

# PhD studies in Ecology: Questions & Answers

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## **Admission interview**

### **1. What do I have to do to be admitted to doctoral study program of Ecology at Charles University? How does the admission interview work?**

A student must have completed (or be close to completing) a Master's degree, so that the MSc or equivalent degree has been awarded before enrolling in the PhD programme. Successful applicants from abroad have usually studied biology, environmental sciences or similar fields, but those with other backgrounds are not disqualified. The topic of the dissertation must be agreed in advance with a supervisor that is approved (or will get approved) by the Doctoral Study Board for Ecology. In the case of non-habilitated supervisors, i.e., well-established experts with a PhD but without docent or professor degrees, approval by the faculty's scientific board is also required, but this is usually a mere formality in the case of a recommendation by the doctoral study board. The planned project must be financially, methodologically, and logistically secure.

During the admission interview, the candidates' ability to discuss the topic of the proposed project is evaluated (i.e., what is their idea of the objectives and hypotheses, but also the basic methodological approaches needed to test them). This provides the committee insight into the candidates' aptitude for scientific work in a specific field and on a specific project.

### **2. Can I have a dissertation supervisor from a department other than the Department of Ecology, but still be an Ecology PhD student?**

Yes, it is possible, and this is not an exceptional situation. Typically, these external supervisors are from other departments or institutes in the Faculty of Science of Charles University, or from collaborating scientific institutes within the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS). However, the topic conducted by the external supervisor should be directly related to the research questions addressed at the Department of Ecology, and the department (and the doctoral study board) must approve it. In such a case, the funding and logistics of the project, as well as the expert know-how, is guaranteed by the supervising department/institution; in certain circumstances it may be appropriate to have a formal consultant at the Department of Ecology. A student applying with a topic that is related to the field of ecology, but is completely outside our expertise, might not succeed in the admission procedure.

### **3. Do I need to know any other language than English to be eligible?**

No. PhD students must have an active command of English, the universal language of the international scientific community. Life and study in Prague is feasible without any knowledge of Czech. Ability to speak or understand other languages may be of course helpful in many research projects, but apart from English, none is mandatory.

## **Progress of the study**

### **4. How is the study organized and its progress monitored?**

The content of the doctoral project and the student's study obligations are summarised at the beginning of the studies in the Individual Study Plan (ISP), which is then stored in the university Study Information System (SIS). The ISP is prepared in close cooperation with the supervisor and contains the expected structure of the dissertation including an estimated timetable and a list of study obligations (i.e., enrolled courses). The individual study plans entered into SIS and approved by the supervisor are then approved by the doctoral study board. Subsequent study, or rather the doctoral

student's research, is carried out in close cooperation with the supervisor, who guides the student professionally.

As this is a multi-year research project, plans naturally change and are refined over time based on the results obtained, successes and failures, or new scientific findings. It is normal for some activities planned at the beginning of the PhD to develop considerably more but others to be suppressed, and completely unplanned lines of research to emerge. The degree of flexibility of individual study plans depends strongly on whether they are an integral part of larger research projects (e.g., when a student is recruited for a specific grant that funds their sub-project, and planned activities must therefore be completed within a certain time frame) or whether these are to some extent independent and therefore more flexible projects. Any proposals for changes and updates to the individual study plan should, of course, be the result of a mutual agreement between the student and the supervisor.

The progress of the PhD project is detailed in an annual report, which are completed by students in SIS. Here, activities in the last academic year are reported, progress in the project and thesis preparation is summarised, and deviations from the original plans are justified. The supervisor comments on PhD students' reports (and may require their further updates/modifications) and then the chair of the doctoral study board approves them. Thus, during the approval of these annual reports, the plans originally formulated in the ISP may be modified.

If the annual review of the student's progress indicates that the student is substantially failing to meet the plans, expectations and study obligations, the doctoral study board may request specific tasks to be done within a specified deadline when a student has to provide an extra progress report for re-evaluation, or even propose termination of the studies. These formal steps would be taken if possibilities of resolving the emerging problems by a mutually acceptable agreement between the student, the supervisor and the study board have failed.

#### **5. How long does (or should) the doctoral study last?**

The "standard period of study", i.e., the optimal period within which to finish PhD studies in ecology, is four years. During this period, the student receives a monthly scholarship, afterwards, further funding of the study is on the discretion of the supervisor's research group (or student's ability to acquire further funding). Successful PhD defence within the standard period (or within the subsequent fifth year) is also rewarded by a bonus scholarship. The maximum period, within which it is absolutely necessary to defend, is 9 years (i.e., standard period + 5 years) since enrolment, this includes any periods of interruptions. The only acceptable reason to prolong further is an officially registered period of parental care. For details, see below.

