

## **UNIVERSIDAD DE LA LAGUNA SCHOOL OF DOCTORAL AND POSTGRADUATE STUDIES CODE OF BEST PRACTICE**

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## 1.Preamble

Royal Decree 99/2011 of 28th January governing official doctoral training courses, amended by Royal Decree 534/2013, of 28th January, establishes the regulatory framework for the creation of official doctoral training courses by schools of doctoral studies within universities, in keeping with a school's statutes, and in accordance with legislation and regulations set by the autonomous community and university concerned.

In this context, Article 9.8 of the aforementioned Royal Decree states that: *"All persons belonging to the School of Doctoral and Postgraduate Studies must agree to adhere to the codes of Best Practice adopted by said school"*. Furthermore, with regards to the *"Memoria"* document used to verify doctoral programs, Section 5.1 of Annex I of the same decree states that this document must include *"a description of planned activities designed to guide doctoral theses, and a set of guidelines governing Best Practice to ensure their correct supervision"*. This is also described in Article 38.7 of the Regulations governing Official Doctoral Studies, approved by the Governing Board of the Universidad de La Laguna in a meeting held on 20th December, 2012, and later published in the BOC Official Gazette of the Canary Islands - no. 17 dated 25th January, 2013.

Despite the immense majority of researchers using long established good scientific practice, it has been uncommon for such practices to be documented and inserted into legislation here in Spain. However, we are becoming increasingly aware of the need to do so, as reflected by the fact that Royal Decree 99/2011 foresees the inclusion of such practices in the governing frameworks and regulations of doctoral studies schools. The essential elements of codes of Best Practice have been defined by the international scientific community, with the understanding that all scientific disciplines, no matter whether they are related to the natural sciences, the social sciences or to the humanities, must be governed by universal ethical principles that ensure scientific rigor, safeguard the legitimate interests of researchers, and prevent problems arising that could jeopardize research integrity.

Focusing on the specific field of doctoral studies, the underlying goal behind creating a *Code of Best Practice* document is to ensure that different stakeholders are provided a tool that dictates correct protocol for working with each other; in other words, a document that serves to explain how students, PhD supervisors, and

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the University as an institution are all expected to work in relation to each other over the course of a doctoral program. The main goal of such a document is to ensure rigorous research in which the planning, pursuit, and dissemination stages are all ethically sound.

For this precise reason, our mission is to establish a set of declarations and commitments that go one step further than what is already established by the legal system; as such, they shall also include those elements that foster research capacity under a framework of shared responsibilities that are on par with the highest standards of academic excellence.

In a mark of respect towards the values of individual liberty and creation, the codes of Best Practice that are required during research, and acceptance of said codes, must be expressly stipulated forming a contractual agreement between the researcher and the institution at which research is conducted, and with the society that nurtures it.

For these purposes, and in conformity with RD 99/2011 and its own legal framework, the Universidad de La Laguna has chosen to adopt this School of Doctoral Studies Code of Best Practice, which shall serve as a series of recommendations and commitments that guide the main facets & activities of the School, in order that the School's PhD students, tutors, thesis committees and managerial teams assume these practices and recognise their professional obligations.

This document is not intended to be exhaustive, nor does it strive to reference laws, regulations, procedures or protocols that are already published elsewhere by the Universidad de La Laguna (e.g. on the doctoral program website). Instead, these are codes of Best Practice, - both academic and ethical - that are, generally speaking, aimed at preventing problems arising from either a lack of information or miscommunication. They should serve to steer all stakeholders in the right direction and keep all who are involved on the right track so that all research being pursued is done so under the best possible conditions, thus culminating in a successful doctoral thesis of the highest quality.

Our intention has been to write a clear, concise and comprehensive document that is suitable for all the different areas of knowledge present in the Universidad de La Laguna. Even though this document was created for the purpose of doctoral theses, its content can equally be applied to the work of trainee researchers, initiation to research programs, and masters dissertations.

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This document details activities pertaining to academic tutelage, supervision, and learning by research and teaching staff at the Universidad de La Laguna, and other universities, in different areas of knowledge.

Any references made to individuals, or job positions and activities performed by said individuals, in this document shall be interpreted at all times as being equally applicable to all genders, regardless of whether expressly stated as so in this document, or not.

