

Doctoral Students' Handbook



The book was prepared by the Doctoral School of Riga Technical University, compiled by Ilze Balcere.

This handbook provides a practical overview of the doctoral study process at Riga Technical University, from admission and study progression to the defence of the doctoral thesis and the awarding of a doctoral degree. It explains the role of the Doctoral School, the rights and responsibilities of doctoral students, and the key stages of doctoral studies, including annual assessment, pre-defence, and the promotion process. The handbook also explains opportunities for doctoral studies in cooperation with foreign universities and industry partners, as well as the procedures for suspending and resuming studies. In addition, it provides an overview of the financial support available to doctoral students, including scholarships, grants, and funding for research-related expenses. This material serves as a practical guide for current and potential doctoral students, helping them navigate the doctoral study process and successfully progress towards obtaining a doctoral degree.

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● Introduction

This handbook provides doctoral students of Riga Technical University (RTU), as well as other interested parties, with comprehensive information about doctoral studies, their stages, the documents governing the doctoral study process, and the support opportunities available through RTU administration and academic staff during the path toward obtaining a Doctor of Science degree. It offers practical guidance on the organization and progression of doctoral studies and scientific activities, helping doctoral students better understand the study process and successfully complete their doctoral degree within the prescribed study period.

The duration of doctoral study programmes implemented at RTU is three or four years. Figures 1 and 2 below summarize the main milestones of these study programmes.

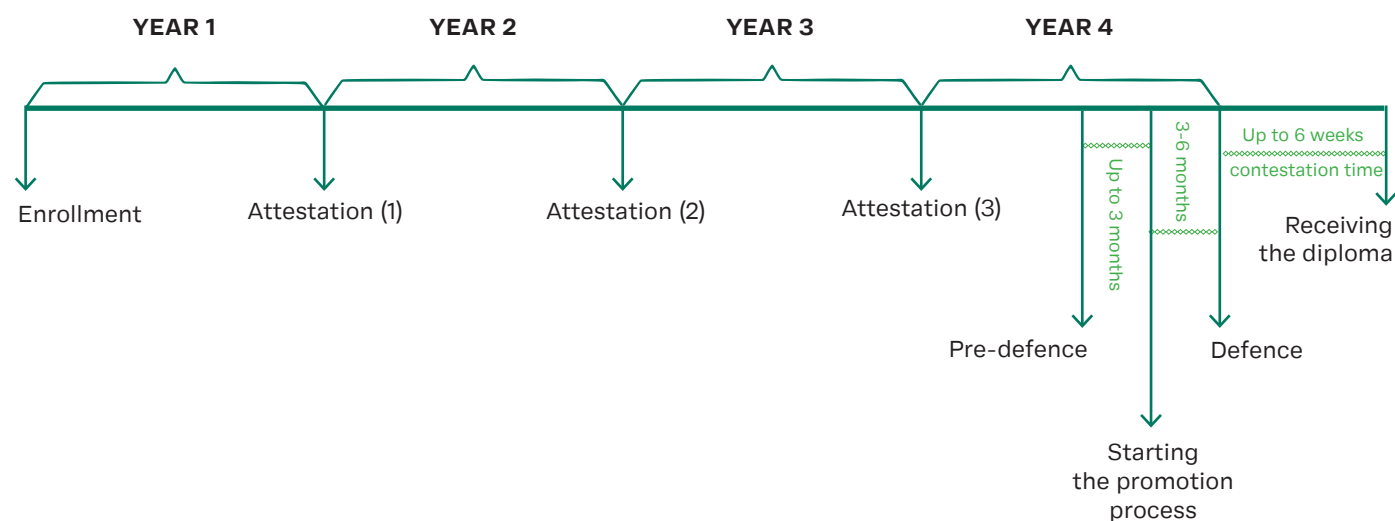


Figure 1

Key milestones for four-year doctoral study programs

More information on each milestone and responsible persons within can be found in the annexes of this handbook.

