



## LISER PhD training Scheme

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This document contains the principles, rules and procedures LISER aims to apply in its new doctoral training scheme. This scheme was designed to apply to all Ph.D. candidates benefiting from a work contract at LISER whatever their funding source. The LISER doctoral training scheme will notably apply to Ph.Ds. supported by the FNR PRIDE (in case of Doctoral Training Units, DTUs), the FNR AFR scheme, Ph.Ds. financed within the framework of competitive research projects and on the Institute's own funds.

The procedures described below take explicitly into account the requirements from the FNR for the management of DTUs and in particular the National Quality Framework for Doctoral Training (NQF-DT)<sup>1</sup>.

## **I. INITIAL CONDITIONS**

### **1. Communication**

A specific webpage devoted to the application procedure of the Ph.D. training scheme will be designed and implemented by the Institute.

The webpage will contain the following information:

- Description of the scheme
- Length of program/opportunity of part-time studies
- Entry requirements
- Timeline of the admission procedure
- Contents of the application (including test requirements)
- Application form to fill-in
- Selection procedure

### **2. Selection of Ph.D. candidates**

In order to attract the best candidates external calls will be made for Ph.D. candidates.<sup>2</sup>

The following documents will be asked for Ph.D. applications:

- Application form (downloaded from website and filled-in)
- Letter of motivation (the letter should state the applicant's motivation for participating in the program and give a short outline of his/her major research interests. The statement should be no longer than 2 pages.)
- CV
- University transcripts

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.fnr.lu/content/download/14972/81065/version/1/file/FNR\\_154821\\_brochure+quality+framework\\_sans\\_logo\\_s\\_bat.pdf](http://www.fnr.lu/content/download/14972/81065/version/1/file/FNR_154821_brochure+quality+framework_sans_logo_s_bat.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Vacancies will be published via EURAXESS, Inomics and other suitable networks as well as on the LISER website specifically devoted to graduate studies.



- Master thesis (in case the applicant has completed a master's program).
- Language test (if applicable, see below)
- Graduate Record Examination (GRE test) for all applicants who did not graduate from a European, US American, Canadian, Australian, or New Zealand university
- Two reference letters

We expect applicants whose native language is not English to demonstrate English language proficiency unless they hold a degree from a university in an English-speaking country, studied at least one semester at an English speaking university (with credentials), or can prove that the majority of courses during their Master's studies were taught in English.

Sufficient evidence for a good command of English is a high score in the "Test of English as a Foreign Language" (TOEFL) or the "International English Language Testing System" (IELTS). If the level of English is not sufficient, we expect candidates to undertake language courses.

The knowledge of one of the official languages of Luxembourg (Luxemburgish/French/German) is regarded as an asset.

There will be a two-stage selection procedure:

1. A pre-selection based on application (short-list)
2. In-person interviews at LISER.

The pre-selection of the applications will be based on reviews conducted by external experts.

A Recruiting and Evaluation Committee takes decisions regarding admission. This committee would be composed of the Ph.D. supervisor(s), the DTU coordinator (if applicable), the HR manager, the Head of Department within which the Ph.D. candidate will be affiliated, and the CEO.

### **3. Evaluation criteria of Ph.D. candidates**

The goal of the recruitment procedure is to identify the most promising Ph.D. candidates that are able to successfully pursue their Ph.D. in line with the goals of the Institute.

The Recruitment and Evaluation Committee will use a framework set up in order to evaluate the candidates (as required by the NQF-DT). The criteria taken into consideration are:

- Academic ability and research potential of the Ph.D. candidates
- Motivations for engaging in a Ph.D.
- Thematic fit and qualifications with the nominated Ph.D. supervisor(s)

The selection will be made fair and non-discriminatory giving due consideration to gender balance.

The final decision is taken by the CEO. The selected candidate will be offered a 12 months contract (see section II)



#### 4. Selection of supervisors

According to NQF-DT, supervisors must hold a Ph.D. degree and be active scholars with a steady scientific production. A main supervisor needs to be appointed for each Ph.D. research project. This is the person who does the main supervision task and earns credit for it.

Internal guidelines for identifying potential supervisors:

- Holds a Ph.D. for at least 3 years
- Has a min of 3 publications in a recognised journal (i.e. indexed in SCOPUS) in the past 5 years
- Has demonstrated research supervision experience (e.g., for Master students or interns) and/or was/is the PI of a competitive research project
- Has a work contract/service contract for the duration of the Ph.D.