## **2. General Principles Governing Research Activities**

In our society, it is inconceivable to imagine our daily lives without the products that have stemmed from the advance in knowledge that forms an essential part of our general existence. All academic disciplines, whether they concern technology, the natural sciences, healthcare, the arts or humanities, and so on have contributed towards the steady march of social progress. However, this progress and its processes should be founded on ethical, moral and legal principles that ensure that whilst pursuing such advances we continue to respect the boundaries of human dignity. These principles have been compiled by the Universidad de La Laguna in this *Code of Best Practice* document as follows:

### **2.1 Research Freedom**

When it comes to research, it is important to recognise and respect the fact that people have individual autonomy and free will. For this reason, research interests should not prevail over those of the individual. Research is at the service of the common good, and those who design research policy are obliged to justify the moral stance being taken when objectives and priorities are being defined.

Researchers should focus their energy on addressing the greater good and expanding the frontiers of scientific knowledge. Whilst doing so, they should also have the freedom to pursue any line of thought or investigation they see fit, and have the freedom to identify the problem-solving methods they wish to use in accordance with recognised ethical principles and practices.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, researchers should, however, recognise that certain restrictions may be placed on this freedom, either due to the unique set of circumstances surrounding their own particular research (e.g. research involving living creatures, business collaborations, etc.); operational constraints (e.g. budget or infrastructure); or, intellectual property protection (of particular relevance for those performing research in the industrial sector). Such limitations should not,

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however, contravene recognised ethical principles and practices, to which researchers have to adhere.

## 2.2 Ethical Principles

Researchers must adhere to recognised ethical practices and fundamental ethical principles appropriate to their academic discipline, as well as the ethical standards documented in national, institutional and sector specific codes of professional conduct.

This dictates that researchers must respect human dignity, especially when the object of research. Whenever human rights and health are at stake, explicit consent must be sought. This consent must be freely given once the individual has been fully informed of their rights and all possible risks, as well as any consequences that may befall the individual who has chosen to volunteer arising from the misuse or incorrect use of the research. It also involves recognising that research that is damaging to a person's health, or that undermines human dignity should not be pursued, i.e. research advocating violence or racism, or that trivialise or refute crimes against humanity, or that makes apologies for acts of terrorism.

The University and its researchers cannot be held directly responsible for how the knowledge that is contributed to common heritage is used, however they shall take steps to avoid involving themselves in projects and the dissemination of information when it is suspected that such knowledge is being used, or could be used, for inappropriate purposes.

Furthermore, it is important to respect and adhere to recommendations made by the ULL's ethics committees prior to commencing research.

## 2.3 Professional Responsibilities

The researcher has a duty of care towards society. He or she must prevent the unnecessary suffering of any living creature and ensure environmental integrity. Similarly, the researcher must ensure that any research contributes towards improving quality of life - present and future - rather than worsening it.

Exercising professional responsibility also involves researchers doing all they can to ensure that new research is relevant and does not duplicate the work of others. When pursuing research in collaboration with others, be they supervisors or other researchers, researchers and doctoral students must do avoid plagiarism, and respect the principles of intellectual property rights and joint data ownership.

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When collaborating with others during the course of one's efforts, researchers must ensure that actions are only delegated to a person deemed competent to carry out the tasks they have been entrusted with, and that they respect the guiding principles of this document whilst doing so.

#### **2.4 Transparency**

A researcher must be prepared to defend and justify their work. In doing so, they are recognising the importance role of peer review in evaluating their discoveries and the social impact of scientific pursuits.

Researchers of all ranks - including those undergoing training - need to be aware that they have the duty to respond to all public or private organisations that employ or fund them, and towards society as a whole. They shall also be held accountable for the efficient use of any funds they have been granted, and consequently they should adhere to the principles of sound, transparent and efficient financial management.

#### **2.5 Contractual and Legal Obligations**

Researchers at all levels must be familiar with the legislation and regulations governing training and employment, which also includes legislation governing intellectual property rights. They should also be aware of any terms and conditions set by financial institutions or sponsors, irrespective of the legal nature of the contract in question. Furthermore, researchers should adhere to such legislation by submitting the outputs and results demanded of them (thesis, publications, patents, reports, development of new products, etc.) in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contract, or equivalent document.

#### **2.6 Safety and Protection**

Researchers should adopt safe working practices at all times, in line with existing legislation, which includes following all necessary health and safety measures, and precautions to recover from I.T disasters, e.g. by preparing proper backup strategies. They should also be familiar with current national legal requirements regarding data protection and confidentiality protection requirements, and undertake the necessary steps to fulfil them at all times.

