

# Suggestions for Onboarding Doctoral Researchers at TU Berlin

A collection of ideas for doctoral researchers

GUIDELINES | Onboarding

TU Berlin Center for Junior Scholars (CJS)

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## Preliminary remarks

Dear Doctoral Researchers,

**Welcome to TU Berlin! How wonderful that you have decided to pursue a doctorate!** With this decision, you have taken an important step in your professional development. A doctorate not only opens up opportunities in academia, but also strengthens skills that are valued in many professional fields, regardless of whether you see your future in academia or in other areas. The doctoral period is a phase of **intellectual freedom**, for developing your own ideas, and immersing yourself in your chosen subject. At the same time, it also brings **challenges**, and it is especially important in these moments to know that you are not alone. In this brochure, we would like to introduce you to **services, counseling centers, and networking opportunities**, and give you an **overview of your first days at TU Berlin**. This brochure is not intended as a guide to doctoral studies, but rather provides tips on how to orient yourself and settle into your doctoral environment from day one so that you can get off to a successful start in your doctoral project.

The idea for this onboarding<sup>1</sup> brochure originated in the **Resonanzraum**, a **committee of the Center for Junior Scholars Council**, in which members of various status groups from TU faculties address a variety of topics and develop measures as necessary – in this case, the overarching theme was "Supervision and measures for better doctoral conditions." At the beginning of the discussion, it became clear that doctoral research associates find familiarizing themselves with work at their chair or in their project often so complex and time-consuming that their doctoral studies take a back seat. As a result, the decision was taken to compile a **set of measures** that summarizes ideas and existing templates to make this **initial phase** easier.

The **goal of onboarding is to introduce you to TU Berlin as a new doctoral researcher**, help you settle in and better integrate you into the structure and culture of your academic chairs, institutes, and faculties from the very beginning. Although the starting point for this brochure was the situation of doctoral research associates, it is aimed at **all doctoral researchers at TU Berlin**. Wherever it made sense and was possible, we have **also considered scholarship holders and external doctoral**

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<sup>1</sup> Onboarding means the induction of new employees to the place where they will work and be deployed.

**researchers** in the measures suggested, though the focus is on measures for doctoral research associates.

This brochure on onboarding deals with what you as a **doctoral researcher can do to ensure a successful start at TU Berlin**. In addition to this brochure, there is another one for doctoral supervisors. The brochure brings together ideas and measures that are intended as **suggestions**. You can, of course, select the measures that are appropriate for your needs – in other words, "pick out" the things that make sense for you.

**We would like to express our sincere thanks to the members of the Resonanzraum** who contributed their ideas and experience to this brochure, to the chairs headed by **Professors Göhlich, Bardenhagen, Stark, and Rethmeier as well as the Faculty Service Center of Faculty VI** for their best practice examples, which we were permitted to publish here.

Your team from the Center for Junior Scholars



Professor Dr. Annette Mayer

Director of the Center for Scientific Continuing Education and Cooperation (ZEWK) and the Center for Junior Scholars (CJS)



Dr. Andrea Adams

Center for Junior Scholars – proMotion Program head

## Settling in and getting to know the team

The first day at a new workplace is a defining moment – it's about settling in, making initial contacts, and finding your way about in the research group. A good working atmosphere in which you feel welcome and included is a decisive factor for productive work. Many academic chairs already have established routines for the induction of new research associates. **Ask if anything is planned and consider how you would like to introduce yourself to your new colleagues at the chair:** This could be by an email that you send to your new colleagues (with a photo if possible) in which you introduce yourself and tell them a little about your background and your research interests. **At many institutions, it is also customary for new employees to bring cake or sandwiches** to the team meeting on their first day or to treat their colleagues on a separate occasion ("Einstand") – ask around to find out.

Doctoral researchers who are pursuing their doctorate with a **scholarship** or an **external position** are in many cases **not thought of as a matter of course when it comes to introductions**. As a doctoral researcher without a TU position, you should therefore inquire whether there are any introductory routines, whether you can participate in them, or what other opportunities there are to get to know everyone. For example, you can take a tour of the office and introduce yourself, or ask if you can take part in team meetings.

