CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL AND DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZARAGOZA

(approved by resolution of the Management Committee on 9 July 2026)

INTRODUCTION

Royal Decree 99/2011 of 28 January, regulating official doctoral programmes, stipulates in Article 8 that "all members of a Doctoral School must sign a declaration of commitment to comply with the Code of Good Practice adopted by that School". Furthermore, Royal Decree 576/2023 of 4 July, amending Royal Decree 99/2011, states in its first article (paragraph twenty-one) the need for a guide to good practice for the supervision of doctoral theses.

The Doctoral School of the University of Zaragoza (EDUZ) has, pursuant to a resolution of the Steering Committee dated 30 January 2019, amended by a resolution of the same committee dated 22 May 2019, a Code of Good Practice for its School and its Doctoral Programmes as a means of guiding relations between doctoral candidates, those responsible for their supervision and guidance, the Academic Committees, the doctoral programmes and the University, through the EDUZ.

The Code of Good Practice, inspired by the European Charter for Researchers, is a complementary instrument to existing regulations (primarily the EDUZ Internal Regulations, the Regulations on the Internal Quality Assurance System for doctoral studies at the University of Zaragoza, the University of Zaragoza's Code of Good Practice in Research, and the University of Zaragoza's Code of Ethics) and aims to foster a shared culture that will enhance the quality of doctoral training and contribute to rigour, respect, responsibility and integrity in the conduct of scientific activity. This Code does not seek to address legal or ethical matters of a different nature that may fall within the remit of other University bodies, services and committees.

Given the unique nature of doctoral training, in which the learning process combines the acquisition and generation of knowledge, this code should be understood as a complement to the University of Zaragoza's Code of Good Practice in Research in the context of doctoral studies. Consequently, its principles must be applied to the research plan, the personal training plan, the activity report, supervision, the annual assessment, and the preparation, submission and defence of the doctoral thesis.

For all these reasons, the Code of Good Research Practice must be amended to bring it into line with the recently approved regulations (Internal Regulations of the EDUZ [approved by resolution of 13 May 2026 of the Governing Council of the University of Zaragoza], Thesis Regulations [approved by resolution of 29 June 2026 of the Governing Council of the University of Zaragoza], and the Regulations on the Internal Quality Assurance System for Doctoral Studies at the University of Zaragoza [approved by resolution of 13 May 2026 of the Governing Council of the University of Zaragoza]), as well as with Royal Decree 576/2023 of 4 July.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND REQUIREMENTS APPLICABLE TO DOCTORAL STUDIES

1) Basic principles

The aim of doctoral programmes is to train researchers capable of joining the national or international R&D&I system and of adding value both within and outside the academic sphere. As a public university, the University of Zaragoza must ensure that both the human and financial resources invested in doctoral training are directed towards achieving this aim. In this regard, doctoral theses must be feasible, original, ethically sound and aligned with the research priorities of the programmes. It is therefore also essential to carry out a rigorous selection process among candidates wishing to undertake a doctoral thesis.

The University must promote the recognition of doctoral candidates as professionals who make key contributions to the creation of new knowledge and play an essential role in the research system. It must therefore encourage theses to be undertaken on a full-time basis under the supervision and funding of specific pre-doctoral contracts. All of this is without detracting from the recognition of the effort involved in completing a thesis on a part-time basis or without adequate funding, by those seeking to strengthen their professional training in the field of R&D&I. In all cases, realistic expectations and access to training must be guaranteed.

Supervisors and tutors, as well as doctoral candidates, must focus their work on expanding the frontiers of scientific knowledge and on the pursuit of the common good of humanity, within a context that guarantees freedom of thought and expression, as well as the freedom to determine methods of problem-solving. This freedom must be exercised within the framework of current legislation, recognised principles of ethics and scientific integrity, social responsibility, sustainability, safety, data protection, intellectual and industrial property rights, and any existing professional obligations and material constraints.

Those carrying out supervisory and mentoring duties must promote scientific excellence, originality, feasibility and relevance in the doctoral theses they supervise, encouraging the integration of doctoral candidates into research groups and networks, and fostering their research careers and national and international mobility.

