They belong to third-cycle university education and Level 4 of the Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, which comprises those qualifications aimed at providing students with advanced training in research procedures. In terms of educational outcomes, they may be defined by the following:

- have acquired advanced, cutting-edge knowledge and to be able to demonstrate, within the context of internationally recognised scientific research, a deep, comprehensive and proven understanding of the theoretical and practical features which define one or more research fields, as well as expertise in the relevant work methodology

- have made an original and significant contribution to scientific research in the relevant area of knowledge, having received recognition by the international scientific community

- have demonstrated the ability to design a research project so as to carry out critical analysis and to evaluate loosely defined contexts, to which the acquired knowledge, relevant contributions and work methodology can be applied, in order to synthesise new and complex ideas that may lead to a deeper understanding of the relevant field of research

- have developed enough autonomy to set up, manage and lead work teams, innovative research projects and scientific partnerships, either at national or international levels, within the relevant research area, in multidisciplinary contexts which may demand high levels of knowledge transfer

- have developed the necessary ability to carry out research autonomously, with social responsibility and scientific integrity

- have proved competence to participate in scientific discussions at international level, within the relevant knowledge area, as well as to communicate the results of research activity to all types of audiences

- have demonstrated, within a specific scientific field, the ability to contribute to cultural, social or technological breakthroughs, as well as to foster innovation at different levels of the knowledge society.

**Organisation of doctoral studies**

Official doctoral studies are structured into programmes, so, in order to obtain a PhD,
candidates must successfully complete a **doctoral programme**. Their characteristics are the following:

- they may include courses, seminars and other academic activities focused on research training which do not require a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) structure. In any case, the central activity at this level is research
- they are offered by **Doctoral Colleges** or by other competent educational institutions in the area of research
- they may be jointly organised by several universities, and include the participation, by means of agreements, of other R&D&I bodies, centres, institutions or entities, either public, private, national or international
- each programme is planned, designed and coordinated by an **Academic Commission**, which is responsible for the training and research activities which integrate the programme
- the Academic Commission is formed by doctors appointed by the university. Researchers from public research bodies and from other institutions involved in R&D&I, both national and international, may also participate in these commissions
- each PhD programme has a coordinator, who must be an accredited and renowned researcher
- PhD studies have a maximum duration of three years of full-time dedication, from admission into the programme until the doctoral thesis is submitted. The Academic Commission in charge of the programme may authorise an extension of two additional years
- doctoral studies may be carried out on a part-time basis, in which case the length of the programme extends to five years
- PhD candidates must write, submit and defend a **Doctoral thesis**, an original research project which requires a defence, in public session, in front of a board of examiners who are in charge of its evaluation
- this thesis must qualify the PhD candidate to carry out autonomous work in the area of R&D&I.

**Admission Requirements**

Candidates must hold a Bachelor’s degree, or equivalent, and a Master’s degree, or equivalent, provided they have completed at least 300 ECTS credits in the two types of programmes as a whole.

Candidates with a previous PhD may also apply.

In addition, admission may also be granted to those holding:

- a diploma leading to admission into a Master’s degree programme, issued by a Spanish
university or by a higher education institution within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA); or applicants who have completed at least 300 ECTS credits of official university education, 60 of which must belong to a Master's degree programme

- an official qualification of at least 300 ECTS credits, awarded by a Spanish university. The curriculum of these programmes must include training and research credits equivalent to the ones offered in Master's degree programmes. If this requirement is not met, applicants must compulsorily pass the specific training units and programme components required for admission into a PhD programme

- a position in specialised health training by means of an entrance examination, provided that they have already passed at least two years of training in a programme leading to an official degree in any of the specialised branches of Health Sciences

- a qualification from a foreign country, once the universities certify that the programme provides equivalent training to the one offered in a Spanish university Master's degree programme and that the degree is also a pre-requisite for access to PhD studies in the country issuing the diploma

- an official university degree corresponding to Level 3 of the Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education.

Universities are entitled to establish additional selection and admission criteria for applicants to specific PhD programmes.

PhD candidates who have been admitted to a PhD programme must register each year in the university organising the programme, in the relevant doctoral college or in the institution responsible for the programme, and pay a fee for academic mentorship.