There are also often regular **group activities** such as Christmas parties, summer parties, or staff outings, which you can help organize, getting to know other employees th at way. Relevant **mailing lists** for the academic chair, institute, or faculty are important, too – ask about them if necessary. Incidentally, in addition to other doctoral researchers, the **office staff at the academic chair** are often an excellent source of such information.

## Start the doctoral project in good time and clarify expectations regarding supervision

You demonstrate through your doctoral degree that you are capable of making an **independent scientific contribution to research**, which requires a **high degree of independence and often also proactively structuring the doctoral process**. Even though independent research is part of a doctoral program, doctoral researchers also need continuous professional support from their supervisor. We therefore recommend you prioritize **developing your approach to the topic and writing your exposé** from the beginning and agree with your supervisor on deadlines by which both should be completed. To this end, regular meetings between doctoral researchers and their supervisors should be set up from the start. Clarify early on **how often** these meetings will take place and who is **responsible** for scheduling them. It is a good idea to arrange fixed regular appointments with your supervisor and to stipulate that meetings should also take place if you are not as far advanced in your doctoral studies as you would wish – in the sense of a workshop report. If your supervisor is also your direct superior, make sure that appointments are made to **discuss your doctoral progress** specifically – and not just your work for the academic chair or research project.

The preparation and follow-up of supervision meetings is usually the responsibility of doctoral researchers: Beforehand, think about what you want to discuss. It has proven useful to prepare a one-page memo with your questions or concerns. Alternatively, you can use the **doctoral report** template from the Chair of Aircraft Design and Aerostructures drawn up by Professor Bardenhagen to prepare for supervision meetings. To follow up, we recommend writing a **summary of the results**.

[Doctoral report template Chair of Aircraft Design and Aerostructures \(Professor Bardenhagen\)](#)

Another important matter is to **register your intention to pursue a doctorate as early as possible**. Only with this declaration of intent are you officially considered a doctoral researcher at TU Berlin. This has legally binding force and gives you legal certainty. Timely acceptance by the faculty of the intent to pursue a doctorate ensures that, on the one hand, international master's graduates and doctoral researchers from other disciplines are **checked early on to see whether all formal requirements for the doctorate** have been met or whether there are still conditions that need to be fulfilled. At the same time, the declaration of intent makes it possible to **continue the procedure at TU Berlin with the same supervisor as evaluator** even after the supervisor retires or moves to another university (see [Doctoral Regulations section 6 \(4\) sentence 4](#)). For TU Berlin as an institution, early registration means that you can also be addressed as a doctoral researcher. Finally, the intention to pursue a doctorate is important in cases of conflict, because then higher-level institutions such as the faculty can also intervene.

Another important tool is the **supervision agreement**, which should be **discussed and concluded together** as early as possible when registering your intention to pursue a doctorate. Conclusion of a **supervision agreement is mandatory under the TU Berlin Doctoral Regulations and under the Berlin State Higher Education Act**. The supervision agreement not only serves to meet administrative requirements, however, but is also an opportunity to clarify both parties' expectations: An early discussion of the **supervision agreement** should be taken as an opportunity for you and your supervisor to clarify **key aspects of your work together**. **What ideas do you both have about supervision? What regular meetings and what milestones** in the doctoral process should be set? These agreements can increase both parties' **commitment** to the collaborative process.

[Supervision agreement of TU Berlin](#)

[Joint Doctoral Regulations of Faculties I, IV, VI and VII](#)

[Doctoral Regulations of Faculty II](#)

[Doctoral Regulations of Faculty III](#)

Berlin State Higher Education Act  
[BerlHG Section 35 \(5\)](#)

Even when there is a good relationship between doctoral researcher and supervisor, **expectations regarding supervision** can diverge. It is therefore important to **communicate and align expectations**. Additional materials can be helpful in this regard. For example, the "**Expectation management worksheet**" from Tartu University or the "**Guidelines for the Good Supervision of Doctoral Researchers**" offer valuable suggestions for discussions with your supervisor. A helpful tool for supporting project and time management and developing milestones for your doctoral studies is the "Doctoral Studies Barometer" drawn up by Professor Rainer Stark from the Chair of Industrial Information Technology.

