

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HISTORY AND ETHNOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

I. Foundations of the Quality Assurance System

The quality assurance (QA) tasks of the Doctoral School of History and Ethnography (hereinafter: DSHE) are institutionally performed by the Doctoral School Council. In matters of QA, the DSHE aligns with the institutional QA system of the University of Debrecen and with the Institutional Development Plan (IDP) defined at the university-wide level. Its guidelines are set out in the University of Debrecen Quality Assurance Manual, which, among other things, defines the standards of QA in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). Certain QA requirements are also defined in the Doctoral Regulations of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Debrecen. In addition, over the past years, the DSHE Council has formulated and adopted supplementary guidelines and rules that complement the requirements defined in the above documents. This document presents the QA principles and procedures applied by the DSHE internally.¹

II. Quality Assurance Elements of the Admission Process

Our school is characterized by a high number of applications for admission, particularly oversubscription in the full-time program. Candidates from different academic fields with varying levels of preparation undergo a rigorous selection process to become students of our program. This is ensured by our strict admission examination system.

Applicants to our individual training programs may apply with a nearly complete dissertation, and during the admission process, the supervisor provides a written guarantee that the dissertation will be completed within the remaining study period. Consequently, PhD students who choose this form of training take the comprehensive examination after admission, initiating the degree procedure. Admission prerequisites include a nearly completed dissertation, outstanding academic performance, significant publications, and preferably several years of documented scientific and professional practice. Due to these high requirements, the number of applicants for this training form is lower. Graduates of this pathway typically become recognized representatives in their respective professional fields.

III. Quality Assurance Conditions for Talent Development

Our most talented students receive special attention already during their university years. We support the preparation of their KTDK (Faculty Student Scientific Conference) and OTDK (National Student Scientific Conference) papers, involve them in research projects, and provide opportunities for publication in departmental and institute-level publications. As a result, our

¹ University of Debrecen. *Institutional Development Plan (2021–2024)*. Available at:

<https://madhatter.it.unideb.hu/portal/displayDocument/id/3307006>

University of Debrecen. *Quality Assurance Handbook*. 15th edition, 09 December 2021. Available at:

https://btk.unideb.hu/sites/default/files/inlinefiles/DE_Min_bizt_K%C3%A9zik%C3%B6nyv-15-kiad_m%C3%B3d_egys_szerk_BTK01.pdf

University of Debrecen. *Doctoral Regulations*. Available at: <https://madhatter.it.unideb.hu/portal/displayDocument/id/4592700>

The detailed admission regulations can be accessed at the following page: <https://btkphd.unideb.hu/felveteltajekoztato>

students traditionally perform well at various conferences and student-scientific competitions (e.g., OTDK), and student conferences are regularly organized.

We also motivate our future students, already during their undergraduate studies, to select topics that align with the profile and research areas of the Historical and Ethnographic Doctoral School (TNDI). Accordingly, qualified supervisors are available to guide these topics. The TNDI supports research both in Hungary and abroad through its expanding network of institutional collaborations. This includes cooperation with local and regional archives, museums, and public collections, as well as international connections such as the Pannonia Scholarship Program, the CEEPUS – Central European Exchange Program, and other mobility frameworks (e.g., the Visegrad Fund and intergovernmental scholarship programs of the Tempus Public Foundation).

For our doctoral students, we regularly provide detailed information about research-supporting scholarship opportunities through messages sent via the TNDI academic system and events designed to aid student orientation (see: PhD Day).

We continuously update our calls for research topics, striving to incorporate new scientific results, research trends, and emerging directions into our topic offerings, ensuring they are represented across the programs.

IV. Quality Assurance Elements in Doctoral Training

The new eight-semester structure of the doctoral program incorporates numerous elements to strengthen quality assurance. Student progress is monitored through tutorial sessions and consultations with the supervisor. During the program, the supervisor must record in the so-called electronic index the mid-semester grade, which serves as proof of regular consultation and progress in the research topic. This is listed as a compulsory course every semester in the credit list, ensuring regular interaction between the student and supervisor.