Selection procedure:

- A list of potential supervisors is proposed by the Heads of Department to the Management Board
- In addition, eligible researchers have the possibility to introduce an individual application directly to the CEO
- The consolidated list of potential supervisors is discussed by the Management Board and approved by the CEO
- An update of the list is conducted on a yearly basis based on new hiring's and on the monitoring of active supervisors.

All potential and existing supervisors will undergo supervisory training (see section V.2c).

##### a. Main supervisors

The main supervisor must be granted full supervision rights by a degree-awarding institution. If the doctoral degree is supposed to be awarded by the University of Luxembourg, LISER supervisors are expected to hold an authorization to supervise research (*autorisation à diriger des recherches, ADR*).

##### b. Co-supervisors

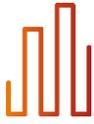
If the main supervisor is not a member of LISER, a co-supervisor from the institute needs to be appointed.

##### c. Ph.D. Supervisory Committee

For each Ph.D. student, a Supervisory Committee (SC) will be established according to the rules of the degree awarding institution (i.e., the partner university).

In case there are no specific requirements, the SC would be composed of:

- The supervisor from LISER
- The supervisor from partner institution (if applicable)



- One or two researchers expert in the field (from LISER or external)

After the selection of the candidate a supervision agreement will be established between the Ph.D. candidate and all members of the supervisory committee. This document will formally identify who are the members of the SC and will make explicit the rules and the procedures to be applied within the LISER PhD training scheme.

## 5. Programme management

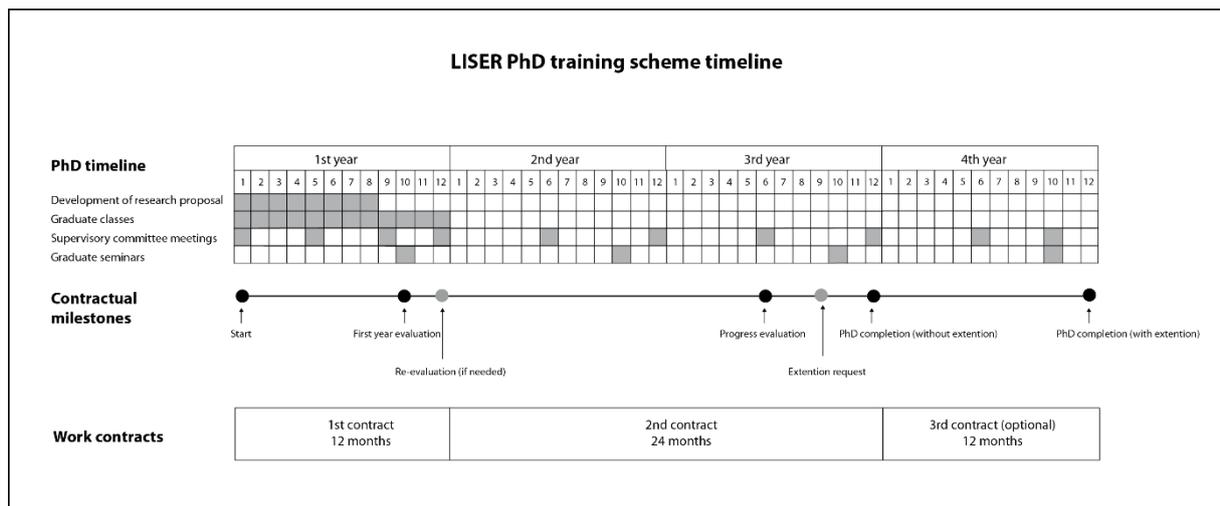
Training and supervision activities at LISER will be managed and coordinated by a programme manager.

Duties of the programme manager:

- Managing the recruitment and selection procedure of candidates
- Managing the monitoring of the supervision and training activities
- Managing the contractual obligations
- Providing the necessary information to the supervisors
- Keeping track of the website content and providing up to date information
- Managing the placement of LISER Ph.D. candidates

## II. PROGRESS ASSESSMENT AND MILESTONES

The timeline for the Ph.D. progress assessment is illustrated in the figure below:



### 1. First year evaluation

The first evaluation takes place maximum 10 months after the start of the Ph.D. and is performed by the Ph.D. Supervisory Committee (SC). The Ph.D. candidate is requested to send his/her consolidated research proposal at least three weeks before the date of the meeting to all members of the SC. This



proposal needs to address the following items: research context and state of the art, research questions and hypotheses, data and methods, work plan, literature. The Ph.D. candidate is presenting his/her research proposal to the SC during the meeting.

