

Doctoral Examination Regulations of the Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg

23.10.2025

On 23 October 2025, the Presidential Board of the Hamburg University of Fine Arts approved the following amended version of the "Doctoral Examination Regulations of the Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg" in accordance with Section 108 (1) sentence 3 HmbHG on the basis of Section 85 (1) no. 1 of the Hamburg Higher Education Act (HmbHG) of 18 July 2001 (HmbGVBl. p. 171), last amended on 19 February 2025 (HmbGVBl. p. 241):

Preamble

The Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg (subsequently referred to as HFBK Hamburg) supervises doctoral theses composed from a range of perspectives, which make an independent contribution to the research on the arts, their functions, contexts and the conditions which they require to flourish.

This can include, for example, analysis of artistic work or investigations of historical, social, medial and cultural processes which have influenced, been influenced or are influenced by artistic discourses. This can also comprise investigations into theories of art or philosophical concepts which focus on art.

The HFBK Hamburg permits and encourages doctoral projects with a high degree of artistic content; its relationship to the scientific theoretical doctoral project must however be made clear. The preponderance of an artistic scientific doctoral project should focus on the scientific component.

§ 1

The doctoral qualification and the subject of the doctoral project

- (1) The HFBK Hamburg awards the qualification of Doctor philosophiae in artibus (Dr. phil. in art.) to candidates who complete a doctoral procedure.
- (2) The award of a doctoral degree from the HFBK Hamburg indicates the suitability of the candidate to conduct independent in-depth specialist research. This is proven by the combination of either:
 1. a) A theoretical-scientific dissertation
b) A piece of artistic work in combination with a theoretical-scientific dissertation
 2. With a defence conducted in front of members of the university community, in which the candidate is to present their project and discuss

its scientific theoretical scientific and (if applicable) its artistic significance as a contribution to research. The candidate is thereby required to demonstrate their ability to present and defend scientific propositions.

- (3) Theoretical scientific doctoral projects in accordance with section 2 no. 1a and the theoretical scientific component of the doctoral project in accordance with section 2 no. 1b can also be produced through collaborative work. This requires the consent of the doctoral committee. The committee will also take all decisions relating to the form in which the independent contribution to doctoral projects performed as a collaborative undertaking is to be demonstrated. Both theoretical scientific components of the doctoral degree must each represent an independent contribution to research.

§ 2

General provisions about the doctoral procedure

- (1) A doctoral degree usually follows the following procedure:
1. Acceptance as a doctoral student in accordance with §§ 5 and 6
 2. Beginning a doctoral procedure in accordance with § 9,
 3. Assessing the doctoral project in accordance with §10
 4. Accepting the doctoral project in accordance with §11
 5. A defence in accordance with § 13
 6. Assessing the doctoral project in accordance with § 14
 7. Publication of the dissertation in accordance with § 15
 8. Awarding the doctoral degree in accordance with § 16
- (2) The decisions to be taken within the scope of the doctoral procedure are reserved for the doctoral committee of the HFBK Hamburg or the doctoral examination committee appointed by the doctoral committee within an individual doctoral procedure.
- (3) Supervisors / examiners of a doctoral project or members of the doctoral committee / doctoral examination committee must be professors, whose body of artistic or scientific work qualifies them for these roles in accordance with § 15 sections 1 and 5 HmbHG or the equivalent laws of other states in Germany. The doctoral committee of the HFBK Hamburg will take all decisions pertaining to any exceptions to this rule.

§ 3

The doctoral committee

- (1) The University Senate of the HFBK Hamburg appoints a doctoral committee for a minimum period of three years to oversee the conduct of doctoral procedures.
- (2) The doctoral committee is made up of four professors from the HFBK Hamburg, of which a minimum of two are to teach in the Department of Theory and History at the HFBK Hamburg; they are to be joined by a professor from another university and a doctoral student enrolled at the HFBK Hamburg. The majority of the members of the committee must themselves hold a doctoral degree. Four deputy members are to be appointed from the professorial staff at the HFBK.

