155309&lang=ro

Doctoral schools may provide **financial support** for doctoral students to support research or artistic creation internships in the country or abroad, upon the request of the doctoral student or the recommendation of the PhD supervisor, by decision of the Board of the doctoral school, within the limit of the financial resources allocated to the doctoral school. The mobility of the doctoral students of the doctoral school may be facilitated by doctoral schools by signing **institutional agreements or partnerships** approved by the Board of the doctoral school, cotutelle doctoral research, doctoral student exchanges with internationally prestigious universities or through participation in international consortia with the purpose to include their doctoral research topics in **international scientific projects**.

X. Number of doctoral students

A PhD supervisor may simultaneously supervise **no more than 5 doctoral students** at various stages of their doctoral studies.

Standards approved by

Decision of the ARACIS Council no. 243/H/12.08.2026