Furthermore, students and their supervisors participating in the post-2016 training format have a mid-semester reporting obligation to the TNDI. At the end of each semester, students must prepare a professional report that evaluates their performance according to various indicators, including completed academic, teaching, and research credits; organizational and public engagement activities; publication output; conference participation; submitted and ongoing applications; and received scholarships or awards. Supervisors provide a textual assessment of the student's performance and the current status of the research required for the dissertation as part of the same report. The doctoral school director approves the semester reports or provides feedback as needed.

By the end of the third semester, students are expected to have a published article related to their dissertation topic, facilitating the successful completion of the chapter defense that precedes the comprehensive examination. At the end of the fourth semester, the chapter defense is required before the comprehensive exam. During this defense, students receive feedback and guidance from departmental colleagues holding academic degrees and invited external experts, also with academic qualifications, which helps improve their manuscript. The chapter defense is a prerequisite for the comprehensive exam.

After the first four semesters, the student's performance is formally assessed, encouraging the doctoral candidate to maintain consistent work and motivating the supervisor to ensure stricter monitoring and accountability. The comprehensive examination strongly incentivizes progress

on the dissertation topic: the student must not only demonstrate general academic preparation before the committee but also show sufficient progress on their chosen dissertation topic to guarantee completion within the time allowed by the regulations.

During the so-called research phase following the comprehensive examination, the dissertation must include a new chapter each semester, which is subject to dual evaluation by the supervisor and an appointed expert. Continuous professional oversight and feedback ensure the steady progress of the dissertation, helping PhD students move closer to completing their dissertation semester by semester. This also guarantees the effectiveness of the doctoral school's training program.

We strive to involve our students in professional academic life even during their training. Accordingly, credit is awarded for presenting at scientific conferences or meetings, as well as for verifiable science-organizing activities. Within its financial capabilities, the TNDI supports both supervisors and PhD students in their research trips, archival investigations, and overall professional progress.

V. Quality Assurance Elements in the Degree Awarding Procedure

Before the defense, one of the tools of quality assurance is the certified publication list, whose acceptability must be ensured according to the University Doctoral Regulations. The student is required to upload publications demonstrating their scientific work to the database of the University and National Library of Debrecen (hereinafter DEENK). Based on the uploaded materials, DEENK prepares the certified publication database. The certified list is then submitted by the candidate along with the dissertation to the relevant disciplinary doctoral council, and it is evaluated by the Doctoral School Council. During the doctoral program, students are also motivated to publish continuously, as earning publication credits is mandatory in the last four semesters.

Prior to submitting the dissertation—aligning with faculty and university regulations—a so-called pre-defense is conducted to decide whether the dissertation can be submitted for public defense, which is mandatory for all doctoral candidates. The purpose of the pre-defense is for experts in the field to provide critical feedback and useful advice to the candidate before the dissertation is finalized. Before the pre-defense, a text verification check is carried out by the Publications Department of the University and National Library of Debrecen (see the aforementioned certified publication list). The results are shared with the doctoral candidate, the supervisor, and the opponents responsible for reviewing the dissertation for the pre-defense. Following this, the doctoral candidate, the supervisor, and the opponents must all confirm whether the dissertation submitted for pre-defense meets scientific ethical standards and expectations. Experts in the topic are invited to the pre-defense, and some of them may later serve as members of the examination committee. All participants must explicitly state their acceptance of the dissertation in terms of content, academic quality, and scientific ethics. This is followed by a second control step. The dissertation can only be submitted if the supervisor, based on the pre-defense feedback, certifies by signature that the dissertation is suitable for public defense.

According to the DE BTK Doctoral Regulations, the doctoral candidate must also declare compliance with copyright norms by signing the second page of the submitted dissertation.

The doctoral school and institutional procedures ensure full transparency regarding the materials submitted for defense. Both the dissertation and the theses—latter also in English—are made publicly accessible (DEA database: uploaded to the Debrecen University Electronic Archive and accessible through the ODT system). The candidate's other publications are publicly available in the iDEa Tudóstér database (<https://tudoster.idea.unideb.hu/>).