In case of a positive evaluation, the SC recommends the Ph.D. to continue and asks for a renewal of the work contract (second period from 12 to 36 months). The recommendation accompanied by a written assessment is communicated to the CEO who takes the final decision.

In case of a negative evaluation, the SC provides a written assessment to the Ph.D. candidate identifying the shortcomings as well as suggestions for improving the research proposal and providing a time-line for re-evaluation.

## **2. Re-evaluation in case of a negative first evaluation.**

The re-evaluation takes place not later than 6 weeks after the first year evaluation meeting in case of a negative outcome. The Ph.D. candidate is requested to send his/her revised research proposal at least one week before the date of the meeting to all members of the SC. The Ph.D. candidate presents his/her revised research proposal to the SC during the meeting. Special emphasis needs to be put on how the shortcomings identified during the initial meeting will be addressed and what the impacts are for the work plan.

In case of a positive re-evaluation by the SC, the continuation of the Ph.D. according to the revised proposal and work plan is recommended. A new work contract covering the period 12-36 months is also recommended. The recommendation accompanied by a written assessment is notified to the CEO who takes the final decision.

In case of a negative evaluation by the SC, the cessation of the Ph.D. is recommended. The recommendation accompanied by a written assessment is notified to the CEO who takes the final decision.

## **3. Progress evaluation**

The progress evaluation takes place 30 months (2.5 years) after the initial start of the Ph.D. The main objective is to assess whether the Ph.D. candidate is on time and will complete his/her PhD within the 3 years or whether a one-year extension is needed. The Ph.D. candidate is requested to send his/her progress report at least three weeks before the date of the meeting to all members of the SC. The Ph.D. candidate is presenting his/her progress report to the SC during the meeting.

For a positive evaluation, the SC recommends the preparation of the Ph.D. submission and the Ph.D. defence is initiated.

In case the research has fallen behind the initial work plan, the SC requests the candidate to apply for a one-year extension.



#### **4. One-year extension request**

The one-year extension request is prepared by the Ph.D. candidate and submitted to the SC not later than three months after the progress evaluation meeting. The extension request report must address the following points: justification for a Ph.D. extension, feasibility of the work, plan towards the completion of the Ph.D. The SC assesses the extension request based on the report submitted.

In case the evaluation of the extension request is positive, the SC recommends the Ph.D. candidate is granted an additional 12 months contract in order to complete his/her Ph.D. The recommendation accompanied by a written assessment is communicated to the CEO who takes the final decision.

In case the evaluation of the extension request is negative, the Ph.D. candidate is requested to finalise his/her Ph.D. as soon as possible and without any funding extension. The recommendation accompanied by a written assessment is communicated to the CEO who takes the final decision.

#### **5. Ph.D. submission and defence**

The decision to submit the Ph.D. dissertation and prepare the Ph.D. defence is taken by the SC after consultation with the Ph.D. candidate in compliance with the concerned university rules.

#### **6. General rules**

To guarantee an efficient communication, decisions made by the SC must be communicated to the Ph.D. candidate the same day than the meetings. In addition a written assessment prepared by the main supervisor must be sent not later than two weeks after each meeting to the Ph.D. candidate and the programme manager. When application, the programme manager will forward the documents to the CEO for final decision.

For all the steps described above, in the case of a DTU funded Ph.D. all recommendations and decisions will also be communicated to the DTU coordinator.

For all decisions taken by the SC and regarding the Ph.D. supervision, the main supervisor has the final word. In case of conflict between the co-supervisors, please refer to section III.1.

### **III. MANAGEMENT OF UNPREDICTABLE EVENTS**

#### **1. Conflict resolution**

LISER has in place a procedure to mediate conflicts applicable to each employee.

Conflicts between the Ph.D. candidate and his/her supervisor will be mediated by the Heads of research departments. They may, if necessary, seek for an outside mediator. In case of conflict of



interest, especially if the department head is also the supervisor, they may exclude themselves from the committee.

At first, the two parties are invited to a meeting. The goal is to find a *modus operandi* between them in order to resolve the problem. Other participants can be invited upon acceptance of all the parties involved. Minutes of the meeting are produced. A follow-up meeting is planned within one month at the latest. If needed, a third meeting is scheduled. After 3 meetings with no possible solution, the conflict mediation is transferred to the CEO.

