

MD-PhD directives

1. Scope

The present directives set out the conditions and procedures for the MD-PhD programme and for awarding the MD-PhD degrees, following the “regulation for the degree of PhD” and the “regulation for the degree of Medical Doctor” of the Faculty of Biomedical Sciences. The MD-PhD programme enables medical students to prepare for a career in biomedical research.

The goal is to give MD-PhD graduates the required scientific competences and skills, which allow them to contribute to translational, disease- and patient-oriented research. After completion of the MD-PhD training, they should preferentially not lose contact with the clinic and complete their clinical training, and/or pursue a career in a medical research institute.

2. Degree title

Successful graduates obtain the doctoral title of “Dr.med. (MD)” and “PhD” according to the “regulation for the degree of Medical Doctor” and the “regulation for the degree of PhD” of the Faculty of Biomedical Sciences. A successful completion of medical studies is a mandatory prerequisite to be awarded the MD and PhD titles in Switzerland.

3. Admission

Applicants must have successfully completed their Bachelor of Medicine and must have a strong interest in the field of biomedical research. In order to be accepted as a MD-PhD student, the student’s grades of the 1st year of the Master of Medicine must be outstanding. The selection of the MD-PhD students is made by the Graduate Studies Committee.

The MD-PhD programme is not aimed at doctors who got an MD title together with their medical diploma, as it is usually done in many European countries, and who are willing to start a PhD. These doctors should follow the rules described in the regulation for the degree of PhD.

4. Programme

The MD-PhD programme consists of a basic training and of the thesis.

Basic training



During the basic training, which includes at least 15 ECTS for the PhD, the students complete course work in subjects which are suitable for preparing them for their specific research project (e.g. cell biology/biochemistry, molecular biology, immunology, neurobiology, tumor biology, public health etc.).

The basic training can be carried out either in parallel to the medical studies during the fifth and sixth year, or the year after obtaining the medical diploma, but must in any case be additional to the ECTS obtained for the Master of Medicine. Students receive personal mentoring by experienced researchers.

The students, together with their mentor, propose an individualized plan of courses, based on their needs. The course plan must be approved by the Graduate Studies Committee. The mentor and the Graduate studies committee are responsible for the coordination, support and supervision of the student during their basic training.

Thesis

The place of work and the research field should be chosen as early as possible, and a Master thesis based on experimental research is recommended in order to gain insight into research methods. The research part of the medical dissertation should be, as far as possible, also completed during the medical studies, and will lead to the title of "Dr. med.", according to the "regulation for the degree of Medical Doctor" of the Faculty of Biomedical Sciences. Such title can be obtained earliest 1 year after receiving the Master of Medicine. The student cannot hand in the same dissertation to the Faculty of Biomedical Sciences (Dr.med.) and to the Graduate Studies Committee (PhD). It is possible and makes sense that the PhD thesis is a (non-overlapping) continuation and deepening of the MD (Dr.med.) thesis.

The rules for conducting the PhD thesis follow the "regulation for the degree of PhD" of the Faculty of Biomedical Sciences.

Candidates are advised to start the PhD thesis immediately after the federal exam. As a rule, obtaining a MD-PhD takes a minimum of 3 years with a clinical activity up to 20%. A higher percentage up to 50% of clinical work is also possible if the clinical work is in the field of the scientific PhD project. If the percentage of clinical work is higher than 20%, the minimum duration of the PhD is extended to 4 years; the maximum duration of a MD-PhD is 6 years. The institute or laboratory where the MD-PhD studies are carried out must document a high-quality research activity and ensure comprehensive supervision and guidance for doctoral candidates, according to the "regulation for the degree of PhD".

In general

For MD-PhD graduates who are pursuing a clinical activity, specialist training is still essential. In some disciplines, one to two years of the MD-PhD programme may be taken into account for the specialist training. Candidates are advised to seek information about this possibility within the relevant medical specialization.

Entry into force

The present directives were approved by the CdP and the Senate (03.12.2020) and are immediately binding.