The Academic Committees bear ultimate responsibility for defining, updating, ensuring the quality of and coordinating the programmes; for monitoring the progress of research; for the training of doctoral candidates; and for authorising the submission of theses, in accordance with the applicable regulations. Their decisions are fundamental to the proper running of the programmes. Consequently, they must be composed of experts in the programme's various fields of research, meet as frequently as necessary in each case, and keep minutes of all decisions taken. These committees shall invite to their meetings such persons as they deem appropriate for the best performance of their duties.

The University of Zaragoza must give due recognition to the work of the various key stakeholders in the doctoral training process, promote the proper development of doctoral programmes and monitor, through its Quality Assurance Committee for Doctoral Studies and other relevant bodies, the overall quality of doctoral studies. All members of the Doctoral School shall actively collaborate in the quality assessment processes set out in the Internal Quality Assurance System.

2) Ethical, social and professional responsibility, scientific integrity and transparency

Supervisors and tutors, as well as doctoral candidates, must do everything in their power to ensure that their work is relevant to society, is based on principles of equity, social responsibility, sustainability and scientific integrity, and constitutes an original contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

Supervisors, tutors and doctoral students must adhere to the fundamental ethical practices and principles applicable to their disciplines, as well as the standards set out in the various codes of ethics, whether national, sectoral or institutional. They must avoid plagiarism of any kind, the fabrication or falsification of data, the improper manipulation of results, improper authorship, and any non-transparent or inappropriate use of digital tools or generative artificial intelligence. Furthermore, they must respect the principles of intellectual and industrial property, or joint ownership of data, when research is carried out in collaboration with other researchers.

Supervisors and doctoral candidates must ensure that their research activities are made accessible to society, where possible and whilst respecting the limits of confidentiality, security, intellectual property and data protection, so that they can be understood by non-specialists and thus improve the general public's understanding of science. Direct engagement with society will help the public to recognise, value and support scientific and technological priorities and needs.

Doctoral candidates must be aware that they are accountable to the doctoral programme, EDUZ and the University of Zaragoza, as well as to society as a whole. As trainee researchers, they must also observe the principles of sound, transparent and effective financial management, and cooperate with any authorised audit of their research. Whenever necessary and upon request by the competent authorities, the methods of data collection and analysis, the results and, where applicable, the detailed data must be open to internal or external scrutiny, whilst at all times complying with current regulations on the protection of personal data, confidentiality, security, and intellectual and industrial property.

The University and EDUZ must publicise, in an appropriate manner, clear, up-to-date, accessible and detailed information about their doctoral programmes. It is recommended that they provide a precise description of the following: research areas, opportunities for doctoral theses, admission criteria, requirements for continued enrolment, training activities, assessment procedures, thesis formats, mobility, joint supervision, international and industrial doctoral programmes, and channels for enquiries or complaints. It is also advisable for programme staff to make their research CVs publicly available.

In the case of doctoral students with special educational needs, a report will be obtained from the University Office for Diversity Support, in order to guarantee equal rights and opportunities. These individuals will receive personalised support, ~~with~~ each case being assessed ~~individually~~ and, where necessary, the relevant curricular and workplace adjustments being made.

3) PhD students, tutors and supervisors

The Academic Committees shall appoint individuals to carry out tutoring and supervision duties who can ensure that these tasks are performed appropriately. As a general rule, each PhD student shall have one tutor and one or two thesis supervisors, who may or may not be the same person as the tutor. However, theses may be co-supervised (in very

exceptionally) by three individuals where there are well-founded reasons of an academic nature or relating to interdisciplinary subject matter, or where the work is carried out in national or international collaboration. In all cases, in order to supervise a thesis, the supervisor must be actively engaged in appropriate research activity, in accordance with current regulations and the criteria of the University of Zaragoza.

A thesis supervisor shall only undertake the supervision of a thesis if they possess the necessary experience and resources, are free from conflicts of interest, and have sufficient availability to provide effective, regular and appropriate supervision of the PhD candidate throughout the entire period of thesis preparation.

Doctoral candidates, tutors and supervisors must maintain a regular, structured and respectful relationship.

Supervisors shall not only guide the doctoral candidate in their research work, but also in the development of a suitable professional career; they shall ensure that the candidate acquires the necessary competences and skills and shall identify any potential problems arising during the preparation of the doctoral thesis, proposing appropriate solutions to them. To ensure the best possible training, and wherever possible, the doctoral student will join a research team whose areas of work align with their interests.