- (3) The doctoral committee will elect one of its number to perform the role of chair, responsible for organizing the tasks of the doctoral committee and carrying out its decisions. The chair must be a member of the HFBK Hamburg.
- (4) The doctoral committee requires the presence of a minimum of three members to be quorate. Should the chair be prevented from attending when a decision is to be made, the committee will appoint a new chair from the members present. Decisions are taken by a simple majority of the voting members present.
- (5) The doctoral committee is responsible for processing all questions associated with the conduct of doctoral procedures and in particular, is to perform the following tasks:
 - 1. Decision making about:
 - a) Fulfilment of the admissions requirements in accordance with § 4.
 - b) The acceptance as a doctoral candidate and the appointment of the first and second supervisors in accordance with § 5.
 - c) A change of supervisors.
 - d) The acceptance of collaborative work and the form in which each candidate is to demonstrate their independent contribution to the project in accordance with § 1 section 3.
 - e) The beginning of the doctoral procedure in accordance with § 9 on the basis of the doctoral project submitted.
 - f) The appointment of examiners in accordance with § 10.
 - g) Acceptance of the doctoral project on the basis of the examiners' reports in accordance with § 11.
 - h) Appointment of the members of the doctoral examination committee in accordance with § 12.
 - 2. Supervision of the correct doctoral procedure and mediation of any disagreements.

§ 4 Admissions requirements

- (1) Admission to a doctoral degree requires a Diplom or Master's degree from a German university or an international university of equivalent status with the minimum grade of "good".
- (2) Applicants are also required to submit proof of their qualification for scientific studies. This can be demonstrated either by the scientific components of their degree qualification or during their doctoral studies. In the latter case, the doctoral committee will require that the applicant present certain certificates of scientific achievement by a certain deadline.
- (3) Holders of a degree from an international university are required to prove the equivalence of their degree in accordance with section 1. Decisions on this matter will be taken by the doctoral committee.
- (4) The doctoral committee examines the academic and artistic aptitude of the applicant and decides on their acceptance resp. admission as a doctoral candidate.

§ 5

Acceptance as a doctoral candidate

- (1) Applications to become a doctoral candidate at the HFBK Hamburg are made online via the HFBK Hamburg application form and must have been received by 30 December (cut-off deadline). If a deadline ends on a Saturday, Sunday or a legal holiday, the application deadline will end at 16.00 on the following working day.
- (2) Applicants are also to submit the following documents to the HFBK Hamburg Examination Office:
 1. A (max. 15 line) summary of the proposed project.
 2. A ten-page proposal outlining the problem to be addressed by the planned project; a combined artistic and theoretical scientific project must outline the proposed balance between the two elements; the proposal is to list all its sources and materials.
 3. The proofs required by § 4 for admission to a doctoral degree.
 4. A C.V.
 5. Written proof of a consultation with the professor proposed as a supervisor in accordance with § 6, confirmation of their interest in supervising this project and the proposal of a second supervisor.
 6. A list of sole and co-authored publications from the applicant and / or a documentation of their artistic work and publications.
 7. A declaration as to whether and with which result, the applicant has already applied for entry to or been part of a doctoral procedure.
 8. A declaration the applicant has read and understood the doctoral examination regulations and the HFBK guidelines for good academic practice (see appendix).

The deadline outlined in section 1 applies.

- (4) The doctoral committee can invite applicants to an interview.
- (5) The doctoral committee is to take all decisions relating to the acceptance or admission of an application to a doctoral degree and the supervision of it in accordance with section 2 no. 5. The committee is to agree to the proposal of the applicant as far as is possible.

§ 6

Supervision of the doctoral project

- (1) The first supervisor of a doctoral degree conducted in accordance with § 1 section 2 no. 1a must be a member of the professorial staff holding a doctoral degree and teaching in the Department of Theory and History at the HFBK. The second supervisor must be a professor teaching a theoretical scientific subject.
- (2) In the case of a doctoral degree pursued in accordance with § 1 section 2 no. 1b, the first supervisor should usually be a member of the professorial staff teaching in the Department of Theory and History, who holds a doctoral degree. The second supervisor must be a university professor teaching an artistic subject.

In well-founded exceptional cases, the doctoral committee can appoint a

professor from an artistic subject as the first supervisor. In this case, the second supervisor is to be a member of the professorial staff holding a doctoral degree and teaching in the Department of Theory and History.