#### **6. When and how do I present my results and progress?**

Apart from annual reports in SIS, students present their project and its progress at least twice during their studies at the department's doctoral seminars, which are held annually in the fall in a conference form somewhere outside of Prague. First-year students present the topic of the thesis, goals, plan, and methodology of the doctoral project. In the third year, they present the progress and results of their research to date and existing or forthcoming publications. If they are unable to attend this "doctoral conference", PhD students present at the regular seminars of the department. In cases worthy of consideration (e.g., a long-term internship abroad), the presentation may be postponed until the next year.

**7. Do I have to take exams during my studies? How many courses do I have to complete? Can I enrol in a course from another faculty? Do I have to enter the courses in SIS or is a certificate of completion from the teacher sufficient?**

In addition to the doctoral project, the individual study plan includes other study obligations – in particular lectures or practical courses that expand the doctoral student's knowledge and skills. These courses are selected by the student in collaboration with the supervisor (often on the supervisor's direct recommendation). The ISP may also include courses from other faculties of Charles University. The number of these obligations is not fixed and depends on the student's previous studies, experience and the needs of the doctoral project. Their completion (that must be properly recorded in SIS) is however required to register for the doctoral state exam. The Doctoral Exam and the Thesis Defence are formally included in ISP as specific study obligations with their own course codes in SIS (MSZXB012 and MDISE001, respectively).

It is also possible to take additional courses, but completion of these is not formally required if not included in the ISP.

**8. What should I do if I have a course in my individual study plan that I do not want or cannot complete for some reason, and I would rather replace it with another course that is more useful to me or remove it from my study plan altogether?**

Such a change must be formally approved, and is typically proposed as part of the annual evaluation of the individual study plan. If necessary, a change can also be requested during the academic year by written application. The supervisor will comment on the proposal and, if the supervisor agrees, the chair of the doctoral study board will usually approve it as well.

**9. What are the duties of my supervisor? For example, does she/he have the obligation to find funding for my project and provide me with adequate facilities (a desk, the possibility to work in the lab)? How can I defend myself if the supervisor does not fulfil their obligations?**

Supervisors have a duty to guide PhD students so that they are able to complete their work on time, whenever possible. They should therefore consult with their students on the progress of their projects, discuss with them any problems that arise, and seek solutions. Similarly, the supervisors should support students in the writing of publications, both by consulting over data or expanded text and by providing reasonably timely feedback on manuscripts on which they are co-authors (i.e., corrections or comments on emerging texts). Doctoral students should, however, be proactive in the execution of their project and in their interaction with their supervisors, as the doctoral study is primarily *their* project!

The supervisor should guarantee relevant funding for the research activities necessary within the doctoral project. The project financial background and feasibility (e.g., costs of fieldwork, materials and equipment, laboratory analyses, etc.) is therefore discussed during the admission procedure. If the doctoral students are guaranteed funding through another institution where the research is performed, or if they have secured the funding themselves and have enrolled in the doctoral studies under such conditions, the supervisor is not obliged to provide funding beyond the original agreement.

If the thesis is carried out at the supervisor's department/institution, the supervisor should provide laboratory space and appropriate materials as necessary. However, the supervisor is not obliged to provide a specific desk for the student.

When the supervisor fails to fulfil his/her obligations over a long period of time and an acceptable solution cannot be reached (with the support of the department and the doctoral study board), the supervisor would have to be formally changed (if feasible) or the study terminated.

**10. What can the supervisors ask students to do? Can they set special conditions or obligations for their students?**

A full-time PhD is a project to which PhD students should devote themselves to fully (comparable to a full-time job). However, the actual work schedule of students can vary considerably between different research groups - and even between students in the same group. It depends, among other things, on 1) whether the student is recruited and employed on a specific project of the supervisor or the group leader, or whether the student has her/his "own" independent project supported, for example, by a university student grant, 2) on the nature of the project (analyses of existing large datasets and work in laboratories require a completely different work mode), 3) on the degree of collaboration with other team members (who may depend on the results of the PhD student's work), etc.

Different research groups may therefore set their own internal rules – but students must be informed about them in advance (before admission or enrolment) and agree to them. To avoid misunderstandings, it is advisable that basic rules binding to both student and supervisor exist in written form.