If issues between the co-supervisors occur (e.g. between the main supervisor from LISER and the supervisor from the partner university), the programme manager (and DTU coordinator if applicable) will act as a mediator and HR could be involved upon request. In case of a non-solved conflict the position of the main supervisor will prevail, subject to approval by the programme manager (and DTU coordinator if applicable). In case a change of the supervisor from the partner university is needed, the procedure described in section III.2 will be applied.

## **2. Change of supervisor**

In case a change of supervisor is envisaged, a written request has to be sent to the HR manager by the concerned parties (either the Ph.D. candidate, or the supervisor(s), or both). The HR manager will investigate the reasons for this demand and check their validity. In case the need for a change of supervisor is confirmed, a new supervisor is designated by the CEO (in coordination with the DTU coordinator and the FNR in case of a DTU funded Ph.D.). Substantial changes in the working plan due to this change of supervisor must be approved by the CEO (and the DTU coordinator if applicable).

## **3. Dropping out of the Ph.D. candidate**

In case a Ph.D. candidate wants to prematurely terminate his/her Ph.D. after the first 12 months of the work contract and before its completion, a meeting with the Ph.D. supervisor, the DTU coordinator and the HR manager will take place in order to discuss the reasons and see if a possible solution could be found before dropping out. The procedure applied is the same as for the resolution of conflict (see section III.1). If no solution has been found, the DTU coordinator and the HR manager will inform the CEO who will take the final decision. In case of a drop-out, the remaining of the grant will have to be returned to the FNR.

If candidates prematurely terminate within the first 12 months of the work contract (drop-out or failed 1<sup>st</sup>-year evaluation), the grant may be reused as specified by the FNR. Subject to approval by the CEO, a new Ph.D. candidate will then be recruited (see section I.2).

## **IV. CONTRACTS AND WORKING CONDITIONS**

PhD student are regular employees of LISER. They will therefore comply with the ROI as applicable to all members of staff.



They also belong to one research team and one department. They shall therefore report to their team leaders and department directors under conditions applicable to all members of staff.

## **V. DOCTORAL LIFE COURSE**

According to the NQF-DT institutions need to implement guidelines for supervision that provide practical information on the formal and informal arrangements that may guide the Ph.D. candidate during the various stages of their Ph.D. Institutions need to have in place a procedure to evaluate supervisors and the supervisory environment. Institutions also need to ensure that training in supervision is available for all supervisors and potential supervisors (as required by the NQF-DT).

### **1. Ph.D. Training**

A combination of three types of training modalities are offered to all Ph.D. candidates:

- Required curriculum at Ph.D. candidate's university
- On-site training at LISER
- Summer, Winter Schools and Workshops

#### **a. Required curriculum**

Ph.D. candidates cover their required course load on research theory and methodology at partner universities during the first year of their doctoral training.

The Ph.D. supervisor(s) assesses individual training needs, while making suggestions to the Institute for particular needs that can be covered by on-site training planning.

A training module will be developed to provide training for all LISER PhD students in the main domains of the Institute and will be taught regularly by LISER staff and external visitors.

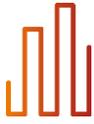
#### **b. On-site training**

The Institute organizes on-site training for Ph.D. candidates in addition to the training plan required by the partner universities.

The on-site training courses are grouped in three modules:

- Lectures on research methodology
- Tutorials on software and data
- Soft-skills training

Training modules are covered by external professors and experts in the Institute's research fields, and by local research staff. Besides technical courses the Institute organizes non-technical courses that enhance the development of key skills to advance in a research career (i.e.: soft-skills such as time management, academic writing, presentation skills, conceptual frameworks, project writing, building networks, etc.)



Furthermore, with the aim of increasing the academic environment and research exchange, the Institute organizes weekly research seminars series where external and local researchers present their work, including Ph.D. candidates.

### **c. Summer, Winter Schools and Workshops**

LISER organizes summer/winter schools as well as workshops that fit the thematic of the DTU. In addition, Ph.D. candidates are encouraged to attend other events such as conferences and workshops, either at the partner universities or elsewhere.

Likewise, doctoral workshops organized thematically to incorporate presentations of candidates and their supervisors and other in-house researchers working on similar research areas and topics serve as an additional venue for research exchange and learning.

### **d. Dissemination and mobility**

LISER supports the dissemination of the results of a Ph.D. project to the research community. The institute notably encourages its Ph.D. students to participate in international conferences and to publish scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals. To achieve this, Ph.D. students receive specific soft-skills training (see section V.1.b.), have access to LISER working papers series, and will be offered translation and proof-reading services.

