



PhD and Equivalent Doctoral Degrees: The ERC Policy

1. The necessity of ascertaining PhD equivalence

The ERC Work Programme clearly states that the eligible Principal Investigator must be a holder of a PhD degree or equivalent. First-professional degrees will not be considered in themselves as PhD-equivalent, even if recipients carry the title "Doctor". It is however recognised that there may be cases where applicants can provide certified evidence of substantial training that has qualified them to plan, direct and perform an independent research programme. Such training on top of research experience and a professional degree may amount to PhD equivalence, thus fulfilling the ERC's PhD degree requirement.

2. PhD Degrees

The research doctorate is the highest earned academic degree. It is always awarded for **independent research** at a professional level in either academic disciplines or professional fields. Regardless of the entry point, doctoral studies involve several stages of academic work. These may include the completion of preliminary course, seminar, and laboratory studies and/or the passing of a battery of written examinations. The PhD student selects an academic adviser and a subject for the dissertation, is assigned a dissertation committee, and designs his/her research (some educators call the doctoral thesis a dissertation to distinguish it from lesser theses). The dissertation committee consists usually of 3-5 faculty members in the student's research field, including the adviser.

3. Independent research

Conducting the research and writing the dissertation usually requires one to several years depending upon the topic selected and the research work necessary to prepare the dissertation. In defending his/her thesis, **the PhD candidate must establish mastery of the subject matter, explain and justify his or her research findings, and answer all questions put by the committee.** A successful defense results in the award of the PhD degree.

4. Degrees equivalent to the PhD:

It is recognised that there are some other doctoral titles that enjoy the same status and represent variants of the PhD in certain fields. All of them **have similar content requirements.** Potential applicants are invited to consult the following web-pages for useful references on degrees that will be considered equivalent to the PhD:

1. EURYDICE: "Examinations, qualifications and titles - Second edition, Volume 1, European glossary on education":

<http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/showPresentation?pubid=046EN> (table in Part II of .pdf document)

Please note that some titles that belong to the same category with doctoral degrees (ISCED 6) may correspond to the intermediate steps towards the completion of doctoral education and they should not be therefore considered as PhD-equivalent.



2. List of research doctorate titles awarded in the United States that enjoy the same status and represent variants of the Ph.D. within certain fields. These doctorate titles are also recognised as PhD-equivalent by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF):

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/edlite-research-doctorate.html>

5. **First Professional Degrees:**

It is important to recognize that the initial professional degrees in various fields are **first degrees, not graduate research degrees**. Several degree titles in such fields include the term "Doctor", **but they are neither research doctorates nor equivalent to the PhD**.

6. **Doctor of Medicine (MD):**

For medical doctors, an MD will not be accepted by itself as equivalent to a PhD award. The ERC Scientific Council has decided to accept as eligible applications from medical doctors who have concluded both basic studies (MD) and a research doctorate or clinical specialty training. Candidates must also provide information on their research experience in order to further substantiate the equivalence of their overall training to a PhD. In these cases, the certified date of the clinical specialty completion is the time reference for calculation of the eligibility time-window (3-8 years).

7. **Caution:**

For medical doctors who have been awarded both an MD and a PhD, the date of their PhD award takes precedence in the calculation of the eligibility time-window (3-8 years after PhD).