**Status of doctoral students/candidates**

There are two types of status for doctoral students: status of university student and status of university student and research trainee.

**Status of university student**

It is included in the [2010 University Student Statute](#), which establishes that ‘a student is any person studying the official programmes of any of the three university cycles’.

This Statute regulates the rights of doctoral candidates as university students in two sections: a common one, which is applicable to all students, and a specific one, which only applies to doctoral students and mentions, among others, the following rights:

- receive quality research training, promoting scientific excellence, equity and social responsibility

- have a tutor who guides their training process and a doctoral supervisor, and a co-supervisor where appropriate, with proven research experience, who supervises the preparation of the doctoral thesis

- universities and PhD colleges must promote in third-cycle programmes the integration
of PhD candidates in research groups and networks

- participate in programmes and be eligible for financial assistance to receive training in the area of research, as well as for national and international mobility

- be guaranteed recognition and protection of intellectual property rights regarding the results obtained from their doctoral thesis, or from any other previous research projects, according to the terms established by the relevant legislation

- be given the status of trainee research staff, as regards their rights to participate and to be represented in the university governing bodies.

**Status of university student and research trainee**

Apart from having the status of university student, university graduates who hold a Bachelor’s, Architect or Engineer degree with at least 300 ECTS credits, a Master’s degree or an equivalent diploma, and who have been admitted to a PhD programme, will also acquire the status of research trainee.

The new [Trainee Research Staff Statute][2] regulates the following aspects:

1. The predoctoral contract:

   - its objective is that predoctoral research staff in training simultaneously carry out research tasks in a specific and innovative project and doctoral programme activities leading to the acquisition of the skills and abilities necessary to obtain the official university PhD degree

   - predoctoral research staff in training may collaborate in teaching tasks (which do not imply a reduction in the teaching load of the department to which they are assigned) up to a maximum of 180 hours throughout the duration of the contract, and provided they do not in any case exceed 60 hours per year

   - its duration may not be less than one year or more than four years, except in the case of people with disabilities where the maximum duration may be six years (including extensions)

   - if the contract has a duration of less than four years, it may be extended consecutively; extensions may not have a duration of less than one year

   - this contract is for full-time engagement throughout its term

   - the financial retribution, which is the one fixed for the equivalent categories to that of predoctoral research staff in training in the collective agreements of its scope, cannot be lower than:

     - 56% of the salary for this category during the first two years

     - 60% during the third year

     - 75% during the fourth year
• it may not be less than the minimum interprofessional wage.

2. Rights and duties. In this section, the following rights, among others, stand out:

- obtain cooperation from the host organisations, centres or institutions, as well as the necessary support to develop their studies and research programmes
- be integrated into the public or private departments, institutes and organisations in which the research is carried out
- participate, as stated in the statutes of the universities and public research bodies, in their governing and representative bodies
- be eligible for additional financial assistance to attend scientific meetings or for in-house training and improvement at other centres
- exercise the intellectual property rights derived from their research activity and in accordance with their contribution. Industrial property rights are defined by each aid scheme
- benefit from all the rights recognised by the corresponding aid scheme.

Supervision arrangements

• Mentor

Once candidates are accepted into the programme, the Academic Commission assigns them a mentor, with the following characteristics:

- they must hold a PhD and have accredited experience in the institution or college organising the programme
- they are responsible for monitoring interaction between the candidate and the Commission.

The Academic Commission is entitled to appoint another mentor at any point of the programme, provided that there are justified reasons and after due consultation with the candidate.

• Thesis director

The Academic Commission in charge of the programme must also assign each doctoral candidate a thesis director, who may be the same person appointed as a mentor or not. The director must hold a PhD, be Spanish or foreign, and have accredited research experience. If a thesis director assigned at the time of enrolment, the Academic Commission must appoint one within three months of enrolment.

The Commission is entitled to appoint another mentor at any point of the programme, provided that there are justified reasons and after due consultation with the candidate. The
thesis director is responsible for planning adequate and coherent training activities to be carried out by the candidate, as well as for the impact and the novelty of the research area of the doctoral thesis, and for deciding on whether the thesis is consistent with the rest of projects and activities in which the candidate is involved.