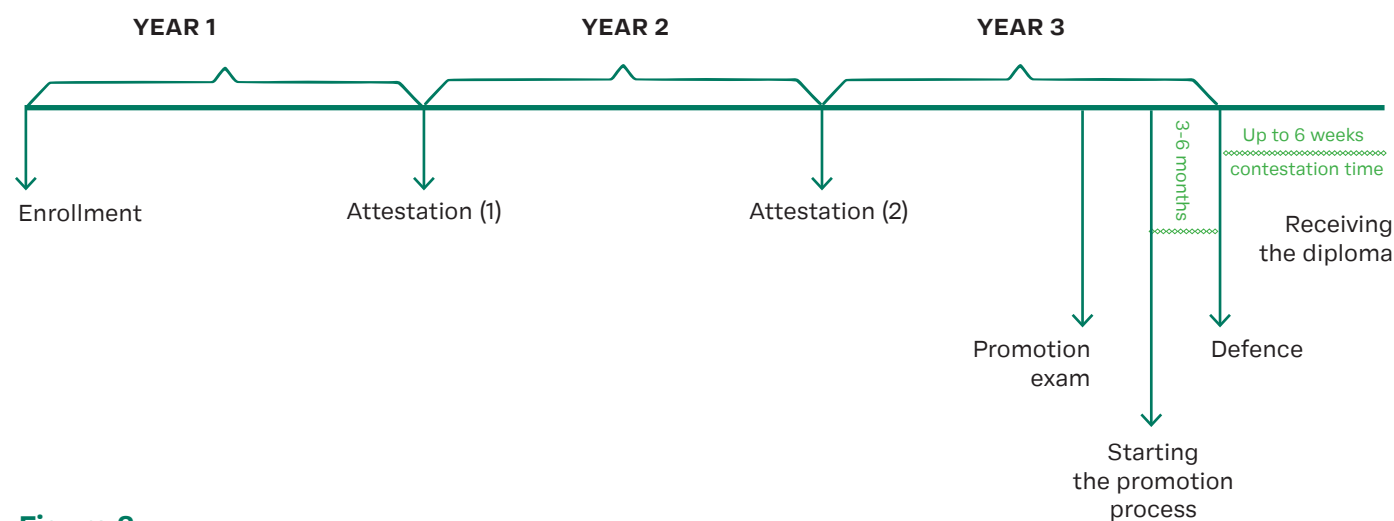


Figure 2

Key milestones for three-year doctoral study programs

● 1. Doctoral School – Study Support Point

The Doctoral School (DS) is a structural unit within the RTU Office of the Vice-Rector for Research responsible for the implementation and administration of doctoral studies. The DS oversees and coordinates the entire doctoral study process, beginning with admission and record-keeping procedures and continuing through to the awarding of the Doctor of Science degree.

The DS performs the following tasks:

- ensures the administration of doctoral studies;
- organizes the admission of doctoral students;
- organizes and develops RTU doctoral studies in cooperation with other structural units;
- monitors the quality of doctoral studies;
- organizes informative seminars, including courses for acquiring widely used skills;
- ensures compliance of doctoral thesis supervision with the RTU Doctoral Regulations;
- organizes the promotion process;
- coordinates and monitors promotion councils;
- organizes the graduation of doctoral students;
- develops RTU internal regulatory acts within doctoral studies;
- develops and publishes the annual RTU doctoral graduate yearbook with RTU Press;
- announces doctoral and postdoctoral grant competitions, the selection of applications, evaluation and grant administration;
- provides the opportunity to develop a doctoral thesis in cooperation with industry (within the framework of the industrial doctoral student activity).

DS acts as a one-stop agency. It is the first place to turn if a doctoral student has any doubts about the study process or if any complications arise that have not been resolved with the involvement of the doctoral thesis supervisor or the director of the doctoral study program. DS is the main point of contact when entering doctoral studies.

● 2. How to Enroll in RTU Doctoral Studies

Admission to doctoral studies takes place throughout the year. There is no longer a specific date to start your studies; you can enrol at any time if there are free RTU-funded study places. You can inquire about RTU-funded places at the DS (e-mail: doktorantura@rtu.lv, tel. +371 67089056).

A doctoral position is announced for a RTU-funded doctoral study place in a specific research topic. If the doctoral student covers the doctoral study fee themselves, a public doctoral position is not announced, and admission requires only the consent of the doctoral thesis supervisor. The application process is described in detail in the next chapter.

A list of available doctoral positions is published and updated on the RTU website (<https://www.rtu.lv/en/studies/doctoral-studies/admission-phd/vacancy>). The topic of doctoral thesis research can also be initiated by an RTU scientist (a prospective doctoral thesis supervisor) in accordance with the procedure established internally by RTU – by announcing a vacancy.

The topic of the doctoral thesis can be proposed by the prospective doctoral student as well. If during master's studies there has been previous cooperation with the academic staff of RTU or experience has been gained by engaging in scientific research, it is initially recommended to discuss the planned research topic with a member of the teaching staff or researcher. A consultation will allow for an initial assessment of the possibilities of developing the research idea and identifying potential supervisors who specialize in the field.

If the applicant has not previously collaborated with RTU and does not know who could supervise their doctoral thesis, or is unsure about the most appropriate doctoral study program, they should contact the DS first. DS staff will be able to refer the applicant to one of the RTU scientists who will evaluate the research idea and be able to decide on further action.

● 3. Applying for Doctoral Studies: Document Submission and Selection

To apply for a RTU-funded doctoral study place, the applicant should apply for a publicly announced doctoral vacancy. The doctoral vacancy announcement will indicate the required competencies (including requirements for previous education), the planned topic of the doctoral thesis, the application procedure, deadline, remuneration, as well as the documents to be submitted for the first selection round, which must be sent to an e-mail address within the deadline specified in the announcement. Current announced vacancies can be seen on the RTU website: <https://www.rtu.lv/en/studies/doctoral-studies/admission-phd/vacancy>). Positions are also announced on the DS Facebook, as well as on LinkedIn and EURAXESS.

Admission to a RTU-funded place is organized in two rounds.

First selection round – Document submission and formal evaluation

To apply for a doctoral position, the applicant submits:

- research application (a link to the form will be available in the doctoral vacancy announcement);
- motivation letter;
- curriculum vitae (CV) of a certain sample;
- a copy of an identity document (passport or ID);
- a copy of master's diploma and diploma supplement;
- a document confirming the payment of the registration fee.

In the first round, a DS representative formally evaluates the submitted documents (for example, checks whether all necessary documents have been submitted and whether the previously obtained education meets the requirements). If any shortcomings are identified, the DS representative contacts the applicant and asks them to eliminate the shortcomings.

If no discrepancies are found after the first selection round, the applicant will receive an invitation from DS to an interview in the second selection round.