Students who are formally employed on a particular research project become employees of the university, and as such are obliged to fulfil not only their study obligations but also their work contract and legislation (including, e.g., observing the agreed working hours, prior arrangements when taking free days, etc.). Before signing the work contract, the students should therefore carefully inform themselves about their obligations and the employment rules.

**11. Under what circumstances can the study be terminated prematurely? What happens then?**

Doctoral students may terminate (or interrupt) their studies at their own request (e.g., for personal or health reasons) at any time, ideally after agreement with the supervisor. Of course, it is good practice that in such cases the doctoral student ensures that the work done so far is not wasted, for example, by making available the collected data, samples and all relevant information.

Reasons for unsuccessful termination of the doctoral studies may be long-term or repeated failure to fulfil the obligations set out in the individual study plan (suggested grade "C" in the annual ISP performance review) or in the case of a serious violation of legal regulations or ethical standards (e.g., plagiarism, data fabrication). This relatively exceptional instrument is decided by a vote of the doctoral study board. The student will always be given the opportunity by the faculty to comment, within a certain period of time, on the proposal of the study board. If the student disagrees with the proposal, the study board must respond to this statement and may possibly change its verdict (e.g., set conditions that must be met by the next evaluation). If the doctoral study board insists on termination of the studies, the relevant department of the Rector's Office of Charles University will comment on the proposal and the Rector will decide on the termination of the studies. Of course, in this situation, the results of the student's previous work should also be handed over to the supervisor or relevant research group.

**12. What is the PhD scholarship at the department?**

In addition to the standard "ministry" scholarship (for 2024 it is 10,500 CZK per month, increasing by 2,000 CZK after successful passing of the doctoral state exam), the Department of Ecology guarantees full-time PhD students a further increase in the scholarship (currently (2024) by 5,500 CZK, i.e. to a

minimum of 16,000 CZK net income per month). This amount is usually further increased by the funds of the supervisor's research group. The specific amount of income and its form (stipend vs. salary) depends on the agreement between the supervisor and the student, and may assume fulfilling of specific work tasks. It is usually expected that the regular PhD students invest the equivalent of a full-time job to their studies under the agreed conditions.

The Department rewards students' publications and other achievements with exceptional one-off scholarships (see below). The Faculty of Science also rewards doctoral students who successfully complete their studies within the standard period of study or in the subsequent year (i.e., within 5 years from the start) with an exceptional scholarship.

### **13. Do students in the department have health and social insurance covered?**

Health and social insurance are by default covered only for those students who are formally employed by the university or the institution where they perform their research (typically by becoming a formal member of a grant research team, for a gross monthly sum exceeding ca 4000 CZK). If the students' income is in the form of a scholarship (not taxable), students have to arrange their own health insurance unless they meet the conditions under which the state pays health insurance for them. In the case of Czech citizens or permanent residents, this applies to "persons studying for the first time in a doctoral study programme carried out by a university in the Czech Republic during the standard period of full-time study, unless they are employees or self-employed" - this condition is not limited by age.

For foreign students who do not have employment contract, there are multiple options available for long-term health insurance:

1) If you are an EU citizen, and have valid [European Health Insurance Card](#) (EHIC), i.e., a proof that you have a valid insurance in your home country, you have access to medically necessary, state-provided healthcare during a temporary stay in any of the 27 EU countries (including Czechia), Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland or the United Kingdom under the same conditions and at the same cost (free in some countries) as people insured in that country. This is not a problem in the first six months of your stay or so. As you "settle down" in Czechia (i.e., the country becomes your "habitual place of residence"), you should get [S1 form](#) from your health insurance company to remain in this regime (assuming that your insurance status in your home country remains valid – make sure about this, your home country may not be willing to cover your insurance if you study for several years abroad).

2) In the case of foreign doctoral students who prove to the public health insurance company ([Všeobecná zdravotní pojišťovna](#)) that Czechia is their [habitual place of residence](#) ("*faktické bydliště*") during their studies, it should be possible to achieve the same status as Czech nationals, and to become incorporated in the public health insurance system (assuming that is their first PhD study in Czechia, and they have no other income here or elsewhere than the scholarship). To prove habitual place of residence, at least five independent documents are required: 1) confirmation issued by the Ministry of Interior that a temporary residence was registered in Czechia ("*potvrzení o přechodném pobytu*"), 2) rental contract on the student's name with the same address as on the temporary residence confirmation, 3) up-to-date student status confirmation (can be exported from SIS), 4) proof of a bank account opened with a Czech bank, and 5) some additional relevant document(s) such as a contract with the local cellphone operator (probably easiest to arrange), energy provider, etc. Getting this status is not fully guaranteed, though, as the decision is made by the health insurance company staff. Note that there may be a language barrier (nobody able or willing to speak English in the health insurance company office), so it is highly recommended that you have a Czech-speaking colleague along when you attempt any steps towards this goal.