- (3) § 2 section 3 applies accordingly.
- (4) The first supervisor is to conclude a supervision agreement with the doctoral candidate recording the working title of the doctoral project and establishing the respective rights and obligations of both parties; a completion plan in accordance with the standard period of completion and if required, specification of the certificates of academic achievement to be gained and the deadlines by which they are to be submitted and which demonstrate the ability to perform scientific studies. The respective rights and obligations established within the scope of this agreement include binding and regular consultation about the progress of the doctoral project and regular feedback relating to the performance and potential of the doctoral student.

§ 7

Enrolment, the doctoral programme and tuition fees

- (1) Applicants admitted to a doctoral degree will be enrolled as doctoral candidates at the HFBK Hamburg. Admission is granted for ten semesters, after which the doctoral project should have been completed. Given a well-founded application to the doctoral committee, a candidate can apply for extension of the period of study by a maximum of four semesters. § 2 section 2 of the doctoral degree regulations applies accordingly. This application will be granted only once.
- (2) Students can apply to the doctoral committee for intermission from and / or suspension of their doctoral studies; a positive decision this requires submission to the doctoral committee of well-founded grounds within an application.
- (3) The aims and curriculum of the doctoral programme are outlined in accordance with § 20 in the doctoral degree regulations issued by the University Senate.
- (4) Doctoral candidates are not required to pay tuition fees.

§ 8

A theoretical scientific doctoral project

- (1) A theoretical scientific doctoral project (dissertation) in accordance with § 1 section 2 no. 1a or the theoretical scientific component of a doctoral project in accordance with § 1 section 2 no. 1b must satisfy scientific standards and represent an independent contribution to research.
- (2) If a theoretical scientific doctoral project or the theoretical scientific component of a doctoral project is the result of collaborative work in accordance with § 1 section 3, each candidate must indicate their own contribution clearly.
- (3) A theoretical scientific doctoral project or component is to be composed in German. The doctoral committee can approve deviations from this rule, if examination is still possible. Any dissertations submitted in a language other than German must be accompanied by a comprehensive German language

summary (minimum 25 pages in length).

- (4) The theoretical scientific doctoral project or component must be accompanied by a legal declaration appended to the dissertation and signed by the doctoral candidate, indicating that the dissertation was composed by the candidate working entirely independently, that they have not used any sources or aids other than those specified and that they have marked any direct quotations or indirect references from other authors as such.

§ 9

Beginning the doctoral procedure

- (1) The requirement for beginning the doctoral procedure is the completion of a theoretical scientific dissertation in accordance with §1 section 2 no. 1a or a theoretical scientific dissertation in connection with a work of art in accordance with § 1 section 2 no. 1b.
- (2) The following documents are to be submitted to the HFBK Hamburg Examination Office:
1. The applicant's Study Book with all the requisite signatures from the first supervisor confirming completion of the doctoral programme in accordance with § 3 of the doctoral degree regulations.
 2. Five bound copies of the dissertation or the theoretical scientific component of the doctoral project and a digital copy in a conventional digital storage device.
 3. Given a doctoral project realized in accordance with the specifications of 1 section 2 no. 1b, five copies of an appropriate documentation of the work of art are to be provided. This should be accompanied by a proposal of the format and time of its presentation, which is to take place in the period during which the theoretical scientific dissertation is to be assessed. The presentation should usually take place at the HFBK Hamburg.
- (3) The title page of the doctoral project must contain the following information:
- Author
 - Title
 - Supervisors
 - The day of submission
 - A statement that the HFBK Hamburg is the institution at which the doctoral project has been submitted.
- (4) The doctoral candidate must also submit a signed statement that they have not already submitted the doctoral project within the scope of a doctoral procedure at another university.
- (5) Working on the basis of a consideration of the documents submitted, the doctoral committee will decide whether to begin the doctoral procedure.
- (6) The doctoral committee will refuse to begin the examination procedure if:
1. The requisite documents are incomplete or incorrect.
 2. The doctoral candidate has already failed a similar examination at another university or submitted the dissertation to a different examination

procedure in an identical or different form.

3. The doctoral committee can demonstrate that the candidate has infringed good academic practice.
- (7) If the doctoral committee decides not to begin the procedure, the university will retain a copy of the theoretical scientific doctoral project or the theoretical scientific component with documentation of the work of art together with the corresponding records in accordance with § 1 section 2 no. 1a and b.