Second selection round – Interview

The interview, by prior arrangement, can take place both in person and remotely. The participants of the interview are the applicant, a representative of the DS and the prospective doctoral thesis supervisor (the program director may also be invited if necessary). The main goal of the interview is to learn more about the applicant's motivation to study for a doctoral degree, and discuss their education, work, research and teaching experience. Previous scientific or teaching experience is not a mandatory requirement for admission to doctoral studies, but it can be considered an advantage. It is also an opportunity for the doctoral thesis supervisor to ask questions about the applicant's scientific competence. The applicant can learn more about the course of the doctoral studies, the requirements to be met, the organization of the study process and other important questions.

After the interview, a report is prepared, which indicates whether the applicant is recommended for admission. The decision is made by the prospective doctoral thesis supervisor and the DS representative. In turn, the final decision on applicants to be admitted to the doctoral studies is made by the Doctoral Admissions Committee by voting. The committee is chaired by the RTU Vice-Rector for Research and it consists of the vice-deans of the faculties and deputy directors of

independent institutes in the field of science. If the vote is positive, the DS representative contacts the applicant and asks to submit documents for admission. In case of a positive vote, the documents to be submitted are:

- an application to the RTU Rector for admission to the doctoral study program;
- a doctoral student’s work plan (a specific sample form, which the doctoral student fills out together with the doctoral thesis supervisor (and a DS representative if necessary);
- a confirmation of the development of the doctoral thesis.

The required forms for submission are available on the RTU homepage: <https://www.rtu.lv/en/studies/doctoral-studies/admission-phd/application-process-1>

After receiving all documents, the RTU Admissions Committee prepares a study agreement. The admission process from the date of the interview to the signing of the study agreement takes approximately two weeks. After signing the study agreement, the relevant structural unit of RTU (a research institute, for example) prepares an employment contract.

According to the Law on Higher Education Institutions, higher education institutions are obliged to establish legal employment relations with those doctoral students who are admitted to RTU-funded places. In the event of admission, not only a study agreement will be signed, but also an employment contract with RTU for a part-time job (0.5 full-time equivalent) and a salary starting from 1,000 EUR gross. The employment contract is concluded with the doctoral student within two months after signing the study agreement by the structural unit that has announced the doctoral vacancy. Concluding an employment contract guarantees a stable income to the doctoral student and allows them to fully focus on the development of their doctoral thesis.

An employment contract is not concluded if the doctoral student:

- is already employed at RTU in an elected academic position or as a visiting academic staff member;
- is engaged in student education within the framework of the existing position (for example, gives lectures, leads laboratory work, etc.) or performs scientific activities within the framework of the duties of the position;
- is employed by a RTU DS cooperation partner (a cooperation partner is a scientific institution with which DS has signed a cooperation agreement on the implementation of doctoral studies).

The admission process is visually illustrated in Figure 3.