3) In case you cannot be covered by the public system, you should opt for a commercial comprehensive health insurance, which can be arranged with several insurance companies; for example [AXA](#), [Uniqua](#) or [PVZP](#). The last-mentioned company even offers [a product](#) that fully corresponds to the Czech public health insurance in terms of coverage (for foreign students up to 30 years, at a better price than what Czech self-paying student would have to pay!).

**14. Can I get a job (part- or full-time) elsewhere during doctoral studies? Can someone forbid me to do so, or kick me out of studies because I work elsewhere?**

Full-time doctoral studies, if undertaken responsibly, are similarly demanding as full-time work (even if the doctoral student has no employment relationship with the faculty). If the student is employed on a grant, he or she must comply with all the obligations arising from this contract, including for example the need to stick to the agreed working hours or arrange vacation days in advance.

It is in principle possible to work for another employer while studying; no one can prohibit this. However, the student's activity and productivity are assessed each year, so it depends on the extent to which other employment restricts the student's work on the doctoral project. The general experience is that PhD students having a parallel unrelated job that requires a lot of time cannot manage their study obligations, which can lead to the termination of their studies. However, it is always the doctoral study board, not just the supervisor, who decides about termination of the studies, and the student has the right to appeal.

**15. Am I entitled to free language courses during my doctoral studies? Where and how can I apply? What do they contain? Do they include anything like "academic writing"?**

Free courses to improve the level of foreign languages are not offered by the faculty. w. However, students are not required to take a formal language exam or earn a certificate in any language. It is assumed that the PhD student already knows English at the time of entry and this ability is verified during the admission interview. Tips and tricks on presenting results and writing publications can be obtained during the various courses organised (more or less regularly) specifically for PhD students, also in English. Further information and an overview of the courses currently organised can be found on the UK Doctoral Studies Platform.

**16. Do I have to/can I teach as a PhD student? Can I supervise undergraduate (BSc. or MSc.) theses?**

Participating in teaching is neither an obligation nor a right for PhD students in our department. Students may be asked to contribute to practical courses organized by the department related to their field, as long as this does not seriously interfere with the work on their dissertation (they at the same time have the right to refuse if serious circumstances on their part prevent this). A typical course in which PhD students' participation is crucial is the Field Course in Ecology, which especially targets first-year bachelor students (though involvement of foreigners in this course is generally limited, as many undergraduates are too shy to interact in English). Involvement in teaching is usually rewarded with a bonus stipend from departmental funds.

Supervision of BSc theses by PhD students (subject to the approval of the department and the guarantor of the respective study programme) is quite common. Formal supervision of MSc students, on the other hand, is not common; it would be a possibility if an advanced doctoral student had a faculty position at the university (e.g., as a lecturer). However, PhD students often become official advisors (i.e., co-supervisors) for bachelor or master students working on topics related to their doctoral project.

Participating in teaching or student mentoring can be a source of experience, but it also requires a substantial time investment. Therefore, involvement in these activities should be carefully considered in relation to working on one's own PhD project. Neither the department nor the supervisor is obliged to provide the students with teaching opportunities.

**17. Do I have to/can I go to internships abroad and attend conferences as part of my studies?**

Current study regulations assume that students will gain international experience during their studies, but the length or form of the internship is not formally specified. Funding permitting, it is highly recommended to actively participate (i.e., present a talk or a poster) in relevant conferences, both local and international, as this allows students to network with colleagues from other institutions and countries. If a student is applying for a university grant (GAUK), it is highly advisable to plan funding for active participation at relevant conferences or for short-term stays. Stays abroad, especially those longer than one month, can be funded by Erasmus+ and the Mobility Fund of Charles University. PhD students may also fund short-term internships with the Erasmus+ programme. All these activities broaden the experience of PhD students with various aspects of research and its presentation, and should ultimately facilitate the successful completion of studies and possible further academic career.