Subject to authorisation by the Academic Commission, a doctoral thesis may be co-directed by other doctors, on the basis of academic reasons (for example, the multidisciplinary nature of the thesis topic, or the participation of the candidate in national or international programmes).

- Personal activity portfolio

Once the student has been officially registered in the programme, universities open a personal activity portfolio, which documents all the relevant activities carried out by the candidate. This document is periodically reviewed by the mentor and by the thesis director, and evaluated by the Academic Commission in charge of the programme.

- Research plan

Before the end of the first year of the programme, candidates must draw up a research plan, which must include, at least, their intended work methodology, planned objectives, as well as the timing and resources needed to achieve these goals. The research plan can be improved throughout the development of the programme, and must receive approval from the mentor and the thesis director.

- Written agreement

Apart from the above-mentioned requirements, universities are responsible for establishing procedures to supervise doctoral candidates. This is normally done by means of a written agreement, which must be signed, as soon as possible after admission to the programme, by the university, the candidate, the mentor and the thesis director. This document must include procedures for conflict resolution, including issues related to intellectual or industrial property that may arise throughout the programme.

Employability

The improvement of employability of university graduates is a constant source of concern for Education Authorities and universities. In order to deal with this problem, the following principles must underpin university education:

- include in their study plans abilities and skills oriented towards innovation, creativity, business initiative and entrepreneurship, incorporating them into the different subjects, concepts and cross-curricular competences, in learning methods and in examinations

- make proposals for new degrees and educational provision which prepare students for the qualifications required by new employment needs so as to improve employability of citizens in the labour market
• promote adaptability to social and economic changes, providing citizens with opportunities for ongoing professional development and extension of university studies

• increase the possibilities for mobility in education within Spain and in Europe, as well as the effective incorporation of university graduates into the labour market, strengthening the links between universities and the business world, paying special attention to the promotion of competences for entrepreneurship and self-employment.

Collaboration between universities and the productive sector may be articulated on the basis of the following initiatives:

• creation of technology-based innovation companies

• establishment of innovation poles, by means of providing a common physical space for universities and companies in the production sector

• launching and promotion of programmes to enhance transfer and appreciation of knowledge

• creation of consortia for research and the transfer of knowledge

• creation of corporate-sponsored university chairs, based on the collaboration in research projects which allow university students to participate and combine their research activity with training opportunities.

In addition, both in the regulations for university education and in the University Student Statute, there are a series of specific measures aimed at promoting the employability of university students, such as:

• mobility programmes through university cooperation agreements: they pay attention to academic training related to the degree in which the student is enrolled, and to other competence areas, such as training for employment. For more information, see Mobility in Higher Education [3]

• integration of external placements into the curricula

• student information and guidance services, the aim of which is to provide information and orientation regarding learning itineraries and future professional opportunities, training in cross-curricular competences and design of professional projects, in order to facilitate the employability and insertion of students in the labour market

• student guidance and monitoring, by which coordinators or student advisors provide guidance to students throughout the programme, regarding their learning process as well as their professional prospects in the labour market.

• creation of alumni associations for former students, registered at universities. One of their goals is to collaborate actively in providing access to the labour market to university graduates.

More information on Guidance and Counselling in Higher Education [4].
Doctors are considered key in the process of changing the productive system toward a sustainable economy, as the main actors in society for generating, transferring, and adapting Research and Development and Innovation (R&D&i).

They must play a key role regarding both the transfer of knowledge and the collaboration projects of the university with businesses, research centres and other public or private organisations, in which knowledge and research must revert to the betterment of society, as well as regards the scientific and technological parks.

The Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, within the framework of the 2017-2020 State Plan for Scientific and Technical Research and Innovation, intends to finance and encourage the training and specialisation of human resources in R&D&i and to improve their integration into employment, in both the public and private sectors. More information on Grants and financial support for PhD students under the State Programme for the Promotion of Talent and its Employability.

**Assessment**

Universities entrust doctoral colleges, and other units in charge of programme development, with the responsibility of planning evaluation at this level. Thus, these bodies must establish assessment mechanisms, criteria and procedures.