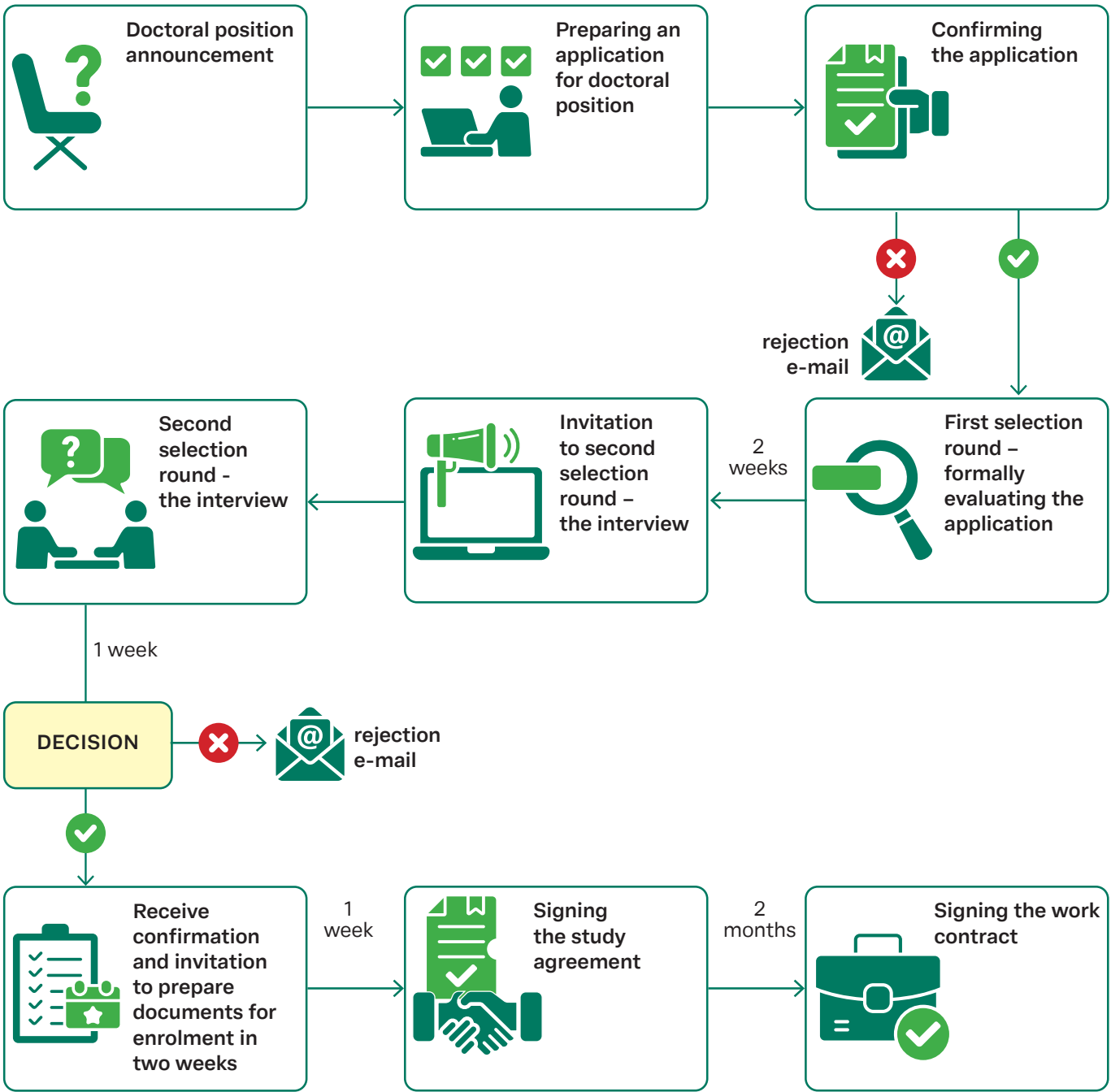


Figure 3
Admission process for RTU-funded doctoral study places

● 4. Resuming Studies in Later Stages

If a person has previously studied for a doctoral degree (for example, in a similar study program), but has not completed the doctoral studies for various reasons, it is possible to resume the studies. The time previously spent on doctoral studies is applied so that the applicant is enrolled, for example, not in the first, but in the second or third year of study. The applicant must be able to demonstrate not only the previously completed study courses, but also their research activities, for example, current publications or conference theses, which are planned to be used in the doctoral thesis. The comparison is carried out by the director of the relevant study program, evaluating the documents submitted by the applicant.

● 5. Joint Doctoral Studies with a Foreign Institution (*Cotutelle*)

The Law on Higher Education Institutions provides the possibility of implementing joint doctoral studies with a foreign recognized higher education institution, obtaining one doctoral degree simultaneously from two higher education institutions. A special tripartite agreement must be concluded at the beginning of studies for the implementation of joint doctoral studies (*cotutelle*), which is signed by the doctoral student, the foreign higher education institution and RTU.

The doctoral student will be simultaneously enrolled at both RTU and the respective foreign university and will develop one doctoral thesis, which will have two supervisors – from RTU and the other university. The defence can take place at either RTU or the foreign university or both, but usually one university is selected to defend the doctoral thesis. These and other aspects are stipulated in the agreement on the implementation of joint doctoral studies, the preparation and coordination of which is ensured by the DS. During the implementation of joint doctoral studies, at least one year must usually be spent at the foreign university. To start the implementation of joint doctoral studies, the doctoral student contacts the DS.

● 6. Industrial Doctoral Student – Doctoral Studies in Collaboration with Industry

An industrial doctoral student is an RTU doctoral activity in cooperation with industry. An industrial partner can be a legal entity registered in Latvia or abroad, whose defined study tasks the doctoral student performs during the studies and transfers to the partner. The industrial partner participates in the financing of the doctoral student's studies with its own investment, as well as provides a consultant (a highly qualified company specialist) who advises the doctoral student in the development of the doctoral thesis. If necessary, the partner can provide access to the infrastructure of the company, specific data and equipment, training or any other information necessary for the doctoral student to perform the tasks. The activity of an industrial doctoral student, including the preparation and conclusion of the contract, is coordinated by the DS.

● 7. RTU Doctoral Studies Regulations – The Legal Framework of Doctoral Studies

Doctoral studies in Latvia are regulated by several regulatory acts – the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the Law on Scientific Activities and a number of various Cabinet regulations. At the RTU level, doctoral studies processes are stipulated in the RTU Doctoral Studies Regulations.

The rights of a doctoral student are:

- to request and receive information about the progress of doctoral studies, including administrative issues;
- to attend activities organized by the Doctoral School (informative seminars, lectures, etc.) to acquire widely used skills;
- to use a study break;
- to apply for doctoral student scholarships and grant competitions in accordance with the established procedure (more details about grant competitions can be found on the RTU website: <https://www.rtu.lv/en/studies/doctoral-studies/scholarships-and-grants>);
- to receive access to material and technical support and information necessary for a successful development of the doctoral thesis;
- to regularly consult with the doctoral thesis supervisor, co-supervisor and/or consultant in the development of the doctoral thesis.

The doctoral student's responsibilities are:

- to regularly consult with the doctoral thesis supervisor, co-supervisor and/or consultant in the development of the doctoral thesis;
- to study in the relevant doctoral programme with academic integrity, in accordance with the requirements set out in the detailed study plan for the academic year;
- to participate in the annual attestation and pre-defence (at the end of the last study year);
- to resolve any problems that arise in a timely manner by contacting the doctoral thesis supervisor, the director of the doctoral study program or the Doctoral School;
- to provide information to the doctoral thesis supervisor about the results and progress of their research;
- to comply with RTU internal and external regulatory acts that regulate doctoral studies.

● 8. Study Break

According to Article 50, Part 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, a doctoral student has the right to a study break, which may not exceed two years in total within the framework of the doctoral study programme. The RTU-funded study place is maintained during the study break. According to the RTU Doctoral Studies Regulations, a study break may be granted:

- due to health (long-term illness);
- during pregnancy and childcare leave until the deadline specified in the regulatory enactments of the Republic of Latvia;
- due to family or social circumstances;
- for the period of absence in connection with the mandatory conscription into the national defence service according to the random principle.