Completion of internships and active participation in conferences (talks or posters) are also considered in the evaluation of study progress. However, such activities should be planned in close collaboration with the supervisor – stays abroad should not interfere with core work on the PhD project. If the student is employed on a particular supervisor's grant, a prolonged absence could be a breach of duties, not to mention that it might disrupt the successful completion of that project.

**18. Can I apply for some financial support for my PhD research myself?**

The Charles University Grant Agency (GAUK) has been supporting student research for several decades. From the GAUK, it is possible to get a grant for up to three years, which can cover not only the costs of the research itself (material, small equipment, services, travel costs), but also the presentation or publication of the results (e.g. by funding conference participation or contributing to publication costs), and such grants can also contribute several thousand CZK monthly to the stipend of students participating in the project.

It is important to keep in mind that GAUK projects are student grants. The PhD student (or student team) applying to the GAUK therefore must have a key role in the preparation of the project application (although feedback from the supervisor, who is typically the project guarantor, is of course not only welcome but expected). Similarly, it is the students (especially the grant principal investigator) who are primarily responsible for competing the project and preparation of its annual reports (interim and final).

PhD students are strongly encouraged to apply for a GAUK grant (or other appropriate source of funding), unless the project would interfere with their other duties. Being awarded a grant is an honour, but also a commitment – student team members are expected to invest a substantial amount of time and effort in the project (for which they are rewarded). The student should carefully consider their time availability before participating in a new grant application, especially if their individual study plan is tied to another project that covers the cost of the research and keeps them fully occupied (unless a replacement who will take care of their previous duties is found). Double funding of the same activities is not possible, and starting a new project on a different topic would not be manageable. In any case, there must always be a consensus with the supervisor on participation in planned projects (whether as principal investigator or team member), similarly as when planning of any internships abroad.

**19. Is there any financial (or other) reward when students succeed to publish their research?**

The Department of Ecology rewards students with a one-time scholarship bonus for publications in journals indexed by the *Web of Science* as long as the department (or faculty) affiliation is correctly given on those papers. Writing first-author manuscripts is incentivized by a stipend paid immediately upon acceptance of the manuscript - once the formal decision arrives, the student can ask for this bonus. The amount of this exceptional stipend is differentiated according to the ranking of the journal (specifically, position within WoS categories according to Journal Citation Reports); for 2024, it is 10,000 CZK for Q1 journals, 6000 CZK for Q2 and Q3, and 4000 CZK for Q4 journals).

Co-authorship of articles is rewarded by one-time bonuses (one-third of the first-author bonus given above) that are paid semi-annually (in summer and winter).

**20. Do students receive bonuses for other achievements and activities?**

Students awarded for the best presentations or posters at conferences receive a special scholarship "to celebrate" their successful representation of the department (for success at international conferences, the scholarship is twice as much as for "Czechoslovak" conferences; currently (2024) the amounts are 2000 and 1000 CZK). The department may also reward PhD students for active involvement in teaching or other reasons worthy of consideration (e.g. help with the preparation of conferences or other departmental events, popularization, etc.).

Students who defend their dissertation during the standard period of study (within four years since enrolment) are rewarded with a one-off extraordinary scholarship by the Faculty of Science (its amount is specified in the currently valid Measure of the Dean, in 2023 it was 30,000 CZK), and students defending in the following year will receive half the amount. Further remuneration, if any, is entirely at the discretion of the supervisor's research group.

**Doctoral state exam**

**21. How should I select topics for the doctoral state exam? What am I evaluated for during this exam?**

The selection of topics is done in cooperation with the supervisor. There are three topics, one of which is closely related to the topic of the dissertation itself, the second relates to the student's broader specialisation, and the third is even broader within the respective field (usually ecology, in some projects evolutionary biology). The suggested topics should be sent to, or discussed in person with, the chair of the doctoral study board before formally applying for the state exam.

The purpose of the examination is to demonstrate the student's overall understanding of the field related to the dissertation topic and the ability to discuss it with other experts. Thus, it does not only test basic orientation of the student in the three proposed topics (the closer to the student's actual research, the more detailed expertise is expected), but also the ability to converse, argue, and possibly defend one's opinion in a professional manner.