The institute also supports the dissemination of results to a non-scientific public and therefore provides an adequate expertise in communication and outreach activities.

Last, the mobility of Ph.D. students is encouraged through the promotion of short-term visits to relevant research institutions.

## **2. Ph.D. Supervision**

Ph.D. supervision at LISER will be based on two documents:

- *A supervision agreement* detailing the general principles signed by the Ph.D. candidates and the supervisors
- *A project monitoring* reflecting the progress of the thesis

### **a. Guiding principles for Ph.D. supervision agreement**

The principles and rules guiding LISER Ph.D. supervision are inspired by the European Charter for Researchers. The Institute commits to abide to these principles and both the Ph.D. supervisors and the candidates are requested to sign and follow a supervision agreement that makes explicit their rights and responsibilities as described below.

Guidelines for Ph.D. supervisors:



1. The supervisor must be aware of the inherent power imbalance in the relationship with students, behave professionally, and communicate appropriately. He/she must provide a safe, healthy environment that fosters productive scholarly work, curiosity, and freedom of expression. The environment must be free from harassment, discrimination, and intimidation.
2. The supervisor is expected to have sufficient time and resources (as appropriate for the field) to support the student's work effectively. It is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that students have appropriate safety training, and that they carry out all work safely, and in accordance with standard operating procedures, once properly trained.
3. The supervisor should help the student develop a realistic thesis/research plan with reasonable plans, that balance exploration with achievable, manageable and focused goals, and allow completion of scholarly work "in time."
4. The supervisory committee must approve thesis project plans, including those that are part of a larger collaborative project led by others (e.g. research team members or collaborators).
5. The supervisor should be aware that a student might experience changes in motivation and productivity. The supervisor should be prepared to adapt his/her mentorship approach to promote success in a range of different situations.
6. The supervisor is expected to be aware of accommodation policies, procedures and support services, and to support students with disabilities in designing and organizing accommodations. They are expected to be respectful of graduate students who are dealing with stressful situations and personal difficulties. The supervisor/advisor is responsible for promoting a culture of respect and collaboration and encouraging timely conflict resolution when disputes arise, which may require consultation with the supervisory committee or others (e.g. DTU coordinator).
7. The supervisor must regularly communicate and have face-to-face meetings with the student to provide feedback on the student's progress, strengths, weaknesses, gaps in knowledge, and how well the student is addressing deficiencies. Written summaries of feedback should be prepared when there are significant deficiencies. When a student is struggling with meeting graduate program/thesis work expectations, a supervisory committee meeting should be scheduled early to assess progress and plans, and to provide a clear statement of requirements to meet expectations.
8. The supervisor and supervisory committee are required to provide students with timely, but not instantaneous, feedback.
9. Supervisors who undertake a research leave or other leaves must communicate to their Ph.D. students the plans to provide supervision during the leave.
10. The supervisor is expected to encourage increasing independence as the student progresses through graduate work. Although the supervisor is not expected to be a copy editor for the student's written work, he/she should review and provide feedback on materials that the student produces prior to external review or defence.
11. Students' contributions to research must be acknowledged in accordance with the Institute policies and the norms of the academic discipline.
12. When feasible and appropriate, supervisors are expected to encourage students to submit their graduate work for presentation at conferences and workshops, and for publication.
13. The supervisor should recognize that there are multiple career paths available to different students, and should be respectful of the student's choice of career path, providing advice, where appropriate, on the best way for the student to reach his/her career goals. The supervisor also should be aware of professional development opportunities for the student



offered through the Department/Program, Faculty, or University, and should encourage the student to take advantage of such opportunities.