#### **2.7 Dissemination and Exploitation of Results**

In addressing the greater good and expanding the frontiers of scientific knowledge, the dissemination and exploitation of research results is a duty that must be upheld. All researchers should ensure, in compliance with their contractual

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arrangements, that the results of their research are disseminated and exploited, e.g. published in journals, communicated in press releases, transferred into other research settings or, as and when appropriate, commercialised.

Based on these principles, it follows that research activities should be guided by a Code of Best Practice. The researcher must adapt his or her actions so that their activities adhere to the aforementioned ethical principles. Best Practice measures followed have an impact on research procedures and results. Current knowledge generation processes require teamwork, human and material resources, shared infrastructure, project management, and software to allow each researcher to perform the duties and tasks assigned to them, thus, it is essential for the entire team of stakeholders to adopt shared Best Practice measures to ensure that research is fruitful; an individual's honesty, vocation, or initiative alone would not suffice. Whilst always recognising and accepting the value of individual freedom and creativity, demands for and acceptance of Best Practice principles should be expressly stated in the contractual agreement drawn up between the researcher and the institution at which research is conducted, and with the society that nurtures it.

### **3. Duties, Rights and Obligations**

#### **3.1 The Student**

Doctoral students must pursue original research under the guidance of a thesis supervisor. The successful culmination of this work shall result in a doctoral thesis. This thesis must make a significant and original contribution to the area of knowledge of the discipline concerned (evidenced, for example, through the publication of results in specialist journals). At the start of the process, the student must defend the doctoral thesis research project in line with the conditions stipulated by the doctoral program. At the end of the process, the student must be able to defend the thesis at a *viva voce* examination - this is an oral exam held in front of a panel of experts who have been assigned the task of examining the thesis.

The student shall be responsible for his or her research, and is expected to make reasonable efforts that are appropriate to their academic level. To achieve these objectives, the student should make proper use of the rights enshrined in Article 10 of Royal Decree 1791/2010, of 30th December, that approves the University Student Statutes, and must comply with the following requirements:

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1. Be familiar with regulations and legislation governing doctoral studies, and those pertaining to European, national and university research, including administrative protocols and requirements, and rules to combat plagiarism, etc.

2. Understand and meet the expectations held by supervisors and the research team regarding their research work, and be capable of expressing their own expectations.

3. Maintain a professional relationship with the supervisor / supervisors and other members of the academic team, as established in the document that has previously been signed by all parties entitled "*Documento de compromiso de elaboración de tesis doctoral en la ULL*".

4. Commit to completing training by pursuing the assigned activities included in the doctoral program, or those activities that are agreed on with the supervisor.

5. Commit to showing initiative when it comes to identifying problems (technical, personal, etc.) that arise over the course of research, and propose solutions that can be discussed with the supervisor.

6. Foster strong personal connections that will enable a suitable pace of work to be set.

7. Create a schedule of work for the thesis and perform annual reviews (including grant reports and project reports).

8. Actively attend and participate in scheduled meetings - these include meetings with the supervisor, the research team, and so on.

Further recommendations include:

a. Writing up short reports following each meeting held over the course of PhD research, making a specific note of the main conclusions drawn from these meetings.

b. Said meetings will repeatedly address and refer to the Study Plan. This is a consensual plan agreed upon by both the student and the supervisor at the start of any doctoral studies. The supervisor must be informed of any change/s to the plan immediately.

9. Achieve maximum dissemination & impact of research results and activities. To do so, students are advised to:

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a. Use online tools (blogs to create an online portfolio, social networks, etc.) to create connections with other researchers, research groups, and wider society.

b. Actively participate in seminars, and international and national congresses.

c. Participate in conferences.

10. Be involved in networking by:

a. Participating in short stays at foreign research centres (internationalisation).

b. Participate in social networks linked to research and academic subjects.

11. Commit to developing transversal competencies, including:

a. Good written and verbal skills in mother tongue and foreign language.

b. Digital competencies.

c. A strong work ethic and proactive approach.

d. Any listed by the School of Doctoral and Postgraduate Studies; some will be specific to the doctoral program in question, whilst others will be more generic in nature.