**22. In which language is the doctoral state exam conducted? Who is in the committee?**

The language of the exam is English; students enrolled to the Czech doctoral programme (who have most study obligations in English anyway) may take the examination also in Czech or Slovak (as agreed in advance). The exam committee is composed by experts from the Faculty of Science as well from various other institutions, who fulfil the legal criteria (docent or professor degree or prior approval by the Scientific Board of the Faculty). At least three members of the committee must be present during

the exam. If the student's performance is not unambiguous, they vote about the success or failure of the candidate in a secret ballot.

**23. What happens if I fail the doctoral state exam?**

Unlike undergraduate exams, there is only one additional attempt available. When preparing for it, one must consider the experience from the failed attempt, and it is advisable to seek feedback from the committee members about the topics to better master, and best resources to do so.

**24. Do I have to take the doctoral state exam during the first four years of doctoral studies (standard period of the study), or can I take it later?**

We strongly recommend taking the doctoral state exam reasonably early during your studies (after other study obligations listed in the ISP have been fulfilled). An incentive for students to do so is also the increase of the monthly stipend (paid out during the standard study period) after successful completion of the exam. In principle, it was possible to take the exam later.

**25. Can I apply for the doctoral state exam before I have fulfilled all the study obligations (exams, courses) included in my approved individual study plan?**

This is not possible, as it would have to be preceded by a change in the study plan (with the removal of unfulfilled study obligations). If necessary, this change can be made during the annual review of ISP progress, or during the year following a formal written request submitted to the study department. In any case, you should always consult your supervisor in advance.

## **PhD thesis and its structure**

**26. What are the requirements for graduation (other than the exams listed in the individual study plan and the doctoral state exam), what is required of me professionally?**

A thesis, the key outcome of PhD studies, must be submitted and subsequently defended. The thesis usually consists of a general summary as an introduction, and individual chapters in the form of published or accepted peer-reviewed articles (or book chapters or other types of peer-reviewed scholarly publications) or unpublished manuscripts (prepared for submission or submitted for peer review). These chapters (publications or manuscripts) should be at least three, and at least one must be published or accepted for publication with the PhD candidate as its first author.

The doctoral study board recommends that the submitted dissertation includes at least one publication published or accepted for publication in a respected journal indexed in the *Web of Science Core Collection* database (i.e., a "journal with an impact factor"). The specific scientometric parameters of the target journals are not specified, as the quality of publications is primarily judged by referees and the evaluation committee on the basis of their content and the student's contribution, not merely on the ranking, prestige or impact factor of the journal.

In addition to the introduction and chapters, an up-to-date curriculum vitae (including complete publication list) and co-authors' statement about student's contribution must be provided (see below).

**27. How soon can I submit my dissertation?**

Unlike the maximum duration of the studies (which is the present standard period + 5 years, i.e., 9 years altogether), there is no "minimum PhD study duration". The thesis can be submitted after all other study requirements of the ISP have been fulfilled, and the doctoral state exam has been passed.

What is important is that the dissertation itself is defensible – i.e., not only does it meet all formal requirements (intro + chapters, one of them accepted), but its chapters are of sufficient quality to demonstrate that the student has successfully performed a research project and became an expert in the respective field.

**28. Do I need the consent of co-authors of publications/manuscripts I want to use in my dissertation?**

The explicit formal consent of all co-authors does not need to be in the dissertation, but the contribution of the student to each chapter must be specified. This is usually in a form of a declaration from a key co-author (mostly the supervisor, or the first or corresponding author of the respective chapter, etc.). This author contribution statement should be an integral part of the dissertation.

It is of course a courtesy to ask the key co-authors in advance, optimally at the time of publication - it would be quite inappropriate to include a publication in a dissertation if the co-authors do not explicitly agree. Moreover, in some countries, including the same publication in multiple dissertations – even at different universities or abroad – is not acceptable. Therefore, the intention to include a publication in a dissertation should be arranged early with your co-authors.

**29. Do I need to secure permission from the publisher who published my article to use it in my dissertation?**

No, this is allowed by default. Articles included as chapters in a dissertation usually aren't put online by the university, so there is no breach of copyright agreements. (When the thesis is submitted in a digital form, such chapters may be attached as non-public appendices.)

**30. What if the dissertation contains unpublished results that we don't want to leave hanging freely on the Internet before their acceptance in a peer-reviewed journal? Is there any way to keep them secret?**

The dissertation must be made public by the university. However, it can be divided into a public part (the introduction, including some summarization of the remaining chapters), which will be freely available in the university repository, and non-public appendices, which can be both published papers and unpublished chapters. However, the content of these chapters cannot be kept secret from the referees, the committee, and the guests at the public thesis defence.

