

Universities  
Graduate schools

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Subject: Updated graduate school practices (6/504/2007, 22.3.2007)

By this letter the Ministry of Education updates its recommendations to graduate schools in universities which have Ministry-funded positions in doctoral education.

1. A **graduate school** is an structure internal to a university, common to two or several universities or common to universities and external partners, within which researcher training is organised into planned, efficient, guided and temporally controlled system. A graduate school has a Board responsible for its operation in conformity with the university's human resources, other policy and agreements in effect. The ultimate responsibility for the graduate school rests with the university and, in the case of a multiple-party graduate school, with the coordinating university. The Ministry of Education funding for a graduate school is allocated to the university, which pays the graduate student salary. Funds allocated from the sub-item for university operational costs cannot be transferred to another organisation. It is possible to write a doctoral thesis outside a university, but the setting must support the growth of the doctoral candidate into a research professional as a member of a research community. Irrespective of where he/she is writing the dissertation, the graduate school students should be able to attend organised doctoral modules, such as lectures, seminars and practicums.

A graduate school student may belong only to one graduate school at a given time and defend his/her dissertation in one university, which alone will report the doctoral dissertation as part of its performance.

## 2. Four-year doctoral training in the employ of a university

Since 1995 the Ministry of Education has allocated operational funds generally for four years towards full-time training of a graduate school

student. This funding is allocated to the university within which the graduate school operates or, in regard of a networked graduate school, to the coordinating university. The employment contract between the student and the university must be concluded for a four year period even when the graduate school funds from the sub-item for university operational funds have been allocated to the university for a period shorter or longer than four years. A funding commitment shorter than four years is possible in cases in which the student has done research for the dissertation with other funding and enrolls in a graduate school in the middle of the dissertation process. As a rule, the four-year period should not be extended.

As from 2010 the operational costs appropriation for graduate school salaries will be determined as part of the performance agreement procedure between the Ministry of Education and the university based on a decision made by the Academy of Finland Board concerning openings in graduate schools, without a separate Ministry of Education decision on graduate schools. The term of graduate school openings funded on the basis of the decision made in 2006 will end in 2011. The Ministry of Education sent a letter regarding the financing of these graduate schools in early 2008 (OPM/1/525/2008). For a four-year period of full-time studies to be possible, the appropriation for operational costs should, as a rule, be used during the year for which it is allocated.

The university is responsible for seeing to it that the salary paid to the graduate school student conforms to the university salary scheme. Tasks not relating to the dissertation research which are assigned to the student as a member of the university personnel may not endanger full-time dissertation research. Notifications submitted by a graduate school student concerning secondary occupations and permits concerning them can and must be scrutinised by the university in a same responsible way as those submitted by other personnel.

The Ministry of Education allocates funds for salary increments according to the total salary costs of each university, which will then take care of the salary adjustments in all the personnel groups. The salary raises will no longer be allocated separately to the graduate schools.

### **3. Maternity and parent leave and child-care leave**

Maternity and parent leave and child-care leave prolong the duration of the graduate school by the duration of the leave. In its operation, a graduate school must budget for prolonged graduate school periods owing to these reasons. In committing to a graduate school, the university must budget for the cost of maternity and parent leave and child-care leave in the same way as regarding other personnel. The graduate school student has the right to training of the duration agreed upon even though the graduate school closes down during these leaves.

#### **4. Centralised access to data on graduate schools in universities**

Universities must have centralised access to data on the graduate schools operating within them and on graduate schools in which a department or some organisational unit of the university is a partner. A graduate school must be able to keep record of the number of its students and the sources of financing, and of the number of other students attending the graduate school. Systematic collection of data makes it possible to monitor and evaluate the graduate school system and to participate more effectively in international cooperation in researcher training.

Networked graduate schools do not necessarily have openings for all partners in all application rounds, but this must not endanger cooperation between the parties. The university on its part must take care that the graduate school directors, coordinators and executive groups are familiar with the decision-making procedures and know how to apply the university's human resources policy and the guidelines, statutes and agreements in effect. The graduate school students must also be familiarised with the decision-making and responsibility structures, as well as with the guidelines governing the graduate school.

The networked graduate schools must draw up procedural guidelines for situations in which the partner organisations operate in a different way and which are not directly governed by the guidelines, statutes and agreements. Similarly, operational guidelines must also be drawn up for the eventuality of disputes.

#### **5. Future of the graduate school system**

The graduate school system is being developed as part of a four-step researcher career system<sup>1</sup> according to the action programme for researcher training and research career paths<sup>2</sup>. The graduate school phase is the first step and it is recommended that the doctoral candidate be called *nuorempi tutkija/ yngre forskare* (early-stage researcher).

The decision on graduate school openings was transferred from the Ministry of Education to the Academy of Finland as from 1 January 2008, after which the Academy is solely responsible for researcher career paths. The Ministry of Education is still responsible for the policy lines governing researcher training and still steers both the universities and the Academy of Finland by target outcomes and performance. The application to graduate schools takes place every other year, the next application round being in 2010. In the 2008 application round, financing was increased with a view to increasing the openings. The aim is to include a larger proportion of doctoral students in more planned education whether in graduate schools or outside them.

<sup>1</sup> Neliportainen tutkijanura. OPM 2008:15 (Four-stage research career system).

<sup>2</sup> Toimenpideohjelma tutkijankoulutuksen ja tutkijanuran kehittämiseksi 2007-2011. OPM 2007:7. (Action programme for the development of researcher training and research career paths)

The Academy of Finland is intensifying the monitoring of graduate schools and contributes to the development of the system. Apart from scientific quality, the monitoring covers the quality of graduate school operations and processes.

#### **6. Graduate school coordinators**

For the 2008 graduate school application, the Ministry of Education instructed the Academy of Finland to issue a decision on a maximum of 20 graduate school coordinator posts. The number of coordinator posts financed by Ministry of Education will be gradually reduced as the networking becomes an established part of university operation with the structural development of the higher education institutions.

#### **7. Contact persons at the Ministry of Education**

For further information about researcher education, turn to Counsellor of Education Erja Heikkinen (erja.heikkinen@minedu.fi, tel. +358 9 160 77029) and Senior Advisor Eeva Kaunismaa (eeva.kaunismaa@minedu.fi, tel. +358 9 160 76960). For more information about matters relating to university personnel and salary systems turn to Counsellor of Education Juhani Dammert (juhani.dammert@minedu.fi, tel. +358 9 160 77489).

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