§ 10

Assessment of the doctoral project

- (1) With the beginning of the doctoral procedure, the doctoral committee appoints a minimum of two examiners; §2 section 3 applies accordingly. Usually, the two supervisors of the doctoral project are to be appointed as examiners. One of the examiners must be a professor holding a doctoral degree teaching in the Department of Theory and History at the HFBK Hamburg. The doctoral candidate has the right to propose examiners.
- (2) The examiners' reports should be submitted three months after they have been commissioned. If an examiners' report is not submitted by the stated deadline and a reminder to do so does not have the desired effect, the doctoral committee can, in consultation with the candidate, appoint another examiner. The members of the doctoral committee and the doctoral examination committee must treat the examiners' reports confidentially.
- (3) The examiners are to work independently to assess the doctoral project in accordance with § 1 section 2 no. 1a and b. In the case of a doctoral project in accordance with § 1 section 2 no. 1b, the piece of artistic work is to be presented in a suitable form, usually at the HFBK Hamburg.
- (4) The examiners will tender a well-founded recommendation to the doctoral committee as to the acceptance or rejection of the doctoral project. The examiners' reports must present the significance of the dissertation and its results in a wider context and highlight any of its drawbacks.

Grading of the dissertation is to be performed in accordance with the specifications of S 13 section 1.

- (5) The examiners' report should present the following as a minimum:
 - The value of the selected topic in the current research landscape.
 - A presentation of the selected approach, methodology and findings.
 - An appraisal of the special features of the doctoral project and any criticism.
 - A comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the doctoral project.
 - A clear judgement derived from the previous considerations.
- (6) If the drawbacks exhibited by the dissertation are not sufficient to justify its rejection, the examiners can propose to the doctoral committee that the dissertation be accepted with requirements to make amendments prior to publication. Such requirements do not delay registration for the defence.

§ 11

Acceptance of the doctoral project

- (1) After the examiners' reports have been submitted, the doctoral committee decides whether to accept the doctoral project in accordance with §1 section 2 no. 1a and b. This decision can be made subject to conditions requiring the candidate to take certain steps before publication. The doctoral committee names the examiner to which the candidate is required to demonstrate that they have complied with all the conditions imposed.
- (2) If the two examiners' reports propose grades which differ by two grades or more, or if one examiner recommends acceptance and the other rejection of the doctoral project, the doctoral committee will appoint a further examiner. The grade awarded will be the arithmetic average of the grades awarded in the examiners' reports.
- (3) A doctoral project cannot be accepted if the majority of the examiners' reports do not recommend it.
- (4) In the case of a rejection, the doctoral candidate will be informed of the grounds in accordance with § 19. The candidate has the right to view the examiners' reports within a month of receiving notification of the negative decision.
- (5) If the doctoral project is rejected, the university will retain one copy of the dissertation, any work of art created, the examiners' reports and the procedural documents. A revised version of the doctoral project can be submitted six months later at the earliest. A further repeat is not permissible.
- (6) If the doctoral project is accepted, the doctoral candidate has the right to apply to the chair of the doctoral committee to view the examiners' reports (without the grading) at least two weeks before the defence.

§ 12

The doctoral examination committee

- (1) In accepting the doctoral project, the doctoral committee appoints a doctoral examination committee with responsibility for the further conduct of the examination procedure, the defence and the grading of the doctoral project.
- (2) The doctoral examination committee consists of the examiners in accordance with § 10 section 1 and two further professors. It must consist of a minimum of
 - A professor teaching in the Department of Theory and History at the HFBK Hamburg
 - A professor in an artistic department
 - A professor from another university
 - A professor in the doctoral committee

The majority of the members of the committee must themselves hold a doctoral degree.

- (3) The examination committee appoints a chair from its membership. The committee is quorate when at least three of its members are present, of which two hold a doctoral degree.