**31. Am I supposed to provide a statement that I worked on my thesis alone (which probably won't be true)?**

A formal statement of the PhD candidate must be part of the dissertation, but it must of course be correct. We recommend the following statement or something similar:

"I declare that this thesis has not been submitted for the purpose of obtaining the same or any other academic degree earlier or at another institution. My involvement in the research presented in this thesis is expressed through the author order of the included publications/manuscripts, and is detailed in the "Author Contribution" section. All literature and other sources used when writing this thesis have been properly cited."

**32. Can the same published article be part of multiple theses? For example, a PhD and MSc thesis of the same person, PhD dissertations of two different students, or a MSc. thesis and a PhD. thesis by two students? Am I allowed to use unpublished parts of my MSc. thesis in my dissertation?**

The same, already accepted or published article may not be part of multiple theses by the same student. However, unpublished parts of a MSc. thesis that were successfully brought to publication during the doctoral studies, or manuscripts based on data collected during the MSc., may be used in the dissertation. (Note that this applies to our specific conditions, and it may not be true in some other countries). If two (or more) students have contributed to a manuscript or publication and their contributions were significant, such output may be used in their qualification theses. Note that if the co-author is a student from another university, especially from abroad, the rules for them may be different and should be taken into account!

**33. How many copies of the dissertation are needed in physical form? What do they look like and who are they for?**

Since 2024, the dissertation does not need to be submitted in hardcover or book form. However, it is advisable to discuss with the supervisor whether some printed form might not be useful for their archive or for the referees. For the review purposes, a thesis should certainly be provided in one neat PDF file. Any electronic appendices to publications that are not freely available to the public should also be made available to referees.

**34. Why do I have to submit my entire dissertation in PDF/A format? Is there any way around this?**

This format is a standard for archiving PDF documents, and Charles University requires electronically submitted theses in this format (the compliance to which is automatically checked in SIS). However, many published articles cannot be successfully converted to this format. The practical advantage of dividing the dissertation into a public general section and non-public chapters is therefore that the introduction is much easier to convert to PDF/A. The attached non-public chapters can then also be in "plain PDF" format (for example, in one ZIP archive), but an exception must be arranged in advance if they are to be submitted in a format other than PDF/A. It is a good idea to take this into account in advance when planning the timing of electronic submission.

## **Submission and defence of the thesis**

**35. How long before the scheduled defence do I have to submit my thesis (for example, if I want to defend it within the standard study period, and get the well-deserved scholarship bonus)?**

Officially, four weeks before the defence, its date and venue must already be set. By that time, the referees must already have the thesis (they have four weeks to prepare their report, which should be delivered a week in advance). As it may take some time to set up the committee for the date and get it approved, and find the suitable referees, it is recommended to submit the thesis at least ten weeks before the defence, but preferably more. This is especially true in the case of last-minute defences (just before the expiration of the ninth year of study), where any sudden delay (illness of the opponent, etc.) would have "fatal" consequences.

In justified cases, the deadlines can be shortened by prior agreement (if the composition of the committee and the time availability of its members are discussed in advance, if the opponents are willing to deliver the paper in a shorter time, etc.), but this cannot be relied upon!

**36. Is the first day of the academic year automatically taken as the start of studies, or is it the day on which the person enrolled? When does the four-year standard period of study end?**

The start of studies is the day of enrolment, the end of the standard period of studies is four years from the day before the day of enrolment. The exact dates for each student can be found in SIS.

**37. Who benefits when a student finishes in the standard study period?**

If the student defends within the standard period of study (i.e., four years), she/he will receive an extraordinary scholarship from the faculty (for the academic year 2023/24 it is 30,000 CZK), and half this amount is also paid if defending within the fifth year. At the same time, it is advantageous for the department and the university (in terms of statistics of defended PhD students) and for the supervisor. It is therefore up to the student and the supervisor to decide whether it is preferable to submit a dissertation containing, for example, one or two chapters in manuscript form, or to wait a few more months for acceptance.

We strongly recommend not to delay the submission of the thesis unnecessarily – at the same time, it is imperative that the submitted work not only meets the minimum required criteria, but is acceptable to the committee. We cannot recommend submitting a thesis "on the verge of defensibility" with a weak introduction just to schedule the defence within the four-year deadline.