12. Participate in knowledge transfer programs and other professional pathways.

13. Actively participate in academic and university life.

### **3.2 Thesis Supervisor**

Thesis supervision consists of offering intellectual and administrative support and training to PhD students with the view to assisting them in the completion of their studies. Supervisor duties, as established pursuant to Art. 12 of Royal Decree 99/2011 of 28th January, governing official doctoral studies, and Art. 10 of the resolution dated January 17th, 2013 that orders the publication of the Regulations for Official Doctoral Studies of the Universidad de La Laguna, and the responsibilities decreed in this Code of Best Practice shall be understood, at all times, with respect to the provisions established therein.

### **GENERAL**

The supervisor must:

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1. Possess a set of criteria to select doctoral students. The thesis committees must establish, make known and apply the set of criteria that is specific to the candidate selection methods employed by the doctoral program.

2. Inform the doctoral student of the expectations held by the supervisor and/or team members pertaining to all aspects of their research.

3. Define the competencies, skills and attitudes that are expected of a candidate throughout their training.

4. In the event that the supervision of a student is performed by more than one person, agree on and clarify the duties of both supervisors, and, from the outset, confirm the responsibilities and duties covered by each when supervising the doctoral student.

5. Maintain a professional, clear, realistic and constructive relationship with the doctoral student and other team members involved in the doctoral program.

6. Be familiar with the regulations, political orientations and administrative structures of the University, as well as any doctoral programs, projects and research groups that may be of relevance to the doctoral student.

7. Provide guidance, as necessary, on complementary training activities that are deemed necessary for the training period of the doctoral student - this includes organisations falling under the doctoral program itself, or equally, those falling outside of the program.

8. The thesis supervisor assumes utmost responsibility for overseeing the training and guidance of doctoral students as they pursue their research, training and activities.

9. Be conscious of the duties, rights and obligations of a thesis supervisor as detailed in the document "*Documento de compromiso de elaboración de tesis doctoral en la ULL*".

### **MONITORING**

One of the fundamental roles of the supervisor is to regularly monitor the doctoral student using a clear framework of formal and informal meetings. These meetings shall then form the basis of an annual progress report that is performed by the thesis committee assigned responsibility for this duty. To assist the doctoral student in preparing for this annual review, the supervisor shall:

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10. Maintain regular contact with the doctoral student: the supervisor will have to adapt to the needs of the research and adapt to the current phase of research. The supervisor must provide prompt answers to any questions or doubts the student may have.

11. Plan regular meetings to monitor the progress of research based on any milestones and deadlines that have been previously agreed on with the doctoral student.

12. Motivate the doctoral student to regularly put their results and research progress in writing - this could be in the form of laboratory logbooks, reports, a portfolio, etc. - so they revise submitted documentation with a view to making any appropriate comments and observations.

13. Ensure that the doctoral student is aware of all deadlines and takes responsibility for submitting any reports requested by the University and/or public and private financial entities funding their research.

14. Anticipate the possible prolonged absence of the supervisor/s: in planning for such an event, steps must be taken to ensure the uninterrupted supervision of research using alternative measures.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

15. Provide guidance and support to the doctoral student in the following matters: their research topic, the work plan, annual reports, the standards of quality demanded from students undertaking a doctorate, the ethical dimensions affecting doctoral students, and sources of research funding and financing opportunities (grants, research contracts, financial aid, etc.).

16. Assure academic and ethical principles followed by the doctoral student are to the highest standard; make the doctoral student aware of current legislation, common guidelines and codes of conduct, which includes health and safety regulations in the workplace and all procedures and obligations arising from these.

17. Ensure that the research of the doctoral student is original and complies with academic requirements; should the supervisor detect signs of plagiarism or infringements of intellectual property rights, s/he must communicate these concerns to the thesis committee of the doctoral program.

18. Motivate the doctoral student to publish research, participate in congresses, seminars and conferences in line with the characteristics or practices of

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their academic/scientific discipline; furthermore, advise the student, when necessary, on how to source funding in order to pursue these activities.

19. Advise the doctoral student on how to deposit and defend the doctoral thesis and provide support for both steps.

20. Provide career guidance: explain different possible career choices available to the student once the doctoral thesis has been completed.

### **3.3 Tutor**

A tutor is assigned to each student by the thesis committee of the doctoral program.