§ 13

The defence

- (1) After the doctoral project has been accepted, a defence must be arranged within three months. The doctoral project will be placed in the HFBK Hamburg library two weeks before the defence and be made available to the university community.
- (2) The defence is open to members of the university community, unless the doctoral candidate objects. The doctoral candidate can submit an application to the chair of the doctoral examination committee for the exclusion of the university community. If the defence does not require the presence of the university community, it can be conducted in private. The members of the doctoral committee are not classed as belonging to the university community in this sense.
- (3) The defence opens with a presentation from the doctoral candidate of the research context from which the doctoral project emerged together with their findings.
- (4) This is followed, if necessary, by a discussion of the examiners' reports.
- (5) After the contribution of the doctoral candidate and if necessary, information about the contents of the examiners' reports, the examiners, other members of the doctoral examination committee and then all other persons present, have the opportunity to ask questions, but not to give a commentary on the doctoral project. The chair can reject questions, if they are not pertinent to the subject of the defence.
- (6) The duration of the defence should not exceed one-and-a-half hours.
- (7) Immediately after the defence, the doctoral examination committee will retire to a private session to discuss whether the defence has been passed or failed and the grade to be awarded for it.

Each member of the doctoral examination committee will award a grade for the defence in accordance with the grading scheme outlined in § 14 section 1. The defence is taken as having been passed if a majority of the members of the doctoral examination committee present award the minimum grade of "satisfactory" in accordance with § 14 section 1.

- (8) If the defence has been passed, the doctoral examination committee will determine the final grade awarded to the doctoral degree in accordance with § 14 section 2. The doctoral candidate is to be informed of the decision immediately after it has been reached.
- (9) A record will be kept of the defence, including the following:
 1. The time and place of the defence
 2. The name of the doctoral candidate
 3. The names of the members of the doctoral examination committee
 4. A summary of the matters discussed in the defence
 5. The individual grades awarded to the doctoral project by the examiners in their reports and for the defence and the grades awarded by the other members of the doctoral examination committee.
 6. The decision taken by the doctoral examination committee regarding the

award of the doctoral degree and the final grade of the doctoral project.

7. The signature of the chair of the doctoral examination committee.
- (10) Should the doctoral candidate fail to attend the defence without advancing a valid reason, the doctoral examination committee will decide whether accept the grounds submitted for the absence of the candidate. If the doctoral candidate is prevented from appearing at the defence on grounds of illness, the doctoral examination committee can require the submission of a medical certificate. If the doctoral examination committee accepts the grounds advanced by the doctoral candidate for their absence, a new date will be set for the defence.
- (11) Should the doctoral candidate fail the defence, they can repeat it once within a year, but no earlier than six weeks after their first attempt. Should the candidate fail the repeat, the doctoral examination is classed as having been failed. The chair of the doctoral committee will inform the doctoral candidate in writing of the final failure of the doctoral degree. The written notification is to include information on the appeals procedure. The doctoral project in accordance with § 1 section 2 no. 1a and b and all examiners' reports will remain in the HFBK Hamburg archive.

§ 14

Assessment of the doctoral project

- (1) A doctoral project in accordance with § 1 section 2 no. 1a and b and the defence in accordance with § 13 are graded in accordance with the following scheme:
- 1 = Excellent
 - 2 = Good
 - 3 = Satisfactory
 - 4 = Fail
- Differentiated grades follow by raising or lowering the grade by increments of 0.3. The grades 0.7, 4.3, 4.7 and 5.3 are not permissible.
- (2) The final grade is constituted from the average of the grades awarded by the examiners' reports and the average of the grades awarded for the defence. The average from the examiners' reports and the defence are combined in the ratio 75 % and 25 % to yield the final grade. The averages and the final grade will be rounded by a single decimal point up to a deviation of 0.05 to the favour of the candidate. With the following averages, the final grade is:
- from 1.0 to under 1,5 "Excellent" (magna cum laude)
 - from 1.5 to under 2.5 "Good" (cum laude)
 - from 2.5 to under 3.5 "Satisfactory"(rite)
- Given exceptional grades (an average of 1.0 in all components of the examination) and the consensus of the doctoral examination committee, it can award the grade "Distinction" (summa cum laude).