**38. If I interrupt my studies during the first four years (e.g., due to parental leave), then return to my studies and successfully defend them in a year when my scholarship is still running (but 5 or 6 years have already passed since my date of enrolment), is this considered to be within the standard period?**

Yes, in this case the study is considered to be completed within the standard period, with all the benefits mentioned above.

**39. How is the defence conducted (duration of presentation, language, etc.)?**

The defence of the PhD thesis is public. It is normally conducted in English so that foreign colleagues from the department can attend; referees from abroad are usually present as well. At the beginning of the defence, the chair of the committee briefly introduces the PhD student, which is followed by the candidate's presentation of the thesis. The duration of this presentation should not exceed 30 minutes. Due to the time limit, it is not necessary (and often not feasible) to present all parts of the submitted thesis in detail, but it is important to put the individual chapters in a general context. When preparing the presentation, it is advisable to already take into account any critical comments in the referees' reports.

After the presentation, the supervisor makes an informal statement about the candidate and the course of study. Then, the reports of the two referees are read (or summarized) and the student responds to the comments and questions of the referees. It is advisable to include brief answers in advance to questions raised in the evaluations, including visual aids, in the presentation file after the "thank you/take home message" slide. If the referees are present, they often read their report only briefly and select only some of the questions for discussion; if they are absent, some member of the committee may take their role.

The discussion about the referees' reports is followed by general discussion, with committee members as well as others present at the defence. Finally, the committee discusses the quality of the work and student's performance at the defence in private, and decides by secret ballot whether the PhD candidate has successfully defended the thesis or not. The student learns the result immediately afterwards.

**40. If I have published articles and received positive evaluations from the referees, does this guarantee that I will defend my dissertation?**

During the defence and in the overall evaluation of the candidate, the committee considers not only the content of the thesis itself, but also the candidate's understanding of the topic, the ability to present it and to respond adequately to comments and questions. An important part of the dissertation is not only the content of published or unpublished chapters, but also the introduction, which connects them and puts them into context. While peer-reviewed publications tend to be a team effort, with co-authors, reviewers and sometimes journal editors contributing to their final form, the introduction is a kind of "showcase" for the PhD candidate, not just a mere formality.

The success of the defence is decided by the members of the committee in a secret ballot. Mere (co)authorship of papers and the positive recommendation of the referees thus do not guarantee that the candidate will successfully defend the thesis - although this is usually the case.

**41. What happens after a successful defence? Should I throw a party? And who will help me with it?**

There is usually an informal celebration with refreshments at the faculty, attended by most of those who attended the defence, including colleagues from the department, guests, committee members, etc. This celebration often extends into the (late) evening. The form and organisation of such a party is up to the candidate (as well as covering its costs). Departmental resources can be used at this celebration by prior arrangement (loan of dishes or taps, cooling of drinks, etc.). It is advisable to arrange the help of colleagues or friends for the preparation of the event, this is not a responsibility of the department secretaries or technicians!

**42. What if I don't defend my dissertation?**

In the event of an unsuccessful defence, the committee will recommend what changes need to be made to the dissertation to make it defensible (or what the student absolutely must learn to perform better during the defence). The committee or the doctoral study board may also suggest a deadline by which the revised dissertation should be submitted. As in the case of the doctoral state exams, there is only one extra attempt available for the dissertation defence. The deadline for the maximum period of study cannot be extended in any way, so if the dissertation is submitted at the "last minute", there is no extra time for possible correction.

**And more...**

**43. How can I combine studies and parental duties?**

Even while taking care of young children, it is possible to maintain the status of an active student if it is realistic to continue working on the PhD project. However, it is also possible to interrupt your studies and wait until the family situation allows for a more regular routine. Even during the interruption, it is of course possible to work on one's data or publications. If the study is formally interrupted and the "period of parenthood" is officially registered with the study department (*both steps must be done at the same time!*), the maximum period of study is also extended by this period.

**44. Is it possible to interrupt studies during the doctoral studies so that the period of interruption does not count towards the 9 years the doctoral student has for his/her studies?**

Nine years is the maximum duration of study, including all interruptions (except for formally registered parenting time, see above). In principle, the PhD student should be able to hand in the thesis within four years since enrolment, so it is pointless to extend the nine-year period any further.

**45. What should I do if I don't know what to do and I haven't found a solution to my problem here?**

First of all, we recommend that you discuss everything with your supervisor. Many problems are purely the result of a lack of communication or misunderstanding. You can also discuss the problems discreetly with the [departmental Student Confident](#), or informally or formally with the chair of the Doctoral Study Board of Ecology.