To apply for a study break, the doctoral student sends an application to the Doctoral School, signed by the supervisor of the doctoral thesis and the doctoral student themselves. In situations where the study break is related to a long-term illness or pregnancy and childcare leave, the application must be accompanied by supporting documents issued by a medical institution. A study break may be used no more than twice. It is recommended to take a study break for one calendar year at once, preferably after the attestation. If the break is taken before the annual attestation, upon returning from it, the doctoral student will have to participate in the attestation.

It is essential to monitor the duration of the study break and to send an application to the Doctoral School for resumption of studies at least ten working days before the end of the break. During the study break, the doctoral student may work on the doctoral thesis.

● 9. Annual Attestation of Doctoral Students

At the end of each academic year (except for the last study year), no later than by the end of August, all RTU doctoral students are assessed in the attestation. Its purpose is to assess the implementation of the detailed study year plan and the progress of the doctoral student's doctoral thesis. The assessment process is regulated by the RTU Doctoral Student Attestation Procedure, which stipulates the composition of the attestation committee, the documents to be submitted, as well as the minimum criteria that the doctoral student must meet during each study year. At the assessment committee meeting, the time and place of which are confirmed by the director of the doctoral study programme, the doctoral student makes a short presentation, introducing the work done in the relevant study year.

The full list of criteria to be met can be viewed in the attestation procedure. The requirements for scientific publications that must be met in doctoral study programs lasting four years are indicated below.

When studying in doctoral study programs lasting 4 years, during these years, a doctoral student must develop at least three scientific publications, of which:

- one scientific article in publications of Group 1 or publications of Group 4.1, 4.2, 4.3¹;
- one scientific article in publications of Group 1.1 or 1.2;
- at least one scientific article in publications of Group 1.1.

¹ Information on the classification of scientific publications is available in this material by Latvian Science Council: <https://www.lzp.gov.lv/lv/media/24/download?attachment>

A doctoral student can submit their work for defence to the promotion council if they have at least three scientific publications in total (which have at least been accepted for publication), of which at least two are scientific articles in journals, of which at least one is in a scientific journal indexed in the SCOPUS or Web of Science database. One of the three publications may be a conference report (in conference proceedings), an article or a chapter in a collection of articles or a scientific book. A doctoral student may also complete the studies with three scientific articles indexed in the aforementioned databases, but they cannot complete their studies if they do not have any scientific articles, but only publications in conference proceedings.

When studying in a three-year doctoral study program, a doctoral student may submit their work to the promotion council if they have at least two scientific publications (which are at least accepted for publication), of which at least one is a scientific article indexed in SCOPUS, Web of Science or included in journals of the INT1 or INT2 category of the ERIH (European Reference Index of the Humanities) database.

The attestation process is illustrated in Figure 4.

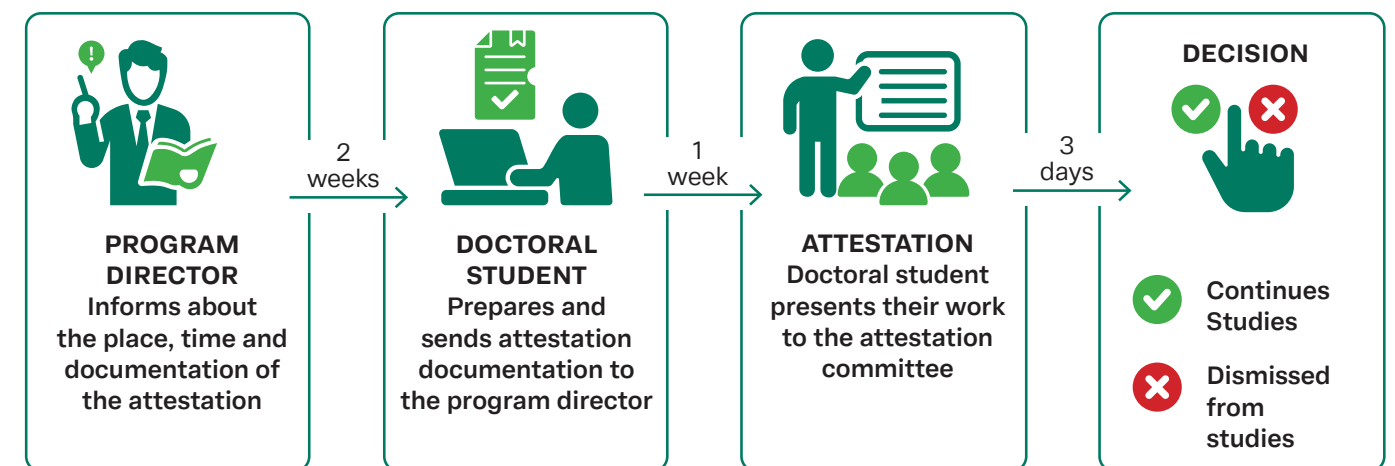


Figure 4
Doctoral attestation process

● 10. Pre-defence of the Doctoral Thesis

During the last study year, doctoral students undergo a pre-defence of their doctoral thesis (this process is discussed in detail in the RTU Attestation Procedure). The pre-defence takes place at an institute or study center meeting, where the doctoral student presents a fully developed doctoral thesis, which is also reviewed by the reviewer. The pre-defence is the final stage before preparing the doctoral thesis for submission to the promotion council. If the reviewer and the meeting participants recognize that the research meets the requirements of the doctoral thesis, the doctoral student is given three months to make final corrections to the work, prepare summaries and submit the work to the promotion council. The pre-defence process is schematically shown in Figure 5.