§ 15

Publication

- (1) If the doctoral committee has issued conditions for publication in accordance with § 11 section 1, the doctoral candidate is to submit proof of compliance to the named examiner before publication. The named examiner must provide their express approval for publication.
- (2) The doctoral candidate is required to submit the following proofs of publication within two years of the passing the defence:
 1. Proof of electronic publication in a form (data format and carrier) to be agreed with the Carl von Ossietzky Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg (subsequently referred to as SUB). The terms and conditions and table of fees listed on the SUB homepage apply
or
 2. Proof of distribution via the book trade via a commercial publisher with a minimum print run of 150 books; the publication must be marked as being a doctoral project submitted to the HFBK Hamburg. Five copies of this book must be delivered free-of-charge to the HFBK Hamburg library
or
 3. Proof of publication in a journal
or
 4. upon application to the doctoral committee and with its authorisation, 30 copies may be submitted to the HFBK Hamburg library, printed in book or photo print on non-ageing wood and acid-free paper and permanently bound.

In the case of a doctoral project in accordance with § 1 section 2 no. 1b, the artistic component of the project is to be published in an appropriate, public and permanently-accessible form, for example, on the HFBK Hamburg repository. The published version of the theoretical scientific component of the doctoral project is to record the publication location of the artistic component.

- (3) If the theoretical scientific component of the doctoral project is to be published in printed form (in a specialist journal, publication as a book by a commercial publisher, delivery of 30 copies), a further copy must be handed over to the Carl von Ossietzky Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg in addition to the copies to be delivered to the HFBK Hamburg University Library.
- (4) In a case of publication in accordance with section 2 no.4, the doctoral candidate transfers the right to the HFBK Hamburg to produce and disseminate further copies of the doctoral project resp. upload it to a network, as far as this falls under its legal activities.

§ 16

Awarding the doctoral degree

- (1) After the doctoral candidate has proven to the chair of the doctoral committee that they have provided requisite copies of the doctoral project to the library or published the doctoral project, the HFBK Hamburg will complete the doctoral procedure by issuing the degree certificate. Only at this point may the title

Doctor philosophiae in artibus (Dr. phil. in art.) be used.

- (2) The doctoral degree certificate will carry the date of the defence. It will state the title of the doctoral project submitted in accordance with § 1 section 2 numbers 1a and b, the names of the examiners and the final grade. The certificate will be signed by the President of the HFBK Hamburg and the chair of the doctoral committee and will carry the HFBK Hamburg seal. A copy of the certificate will be retained in the HFBK Hamburg records.

§ 17

Rescinding the doctoral degree

- (1) The doctoral committee can decide to rescind the doctoral degree should it transpire that the degree was obtained through misconduct or that significant requirements for the award were incorrectly believed to have been fulfilled.
- (2) The holder of the doctoral degree is to be given the opportunity to comment before any action is taken. The decision must be justified and the person affected is to be informed. The notification is to include information regarding the appeals procedure.

§ 18

Viewing records

In well-founded cases, the doctoral candidate or the doctoral graduate can submit a written application to the chair of the doctoral committee to request access to the records of the doctoral procedure.

§ 19

The appeals procedure

- (1) All negative decisions handed down by the doctoral committee or doctoral examination committee are to be issued in writing together with information on the appeals procedure.
- (2) Candidates can lodge appeals against all decisions of the doctoral and doctoral examination committee in accordance with § 66 HmbHG. A formal appeal procedure will be conducted in front of an appeals committee.

§ 20

The doctoral degree regulations and guidelines for doctoral procedure

The University Senate has issued a set of degree course regulations for doctoral degree programmes and a set of guidelines for doctoral studies.

§ 21

Entry into force

The amended version of the doctoral examination regulations take effect the day after their approval by the President's Office. They apply to doctoral candidates who start their doctoral studies in summer semester 2026. The doctoral examination regulations of the Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg from 19 November 2020 lose their validity on this day.

§ 22

Transitional provisions

The amended doctoral examination regulations come into force in summer semester 2026 and also apply to all doctoral candidates at the HFBK Hamburg who started their doctoral degree before this point. Applications for extensions to the completion date and intermission already granted remain unaffected. Should a student already have registered the completion of their doctoral degree (submission to the Examination Office of the dissertation with or without the artistic project), they can follow the procedure outlined by the doctoral examination regulations valid in winter semester 2025/2026.

Additive

This translation may only be used for reference purposes. This English version is not an official translation of the original German version. In cases where any differences occur between the English and the German version, the German version shall prevail.