#### Guidelines for the Ph.D. student:

1. Commitment to scholarly activity is a pre-requisite for graduate success.
2. To support mentorship and guidance, the student must engage in effective, timely and on-going communication with the supervisor regarding the status of their project.
3. The student should discuss expectations with the supervisor to ensure that there is a mutual understanding of research goals and related activities, coursework, timelines and deadlines.
4. The student must manage their time, meet deadlines, and prepare for regularly scheduled meetings (e.g., with the supervisor and supervisory committee). Student- supervisor meetings for thesis work typically occur at least monthly, although meeting regularity will vary amongst disciplines and at various stages. Students are encouraged to discuss concerns about the type and amount of supervision needed for their work with their supervisor. Students are expected to inform the DTU coordinator (or Head of Department if the Ph.D. takes place outside a DTU) if they are concerned about inadequate or inappropriate supervision.
5. The student is expected to develop effective communication and collaborative skills and to demonstrate respect for others. The student should carefully and earnestly consider advice, suggestions, comments and criticisms received from the graduate supervisor. The student should expect timely, but not immediate, responses (regarding meetings, feedback on written work, etc.) from the supervisor and supervisory committee.
6. The student is obliged to act ethically in conducting graduate work. This includes, but is not limited to, following LISER policies on the ethical conduct of research and academic integrity. The student is required to document and honestly report research data, to conscientiously cite information and data sources, and to seek guidance on any data exclusions. He/she must acknowledge contributions of the supervisor, committee members and others, in accordance with the norms of their academic discipline.
7. It is the student's responsibility to carry out all work safely and in accordance with standard operating procedures. Potentially dangerous tasks should not be done while impaired and should not be done until properly trained. It is the student's duty to learn about safe practices, ask questions, and seek appropriate help and guidance on safety matters.

#### **b. PhD project monitoring**

To ensure regular follow-up of the Ph.D., a project monitoring document will be kept up-dated by the Ph.D. candidates and the SC. This document will contain the initial research project of the Ph.D., the written assessments provided by the SC after each meeting and all the amendments done to the project and its supervision until its completion.

#### **c. Training of Ph.D. supervisors**

The Institute supports and encourages supervisors from LISER to engage in professional development and to improve supervision practice by following tailored training courses for doctoral supervision, as well as making available some resources for doctoral supervision.



#### **d. Monitoring of Ph.D. training and supervision**

In order to ensure the highest quality in Ph.D. training and supervision at LISER, a monitoring will be conducted on a yearly basis. This monitoring will be based on a survey among the Ph.D. candidates. The results will be assessed by the programme manager and a written feedback will be provided to the Ph.D. supervisors (and DTU coordinator if applicable).

In addition, the programme manager will conduct personal and confidential interviews with the Ph.D. candidates on a yearly basis. The feedback generated will serve as a basis for a continuous improvement of the training and supervision scheme.

## **VI. FINAL CONDITIONS**

### **1. Ph.D. defence committees**

Ph.D. defence committees will be organised according to the rules of the degree awarding university. In case the main Ph.D. supervisor is affiliated to LISER (i.e. within the framework of a DTU), he/she will be in charge of organising the Ph.D. defence committee. In case the main Ph.D. supervisor is not affiliated to the Institute, the internal supervisor will be nominated as a member of the thesis committee along with the main Ph.D. supervisor. Appointment of external committee members will be coordinated between the LISER internal supervisor and the Ph.D. supervisor.

### **2. Placement and post-doc support**

The next career step of LISER Ph.D. graduates is expected to be outside of the Institute (and most likely outside of Luxembourg) so that graduates are able to create new connections, build up experience, and get extended exposure to the international research community<sup>3</sup>.

This will normally be in the form of a temporary postdoc position in a foreign university or research institute or of an entry-level university lecturer position. Graduates should also be equipped to take up non-academic research positions as analysts in top-level international policy institutions.

LISER helps in placing its Ph.D. Graduates:

- by advertising the profile of its job market candidates on a dedicated LISER webpage
- by organising an information session on the way the structured job market works to give them the opportunity to participate in these meetings (I.E. Jobs for Economics-JOE via ASSA, the British meetings and Spanish meetings, etc.)

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<sup>3</sup> Practically, the regulation that researchers can be on a temporary contract for a maximum of 5 years limits any possibility to appoint Ph.D. graduates as post-docs.



- by committing to provide timely and detailed reference and recommendation letters for its Job market candidates
- by informing Ph.D. candidates about the typical timing and processes of the international market for post-doc researchers in the social sciences
- by providing soft-skills training on academic CV writing and academic interviews for each cohort of Ph.D. candidates by dedicating a lump sum of up to 1000 euros to finance the travelling costs directly related to job market applications (e.g., to participate to ASSA or RES meetings)

LISER maintains contact with its Ph.D. Graduates by offering them the status of unpaid LISER research affiliates (for an initial period of three years). This status allows them:

- to continue participating free of charge in workshops, and seminars organised in the Institute
- to use the LISER affiliation (according to the general rule for use of the LISER affiliation in published material). We expect Ph.D. Graduates to mention the LISER affiliation on publications derived from their dissertation
- to have access to office space for short research visits.