- **Annual assessment of the research plan and the personal activity portfolio of the doctoral candidate**
  - they are assessed by the Academic Commission, together with the reports issued in that regard by the candidate’s mentor and thesis director
  - students must receive a positive evaluation of these documents in order to be allowed to continue in the programme
  - if they are evaluated negatively, on the basis of proven and sound reasons, the candidate can be assessed again after six months, during which time he must draw up a new research plan
  - if the results of this second evaluation are still negative, the candidate will not be allowed to remain in the programme.

- **Assessment of the doctoral thesis**

Once the doctoral thesis is finished, the doctoral college or university unit in charge of the programme establishes the procedures for submission and the deadline for the defence to take place. During this time, the university guarantees public status to the thesis, so as to allow other doctors to send candidates their comments and observations before the public defence is held. The characteristics of the assessment of the doctoral thesis are the following:

- a **board of examiners** is appointed. The majority of board members are experts who do not belong to the same doctoral college or programme
• they must hold a PhD and have accredited research experience

• the board has access to the candidate’s personal activity portfolio, which is also subject to qualitative evaluation that supplements the assessment of the doctoral thesis

• the doctoral thesis is evaluated by means of a public defence session, during which the candidate presents and defends the thesis in front of the board of examiners

• any other doctors who attend the defence session are allowed to ask questions to the candidate, according to the procedures established by the president of the board

• the board of examiners issues a report and a 'fail/pass/very good/excellent' grade for the thesis

• doctoral theses that are graded as 'excellent' may also be awarded a 'cum laude' mark, which requires unanimous agreement among the members of the board (secret ballot)

• the university establishes the necessary mechanisms for the awarding of such mark, guaranteeing that the counting of votes takes place in a different session from that in which the thesis is defended.

**Certification**

Doctoral studies lead to an official **PhD diploma**, valid in all the Spanish territory.

The Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, and the universities must establish the regulations for the award of **honourable mentions or prizes** for outstanding achievement of candidates in doctoral thesis, which can be reflected in the corresponding academic certificate.

Once the doctoral thesis has received positive evaluation, the university is in charge of filing an electronic copy of it, and to send copies to the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities and to the Council of Universities.

Students in doctoral programmes may also be awarded a series of distinctions, called 'mentions', which can be added to the official diploma, according to the criteria and circumstances established in each programme:

• *cum laude* mention: the board evaluating the thesis may award this mention if the overall grade is a distinction and all the members vote unanimously in favour by a secret ballot

• *international* mention: it can be obtained if candidates meet certain requirements, such as the fact of having spent at least three months in a higher education institution or prestigious research centre abroad, either taking courses or carrying out research

• *thesis in co-tutelle with university 'u'* mention: the degree includes this mention when the doctoral thesis is supervised by two or more Doctors from two distinct universities (one Spanish and one foreign). In addition, the candidate must have spent at least six months in the institution with which the agreement is reached, carrying out research
during a single period or over several periods

- industrial mention: this mention is awarded when there is an employment or commercial contract between the candidate and a private or public company, or a public administration (which cannot be a university). The candidate must participate in an industrial or experimental development research project, directly related to his/her thesis, developed in the company where he/she is employed

- honorary doctor: in accordance with their statutes, universities may award an honorary doctor (Doctor Honoris Causa) to persons who are considered to deserve this honour, in view of their academic, scientific, professional or personal achievements.

Organisational variation

In Spain, students may enrol in distance PhD programmes at universities which organise this type of provision.

The National University of Distance Education (UNED), dependent on the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, offers a wide variety of distance doctoral programmes. Some other private universities also offer PhD programmes.

In any case, candidates enrolled in distance PhD programmes are also required to defend their doctoral thesis before a board of examiners, under the same conditions as the rest of students.

Specialised Education: PhD studies

For the organisation of doctoral studies specific to artistic studies, educational authorities must promote agreements with universities, which must include admission criteria and the conditions for the development of the doctoral thesis and its adaptation to the particularities of higher artistic studies, among which interpretation and creation may be considered.

Official degrees in advanced artistic education allow access to official university doctoral studies, without prejudice to other admission criteria that may be determined by the university to which the student intends to access.

The higher education centres with Art programmes must promote, by means of the procedures established by the educational authorities, research programmes in the field of their own disciplines.

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