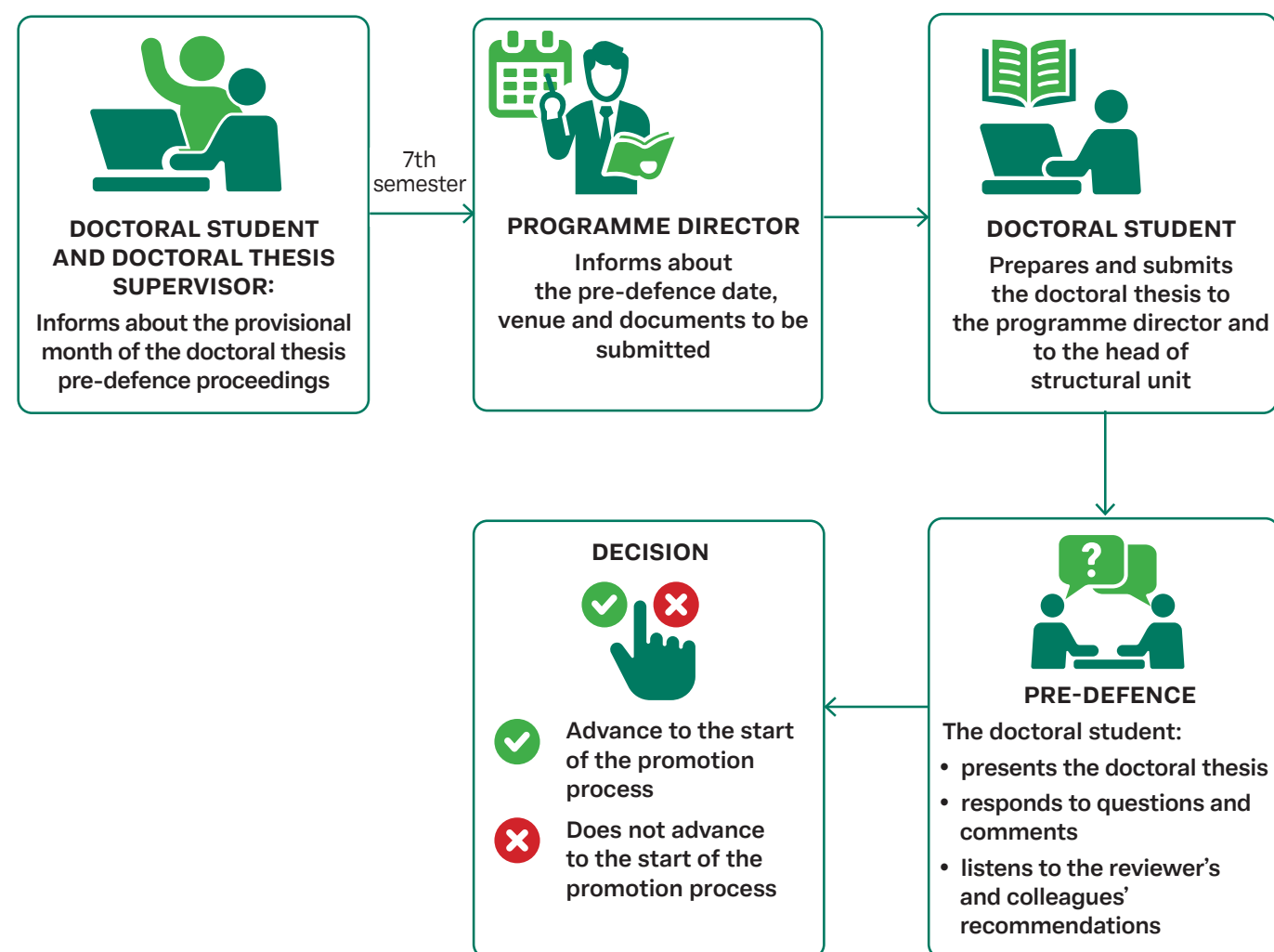


Figure 5
Pre-defence of the doctoral thesis

● 11. Submission of the Doctoral Thesis – Beginning of the Promotion Process

The promotion process is the final stage of doctoral studies, which formally begins after the DS promotion process coordinator has accepted all the documents submitted by the doctoral student for the start of the promotion process. The procedure for the promotion process at RTU is regulated in detail by the RTU Promotion Process Procedure. Within the three-month period specified in the pre-defence meeting, the doctoral student electronically submits to the coordinator:

- an application for submitting the doctoral thesis for defence to the promotion council;
- an application for changing the title of the thesis (if necessary);
- the doctoral thesis in PDF format;
- a summary of the doctoral thesis in Latvian in PDF format;
- a summary of the doctoral thesis in English in PDF format;
- curriculum vitae (CV);
- a list of scientific publications;
- consent of the co-authors of the publications for the use of the publications in the doctorate;
- copies of scientific publications;
- a list of recommended reviewers of the doctoral thesis (the list should be created together with the supervisor and the director of the doctoral study program).

The coordinator evaluates this package of documents, and if no deficiencies are found, a meeting of the promotion council is held within a month. At the meeting, the council reviewer provides an opinion on the compliance of the work with the requirements of the doctoral thesis. If the decision is positive, the council determines the possible date, time and place of the defence of the thesis at the meeting. After the meeting, the coordinator submits the doctoral thesis to the State Scientific Qualifications Commission (SSQC). An anonymous reviewer of this commission examines the thesis and provides his opinion. If the SSQC opinion is positive, the doctoral student contacts RTU Press regarding the documents to be submitted for publication of the thesis. At least a month before the specified date of the defence meeting, the coordinator sends the thesis to the reviewers to prepare written reviews. The doctoral student receives the reviews at least three days before the defence. The defence meeting of the doctoral thesis is open and is announced in the publications "Latvijas Vēstnesis" and "Zinātnes Vēstnesis". In addition to the members of the promotion council and reviewers, other interested parties may also attend the meeting.