The doctoral candidate shall follow the guidelines set by their supervisor(s), keep them informed of the progress of their work and their initiatives, and carry out the tasks entrusted to them, within the objectives of their training, to ensure the smooth running of the research team in which they conduct their research.

The doctoral candidate must maintain an organised, verifiable and secure record of the data, codes, materials, protocols, methodological decisions, results and findings of their research work and submit these to their supervisors, whilst being entitled to receive their opinions and advice in accordance with agreed timetables.

4) Definition, monitoring and development of the doctoral thesis project

Whilst respecting the doctoral candidate's freedom to choose a research topic within the programme's scope, the supervisor(s) shall collaborate in the preparation of their doctoral research project, which must be innovative and contribute to significant progress in their field of knowledge. The research plan must include, at a minimum, the (provisional) title of the thesis, an introduction and justification of the topic under study, working hypotheses, methodology and general objectives, resources and a timetable. The project will be supplemented by an appropriate personal training plan for the doctoral candidate. This plan will set out the various training activities to be undertaken during the doctoral thesis (courses, delivering seminars, mobility programmes, etc.). Both documents must be reviewed and updated periodically.

Thesis supervisors must ensure that the research plan drawn up is feasible within the timeframes set by current legislation, and that the training plan is suited to the doctoral candidate's profile and guarantees their proper doctoral training. Furthermore, they must facilitate access to the resources necessary for the thesis to be carried out properly.

Supervisors and doctoral candidates must be familiar with the strategic objectives governing their field of activity and the funding mechanisms, and must apply for all necessary authorisations before commencing their work or accessing the resources provided.

Supervisors shall continuously monitor the doctoral candidate's progress. Both supervisors and tutors must devote particular attention to mentoring the doctoral candidate and carry out this task in accordance with the highest professional standards. They must also foster a constructive and positive relationship with doctoral candidates, in order to create the conditions necessary for an effective transfer of knowledge and for the successful development of their careers as researchers.

Doctoral candidates must inform those responsible for the programme whenever the research plan for their doctoral thesis is delayed, redefined or completed, or notify them if it must be abandoned or suspended earlier than planned. Doctoral candidates must also report any need for an extension, temporary leave or a change in their level of commitment in accordance with the terms set out in EDUZ's regulations and procedures.

The Academic Committee will assess the progress of the doctoral project annually and ensure that the results of this assessment are made known to all those involved (doctoral candidates, supervisors and programme directors). In the event of an unfavourable assessment, this must be duly justified. In this case, the supervisor, in agreement with the programme's directors and the programme's Academic Committee, must propose to the doctoral candidate a programme of actions to be undertaken with a view to passing the second annual assessment.

5) Training, skills and professional development

PhD candidates, supervisors and programme directors must endeavour to continuously improve their qualifications and skills through regular training, refresher courses and further development. The University of Zaragoza and EDUZ will promote appropriate training resources for PhD candidates and for those carrying out supervisory and mentoring roles.

In the case of doctoral candidates, this will involve designing a suitable personal training plan and participating in the training activities of the programme and EDUZ that lead to the acquisition of the full range of competences specific to the doctoral programme, paying particular attention to those focused on their anticipated professional development.

Mobility is an essential value in the training of research staff. Supervisors and programmes must encourage and promote student mobility by establishing appropriate scientific collaborations, designing mobility agreements, joint supervision arrangements and study visits, and seeking adequate funding to facilitate such mobility.

The Academic Committees shall, to the best of their ability, encourage the development of doctoral theses within the framework of international co-supervision agreements or those designated as international doctorates or industrial doctorates.

Supervisors and tutors must be aware that their role extends beyond mere scientific guidance in their field of specialisation. Therefore, where appropriate, they must endeavour to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure that doctoral candidates receive adequate training for the development of a future professional career as researchers in a field that may not be academic.

The University, through EDUZ, will ensure the aforementioned professional development of doctoral candidates by organising the specific activities necessary for this purpose.

6) Dissemination, transfer and responsible use of research results

Doctoral candidates must ensure that the results of their research are disseminated and put to good use through presentations, transfer to other research contexts or, where appropriate, commercialisation, and, in particular, through publication in relevant scientific journals. Furthermore, the protection of intellectual property will be encouraged through patents or utility models held by public or private entities.

