

A Short Introduction to Counselling Services for Doctoral Candidates (and Other Researchers)

Who you should contact if you need counselling may depend on many factors: your state's university law, your local institution's by-laws, your contracts and agreements, your status as a doctoral candidate, employee or student, and many other aspects of your personal situation.

There are many counselling services at universities and research institutions in Germany, but not all services are available in all institutions. Some services may not be available to you because of your particular status.

If you have a concrete question or concern, you might have to ask around until you find the right answers. Some services are provided by elected delegates, some by appointed representatives, some by commissions with procedural rules, some by professional counsellors, some by office employees.

This leaflet gives you an overview of what may be available at your institution.

Graduate and International Services

Many universities have (**International**) **Graduate Academies** (Graduiertenakademie) that offer a wide range of consulting services or can direct you to the right institution. Most universities also have an **International Services** unit or **Welcome Centre** that provides services for students, doctoral candidates and staff from abroad, probably also concerning residence permits.

If you do your doctorate in a **structured programme** (Graduate School or Research Training Group, GRK, RTG, IRTG, IMPRS), or if there is a **Graduate Academy** (Graduiertenakademie), then this is probably the place to go if you have questions concerning career planning, seminars, travel grants, print grants, stipends, scholarships, or study grants, or if you have general questions or a conflict with your supervisor.

Formal Aspects of Your Thesis

The **graduation office** (Promotionssekretariat, -büro) is concerned with all formal aspects of a doctoral thesis. It is part of the faculty that will award your doctoral degree. It is the place where you request your formal **admission as a doctoral candidate** (Antrag auf Annahme als Doktorand) and deliver your printed thesis and the required paperwork. All forms as well as the **regulations for a doctoral degree** (Promotionsordnung) can usually be downloaded from the faculty web site. The Promotionsordnung contains all the necessary information about the formal procedures and requirements leading to a doctorate. Other documents may give information about formatting your thesis, deadlines etc.

Depending on local and/or state regulations, doctoral candidates might be required to formally register at the faculty or university. Many universities grant the status of a **doctoral student** (Promotionsstudent) that comes with certain privileges: subsidized ticket for public transport, cheaper accommodation and meals, etc. Matriculation and/or registration may take place at the **student affairs office** (Studierendensekretariat) and may involve the payment of a fee in advance.

Doctoral Candidates' Representation

In some German states, doctoral candidates can formally elect delegates. In some universities there are **doctoral conventions** or other kinds of elected or self-organized **representations of doctoral students** (Promovierendenvertretung, Doktorandenkonvent). Many of these organizations offer counselling and organize events.

Discrimination Issues

Any **discrimination** or **harassment** due to gender, country of origin, sexual orientation, a possible handicap, family relation, or any other personal feature is unacceptable, and in many cases also unlawful.

The **representative bodies for disabled employees or disabilities advisers** (Behindertenbeauftragte, Schwerbehindertenvertretung) support persons with a handicap or a chronic illness.

Women's representatives or **Equal Opportunity Commissioners** (Frauenbeauftragte, Gleichstellungsbeauftragte, Gleichstellungsbüros) deal with problems concerning gender discrimination. Germany has federal as well as state laws that concern these issues, like the Gender Discrimination in Employment Act, Gender Equality Act, and the Equal Treatment Act. Sometimes, these services also deal with **Diversity Management** or issues concerning **job and family** (Beruf-Familie-Vereinbarkeit).

Health Related Issues

If you experience psychosomatic symptoms, stress, depression or other mental issues, you can contact **psychotherapeutic counselling services** (Psychologische or Psychotherapeutische Beratung/Beratungsstelle). Your problems will be treated confidentially, and the services are usually free of charge.

Some institutions have a specialized **medical counselling service** (Ärztliche Beratung) for more general issues, or a **coaching and supervision** service. The **in-house medical service** (Betriebsärztlicher Dienst) deals with all work-related medical issues of employees. **Prevention and health care services** (Gesundheitsförderung und Prävention) are sometimes provided, and some institutions have a special unit for **drug related issues** (Suchtberatung, Drogenberatung).