The promotion process involves several stages and stakeholders, and it may take up to six months from the submission of documents to the public defence. A doctoral graduate may receive their diploma no earlier than six weeks after the defence. Every June, RTU holds a Grand Graduation ceremony, during which new doctoral graduates are also specially recognized.

A visualization of the promotion process is shown in Figure 6.

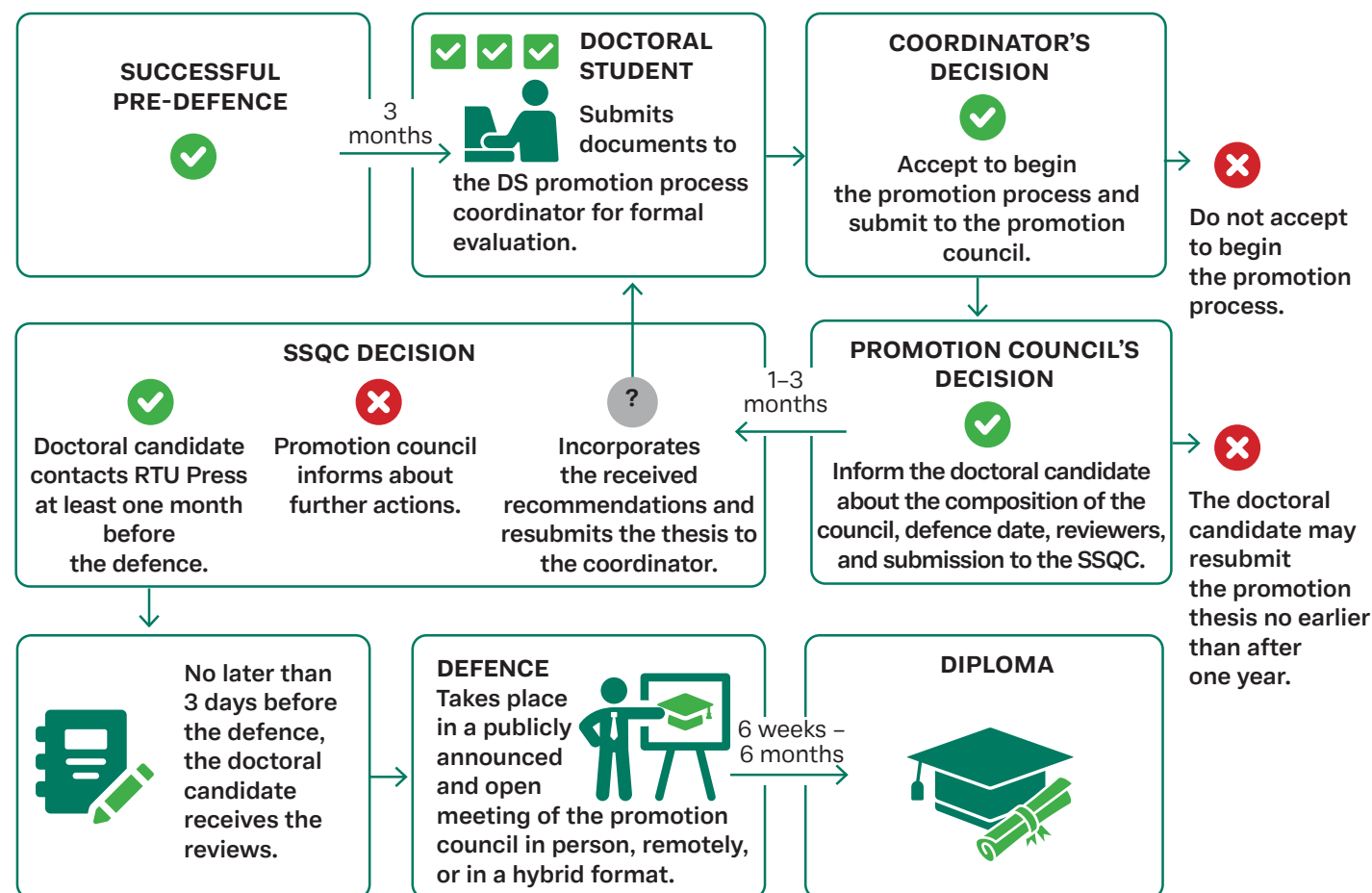


Figure 6
The promotion process

● 12. Financial Support for Doctoral Students

Unit-costs funding for doctoral students

A doctoral student's unit costs are funding specifically intended for doctoral students (both those studying in RTU- and self-funded places) and are allocated each study year. A doctoral student does not need to apply for this funding, it is allocated automatically. The amount available for each doctoral student varies according to the study program – from 845 EUR to 1,212 EUR.

The unit-costs funding for doctoral studies covers:

- materials required for doctoral thesis research;
- scientific publications;
- professional development courses (if not offered free of charge by RTU);
- participation in conferences;
- participation in summer or winter schools;
- going on scientific missions, for example, to carry out measurements necessary for the development of a doctoral thesis;
- specific software (if not provided by RTU).

Doctoral Scholarship

During the first ten working days of each semester, a doctoral student can apply for a doctoral scholarship (140 EUR/month), which is awarded for 11 months a year (August is considered a vacation month). Applications can be submitted online on the ORTUS portal or in person at the Doctoral School.