Supervisors are expected to take the initiative to ensure that the research carried out by the students under their supervision is fruitful and that the results of the theses are disseminated in various scientific forums and through scientific journals and publications.

7) Confidentiality and data protection

Where theses contain data and information that may be regarded as confidential, the parties involved must sign any confidentiality agreements that may be required. The commitment to confidentiality and secrecy shall remain in force and shall be binding even after the administrative or employment relationship between the doctoral candidate and the University of Zaragoza has ended, in accordance with the terms agreed between the parties.

In cases where the doctoral thesis research is wholly or partly funded by a for-profit organisation, agreements regarding the parties' intellectual and industrial property rights and the protocol for financial compensation must be set out in writing, in accordance with current legislation and the regulations of the University of Zaragoza. This document must guarantee the rights of the doctoral candidate and of those supervising the thesis.

Should the completion of the thesis require the processing of personal data, the rules, protocols and instructions required for the proper protection of such data must be followed with the utmost rigour.

8) Safety, risk prevention and information security

Supervisors and PhD candidates must at all times follow safe working practices, in accordance with current legislation, including taking the necessary precautions regarding personal and environmental health and safety.

Where applicable, they shall take the necessary precautions to ensure the proper preservation of information, in accordance with applicable regulations and good data management practices.

9) The doctoral thesis

The doctoral candidate bears ultimate responsibility for the development, originality, integrity, drafting and defence of the doctoral thesis.

It is possible, and generally advisable, that part of the work included in the doctoral thesis may have been previously published, either as a sole author or as a co-author. This fact must be clearly stated in the thesis, and the doctoral candidate shall only include in the thesis as their own that part of the work for which they are responsible. Other aspects may be included in accordance with standard citation and acknowledgement practices and the principles of intellectual property protection.

There are certain unacceptable practices in a doctoral thesis. These include, in particular, the fabrication and/or falsification of results, plagiarism, the concealment of conflicts of interest, the misappropriation of authorship, and the undeclared use of, or use contrary to applicable regulations regarding, generative artificial intelligence tools

, amongst others. Should any of these practices be proven, following the relevant investigation, in a doctoral thesis, these facts would be reported to the competent authority for the appropriate action, including the possible revocation of the doctoral degree and the disqualification of the supervisor from supervising doctoral theses.

The programme's Academic Committee is responsible for accepting a doctoral thesis for consideration. To this end, it must assess the thesis's contributions to knowledge within the field in which it was produced, as well as the quality of its writing and presentation. Reports will be sought from two external experts and, where necessary, appropriate technological tools may be used, whilst always respecting copyright and good academic practice.

The thesis must be submitted in good time to allow for its review by experts and the examination board, as well as for the necessary processing to be carried out properly, giving each of the parties involved sufficient time to fulfil their roles. In all cases, the deadlines set out in the thesis regulations regarding submission and defence must be adhered to.

Academic committees are responsible for proposing the examination board that is to assess the thesis. These examination boards must be composed of specialists with proven research experience and expertise in the field of the thesis, ensuring independence and the absence of conflicts of interest, whilst taking into account the criteria established by the University of Zaragoza. In general, the participation of international experts on the examination boards assessing doctoral theses is desirable.

The defence must be adequately publicised so as to facilitate attendance by the university community and other interested parties.

10) Contractual and legal obligations

Supervisors and doctoral candidates must be familiar with the regulations – whether national, sector-specific or institutional – governing the conditions of training and/or work in the context of the doctoral thesis. This includes regulations on intellectual and industrial property rights and the requirements and conditions of any sponsoring or funding bodies. They must comply with these regulations by delivering the required results in accordance with the terms set out in any relevant agreement or equivalent document and in the doctoral commitment document.

In particular, where the proposed research involves the use of human subjects and human samples, the handling of personal data, or experimentation with animals, biological agents or genetically modified organisms, due regard must be given to current legislation and to the reports, authorisations and supervision provided by whichever committees regulate these scientific practices within their respective fields.

11) Conflict prevention and resolution

The Quality Assurance Committee for Doctoral Studies is the body responsible for resolving academic complaints relating to doctoral studies.

However, as the bodies with ultimate responsibility for the programme, the Academic Committees shall take the appropriate decisions to prevent, avoid and, where possible, resolve any conflicts that may arise during the course of a doctoral thesis.