Other Social Services

Debt counselling or **financial counselling** (Schuldenberatung, Finanzberatung) might be available, in case you have debts or need financial advice. There might also be a **consulting service for insurances** (Versicherungsberatung). More specific counselling services can provide information about **grants or scholarships, housing and rent**.

Conflict counsellors or **mediators** (Konfliktbeauftragte, Mediatoren, Ombudspersonen) can help you if you experience a work-related conflict that cannot be solved by other means.

Family services (Familienservice, -büro) will assist you if you need support because you have or expect a child, if you have local family members who need long term medical care, or if you have general questions about the compatibility of job and family.

Some institutions provide **legal advice** (Rechtsberatung).

Research-related Services

Good Scientific Practice (GSP)

Every research institution in Germany has at least one person that can be contacted if you have a question concerning **good scientific practice** or a **suspicion of research misconduct**. They are called **ombudspersons, trusted persons** or **GSP representatives** (Ombudspersonen, Vertrauenspersonen, Beauftragte für gute wissenschaftliche Praxis). All communication with the ombudspersons will be treated confidentially, and a first direct contact is usually arranged on a short notice.

In case of a concrete suspicion or evidence of severe misconduct, the ombudsperson might hand over the case to an **investigative commission** (Untersuchungskommission). If you do not want to contact your local institution's ombudsperson, you can always approach the **German National Ombudsman** (Ombudsman für die Wissenschaft).

Research with Human Participants

If a research project involves the participation of human beings, it might have to be approved by an **Institutional Review Board** (Ethikkommission) before the project starts. Any study that could cause discomfort, stress or other problems to participants, or generate sensitive (e. g. personal convictions) or potentially disturbing information (e. g. knowledge about previously unknown afflictions) might have to undergo this procedure. If the need for an IRB approval is not self-evident, most IRBs perform a **pre-check** (Prüfung der Vorlagepflicht) that allows the investigators to enquire if a full procedure will be necessary.

All research involving human beings that could potentially cause harm is regulated through federal, state and European law. It is paramount that the Ethikkommission is involved **before** the practical part of the project starts, because a transgression may have serious consequences.

Sensitive Data

The **Data Protection Supervisor** (Datenschutzbeauftragter) or a central institution will advise you if you plan to obtain

sensitive data for your project, e. g. in interviews or in a study involving patients or test subjects.

Research with Animals

Animal Welfare Officers (Tierschutzbeauftragte) have to make sure that animals used in research are treated adequately. The protection of animal welfare is regulated through federal law in Germany.

Dangerous Goods

Whenever dangerous, hazardous or toxic substances are used in a research project, **safety advisers** (Gefahrgutbeauftragte) should be involved.

Environmental and Safety Aspects

Safety technology and **environment protection** units (Sicherheitstechnik and Umweltschutz) deal with aspects of safety and the protection of the environment against contamination.

Inventions and Patents

The **inventor counselling office** (Erfinderberatung) and the **patent office** (Patentberatung, -büro) can assist you if your research involves a patentable invention.

Research Funding

Some institutions have units that can assist you with obtaining **research funding** (Forschungsförderung).

Career Services

Many institutions have a **career advice office** (Kariereberatung) that can help you with planning a career or the next step into an industry job. **Consultancy services for start-ups** (Existenzgründungsberatung, Gründungsberatung) can assist you if you plan to establish your own business.

Employee Representation

All institutions with more than a few employees have a staff representation: in a public service institution (e. g. a university), there is the **staff council** (Personalrat), whereas a company (e. g. a Helmholtz-Zentrum with the legal status of a GmbH/Ltd.) has a **works council** (Betriebsrat).

Helpful Links

<http://www.research-in-germany.org/en/jobs-and-careers/info-for-phd-students.html>
<https://www.daad.de/deutschland/promotion/doktoranden/en/>
<http://www.hochschulkompass.de/en/doctoral-studies.html>
<https://ombudsman-fuer-die-wissenschaft.de/?lang=en>

Imprint

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