The University and National Library of Debrecen issues certification regarding the authenticity of the publications forming the basis of the PhD dissertation and their accessibility in the library database, which the candidate is required to attach to the theses. DEENK conducts bibliographic and scientometric verification of the data uploaded by the doctoral candidate to the iDEa Tudóstér, based on scientific databases and the Journal Citation Reports Impact Factor list. (Procedure for requesting the certified publication list: <http://btkphd.unideb.hu/letoltesek/iDEa.pdf>). The steps of the degree awarding procedure—comprehensive examination, pre-defense, and defense—are also public and announced in advance.

VI. Quality Assurance Criteria for Doctoral School Staff

The TNDI places special emphasis on the regular evaluation of the professional and scientific work of all individuals involved in the doctoral school—lecturers, supervisors, and core members. Within the doctoral school, only those who hold a scientific degree recognized by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB) and who actively participate in national and international scientific research and the academic community may serve as supervisors, topic proposers, or lecturers.

It is also required that lecturers, supervisors, and core members consistently engage in high-quality publication activity in both Hungarian and foreign languages. The professional criteria set by TNDI are monitored through the individual ODT profile, MTMT² publication lists, and the obligation to keep the field-specific tables up to date, which are basic expectations for all lecturers, supervisors, and core members.

Additionally, one of the fundamental pillars of teaching and research quality assurance is the Performance Evaluation System (TÉR) applied by the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Debrecen. Besides publication activity, TÉR evaluates research activity, participation in professional and scientific community work, involvement in research projects or their leadership, mentoring, and nurturing of scientific talent, providing a comprehensive overview of the staff member's actual performance. The doctoral school leadership relies on the data and evaluations presented in TÉR, as they give a transparent and holistic picture of TNDI staff activities.

The doctoral school is also open to involving experts from other institutions (museums, research institutes, archives) in its work, which significantly contributes to the professional level. When external supervisors or consultants are involved, TNDI applies the same criteria as outlined above.

The doctoral school also focuses on supporting academic careers. Within its means, it supports the professional advancement of lecturers, supervisors, and core members, their participation in international mobility programs (Pannonia Program, Visegrad Fellowship, CEEPUS Program, etc.), and their involvement in domestic and international research grants (e.g., National Research, Development and Innovation Office grants, MTA Momentum Program,

MTA Bólyai Scholarship). Staff members are encouraged and motivated to pursue habilitation and the title of Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA), thereby raising the professional standards of supervisors.

For supervisors, efforts are made to ensure an even workload and to accept topics that match their research fields. Where necessary, a co-supervisor may assist in the supervision, in accordance with university regulations (a co-supervisor can only be assigned at the start of the doctoral program and only if the chosen topic intersects with another scientific field). Topic announcements are reviewed and updated annually each spring by the doctoral school (prior to the announcement of current topics in the ODT system).

VII. Assessing Student Needs and Integrating Them into the Quality Assurance System

For the doctoral school, it is of paramount importance that PhD students can provide continuous feedback on the teaching staff's work. This is implemented in three different ways:

- Through students' anonymous, written evaluations of doctoral courses, which they can submit via the Neptun student information system through their student representatives.
- They can also express their opinions and suggestions at the meetings of the TNDI Council (student representation is also present in the Faculty of Humanities Doctoral Council, which handles doctoral matters at the BTK).
- at PhD open days organized by the doctoral school, direct dialogue between students and faculty is also possible, providing an opportunity for feedback.

The elected student representative of the doctoral students has the right to provide opinions in the Doctoral School Council. Furthermore, the TNDI ensures that PhD students have the opportunity to file complaints, appeals, and seek legal remedies in case of problems, with the exact procedures defined by the university's doctoral regulations.²

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² See: University of Debrecen Doctoral Regulations, §27:
<https://madhatter.it.unideb.hu/portal/displayDocument/id/4592700>