The tutor is envisaged as a figure whose purpose is to provide the doctoral student with academic and administrative guidance so that all safeguards are guaranteed whilst students pursue their research activities. The figure of the tutor is described in Art. 9 of the Resolution dated 17th January, 2013 that orders the publication of the Regulations for Official Doctoral Studies of the Universidad de La Laguna, and the responsibilities decreed in this Code of Best Practice shall be understood, at all times, with respect to the provisions established therein.

A tutor may be assigned one or more doctoral students.

#### Tutor responsibilities:

- Prior to the assignment of a supervisor

1. As soon as a student joins a doctoral program, the tutor provides them with guidance and informs them of how the program works and what training activities are on offer; this includes training activities arranged by the doctoral program itself or by the School of Doctoral Studies.

2. The tutor must identify the doctoral student's expectations, preferences, aptitudes and skill set in order to offer suitable tailor-made guidance.

3. The tutor assists the doctoral student in selecting a thesis supervisor for their research; the tutor also helps supervisors select suitable candidates.

4. The tutor provides information as well as advice and guidance services pertaining to any administrative processes required in the doctoral program.

5. The tutor assists the doctoral student so that full and satisfactory use is made of available research resources.

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- Following the assignment of a supervisor

6. The tutor acts as an intermediary between the doctoral student and their supervisor, acting as mediator should problems or questions arise during the course of research.

7. The supervisor, tutor and doctoral student shall establish by mutual agreement the relationship and responsibilities of each party until research is completed whilst always respecting the duties, rights and obligations of the tutor as described in the document "*Documento de compromiso de elaboración de tesis doctoral en la ULL*".

### **3.4 Doctoral Program**

The doctoral program in which the doctoral student enrolls and pursues their research plays a fundamental role providing the student with support and monitoring their progress. It is responsible for ensuring that students have access to adequate resources and supervision throughout their research.

All doctoral programs assign a thesis committee to oversee matters and handle said tasks.

The responsibilities of the doctoral program are established pursuant to Art. 8 of Royal Decree 99/2011 of 28th January governing official doctoral programs, and the resolution dated January 17th, 2013 that orders the publication of the Regulations for Official Doctoral Studies of the Universidad de La Laguna. Particular stress is placed on Best Practice measures concerning the following:

1. Ensuring the doctoral student has access to the resources, facilities and equipment needed to pursue their doctoral studies and complete their thesis. The doctoral program coordinator must ensure that these conditions are met when an candidate's application is accepted.

2. Assigning a tutor and supervisor to each student who is admitted. The thesis supervisor must meet the statutory requirements established in Royal Decree 99/2011 of 28th January governing official doctoral programs (arts. 12 and 11.4); and both figures shall abide by the resolution dated January 17th, 2013 that orders the publication of the Regulations for Official Doctoral Studies of the Universidad de La Laguna (arts. 9 and 10).

3. Providing all necessary support, and supervising a doctoral student's progress using the annual progress reports that the student is under the obligation to submit to the thesis committee.

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4. All information pertaining to the doctoral program must be updated and accessible via the doctoral program website together with other information elements issued by the vice rectorate with expertise and competence in said area.

### **3.5 Thesis Committee**

The responsibilities of the thesis committee are established pursuant to Royal Decree 99/2011, and the resolution dated January 17th, 2013 that orders the publication of the Regulations for Official Doctoral Studies of the Universidad de La Laguna (arts. 14, 15, and 16). Particular stress is placed on Best Practice measures concerning the following:

1. Assigning each student a line of research, of which they will be officially notified within stipulated deadlines.
2. Bridging the gap between students and thesis supervisor/s in order to ensure student progress is monitored correctly; providing support to thesis supervisors, and improving research training experiences.
3. Offering mechanisms to identify and resolve any problem that may arise during the course of the doctoral thesis.
4. Assigning thesis assessors whose responsibility is to evaluate the thesis, and verifying that said evaluations have been duly performed.
5. Saving records of activities and important meetings, including annual progress reports for each student.

### **4. Entry into Force**

This Code of Best Practice will enter into force the day after it is approved by the Governing Board of the Universidad de La laguna.

### **5. Promotion and Dissemination of Code of Best Practice**

The Universidad de La Laguna will share this Code of Best Practice as widely as possible using all means possible to ensure it is brought to the attention of the entire university community.

The Universidad de La Laguna will encourage training and foster the values that underlie good scientific practice during the training of researchers, and in the doctoral thesis defence protocols, in order to ensure the utmost rigor in its doctoral teachings.

Avda. Astrofísico Francisco Sánchez, s/n  
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