The following doctoral students can apply for the scholarship:

- doctoral students who have enrolled in doctoral studies by 31 August 2024;
- doctoral students who have been admitted as exceptional cases in the new doctoral study model (immatriculated starting from 1 September 2024) and are not employed at RTU or at an RTU cooperation partner.

Only those RTU-funded doctoral students who do not have unfulfilled study requirements can apply for the scholarship.

If the allocated funding is less than the number of scholarship applications, then a competition is held within the framework of the study program. A ranking is created in the competition, the main criteria of which are the evaluation of published and submitted scientific publications. The ranking criteria of the competition are published on the RTU website, in the "Scholarships and Grants" section.

Doctoral grants

RTU implements various doctoral grant programs every year and awards both RTU internal and European Union-funded or other doctoral grants. A doctoral grant is a remuneration (salary) obtained as a result of an announced grant competition for the development of a doctoral thesis for at least 20 hours a week. When awarding a grant, the doctoral student is also granted funding for research costs – for the purchase of materials, the development and publication of scientific articles, trips to cooperating universities and institutes or companies to conduct experiments and develop joint scientific articles on the topic of the doctoral thesis, as well as participation in scientific conferences.

When submitting a grant application, it is signed by the doctoral student, their doctoral thesis supervisor and the head of the structural unit (institute or centre) where the doctoral student will be employed to implement the grant in the event of receiving it. The doctoral student includes in the application the planned results and deliverables plan – which they undertake to achieve together with the doctoral thesis supervisor by the end of the grant implementation. The most common deliverable is a scientific article with high impact (Q1 or Q2 quartiles) or a doctoral thesis defended during the grant implementation period. There are grant programs in which the doctoral student undertakes to continue working at the university even after obtaining a doctoral degree as a young scientist. In certain grant programs, in order to fully implement the grant, co-employment (for example, 30% of the full-time workload) in research on a topic related to the doctoral thesis is also required. This can be provided by the structural unit from its own or other project funds, or it can be applied for centrally at the Doctoral School.

In grant programs that the doctoral student implements for at least 12 months, it is usually necessary to submit a six-month progress report, in which the doctoral student:

- reports on the work done during the reporting period in accordance with the deliverables plan, including indicating what was completed in full and what was partially completed, justifying the main obstacles (e.g. changes in the schedule of cooperation partners, the deadline for reviewing a submitted scientific paper is longer than planned, etc.). If necessary, consider alternatives that are equivalent in terms of purpose and scope;
- describes the main international cooperation activities (internships, participation in conferences, etc.);
- assesses the progress of the doctoral thesis and the progress of the main deliverable (e.g. Q1-level scientific paper) in percentage terms;
- outlines the main tasks for the next six-month period, including possible implementation risks, alternatives, etc.

A good tool for measuring progress is a monthly activity description, which is submitted upon request in individual grant programs. Reports should include such activities as:

- work on the preparation and design of scientific articles (if these articles reference the grant). Communication with reviewers and publishing houses can also be mentioned here;
- any work devoted to the development of chapters of the doctoral thesis (work with scientific literature, for example, analysing a specific issue; writing chapters, etc.);
- consultations with the doctoral thesis supervisor, mentioning the topic of the consultation.

The doctoral thesis supervisor is responsible for the substantive and scientific implementation of doctoral grants; institutional support (including preparation of an employment contract, equipping the workplace, etc.) is provided by the director of the institute or head of the centre. If the program has been announced by the DS, it provides administrative support.

13. RTU Study Portal ORTUS

The ORTUS portal (ortus.rtu.lv) is an internal electronic communication system of RTU, used by students, employees and academic staff. ORTUS provides information about:

- RTU news and events;
- class and exam session schedules;
- exam session results;
- study materials.

The ORTUS portal also provides access to scientific databases, free Microsoft Office software, communication with faculty and other RTU students, RTU internal regulations, and RTU e-mail.

To sign up at ortus.rtu.lv, select “Get or renew password” and enter the required data. The initial ORTUS password will be sent to your e-mail or phone. In case of any questions, please contact the RTU IT Service Centre (phone 67089999 or by e-mail it@rtu.lv).

The Eduroam network available to students provides free Wi-Fi both at RTU and at other Latvian and European universities. You can connect to the network with your ORTUS user data.

You can connect to the e-study environment at studijas.rtu.lv by registering with your ORTUS username and password or by opening the ORTUS section “For Students” → “E-study”.

14. Practical Information

- The study agreement is prepared by the RTU Admissions Committee. When the contract is ready for signing, the applicant receives an automatically generated notification and instructions on signing the study agreement via e-mail.
- The student ID card is prepared by the RTU Admissions Committee.
- It is possible to apply for an International Student Identity Card (ISIC). It is an international student card that provides many and various discounts in Latvia and around the world. More information: www.isic.lv.
- The employment contract is prepared within two months after signing the study agreement by the structural unit where the doctoral student will be employed.
- The employee ID card is prepared upon request by the RTU IT Services Centre.
- Certificates (for example, on completed study courses) are prepared by the Doctoral School.
- For everyday communication, the doctoral student must use the e-mail assigned by RTU. The doctoral student is obliged to check it regularly.
- The International Cooperation Department provides support for foreign doctoral students in relation to residence permits.

If you still cannot find the information you are looking for in this guide, please contact the RTU Doctoral School by writing to doktorantura@rtu.lv.