[Expectation management worksheet](#)  
Tartu University

[Guidelines for the Good Supervision of Doctoral Researchers](#),  
Bielefeld

Last but not least, you should clarify the **relationship between your doctoral thesis and other work duties** as early as possible. According to the Berlin State Higher Education Act, if you have a qualification position (also known as a budgetary or structural position) you may spend **50% of your working time on achieving your own academic qualification, and 25% if you have an externally funded position.**

[Berlin State Higher Education Act Section 110 \(4\)](#)

As a research associate, teaching duties, project work and administrative tasks often compete with work on your doctoral thesis in terms of time demands. For this reason, tasks ensuing from your employment (e.g., in a budgetary or third-party-funded position) that are not directly related to the doctorate should also be clearly discussed in terms of time demand, when the position is taken up.

To this end, you should discuss specific tasks and make a note of them. A practical example of this is provided by the **Doctoral Guidelines** for the Chair of Joining Technology by **Professor Michael Rethmeier**, which clearly set out the requirements both for the doctoral work and for the research group.

[Doctoral Guidelines, Chair of Joining Technology \(Professor Rethmeier\)](#)

## Improving networking and peer support

Good networking with colleagues in your research group can make your doctoral studies easier and enrich your everyday life. For example, you can actively participate in **joint lunches** or **initiate networking activities yourself.**

If there are no regular meetings such as colloquiums or work meetings, **organize your own gatherings for discussion** with colleagues and other doctoral researchers. Small research groups can join forces so as to reach a workable size.

The [Center for Junior Scholars \(CJS\)](#) also supports you in setting up **peer coaching groups**: These offer structured, interdisciplinary exchange on topics related to your doctorate, especially non-technical aspects.

**For female doctoral researchers**, the Center for Junior Scholars offers workshops and networking opportunities through the [proMotion Programm](#).

[SYNCS: Peer coaching for doctoral researchers](#)

## Start out well informed: Resources and procedures

Find out as early as possible about the **procedures and responsibilities** in your research group – this will make orientation much easier. Perhaps your academic chair also has a **checklist** to help you get started – such as those created by Faculty VI or the chair headed by Professor Göhlich.

Inquire **what resources are available to you** – e.g., for conference trips, equipment, and device utilization. If you have a project position, it may be helpful to ask to see the application for the project so that you are aware of the research goals and the resources applied for.

If you are doing your **doctorate on a scholarship or externally**, it is worth asking if you may use the **infrastructure** too. Sometimes an unused workspace is available, and you can ask to be listed on the academic chair's website or if you can use the academic chair's printer, copier, or other resources. TU business cards with an institutional address may also be possible. If you would like to gain teaching experience, it may also be possible to take on a teaching assignment, which can mean greater professional involvement and promote exchange with other employees in the research group.

[Onboarding checklist of Faculty VI](#)

[Onboarding checklist for the Chair of Product Development Methods and Mechatronics \(Professor Göhlich\)](#)

## Induction and welcoming events for new doctoral researchers

TU Berlin, your faculty, the Center for Junior Scholars, and the Berlin University Alliance offer **induction and welcoming events** throughout the year. These help you to get to know the University and its structures better and to network with other doctoral researchers. For international doctoral researchers, the **CJS provides a welcome brochure** with general and specific information about doctoral studies and staying at TU Berlin.

- [Welcome Day for new staff at TU Berlin](#)
- [Introductory events](#) organized by the CJS with the faculties
- [BUA Kick Off your Doctorate Retreat](#)

[CJS: Initial consultation and information event for new doctoral researchers](#)

[Welcome Brochure for International Doctoral Researchers at Technische Universität Berlin](#)

## Teaching related information and support services

**Teaching is a central task** of research associates in budgetary positions. Make sure to discuss at an early stage which courses or examination tasks you will take on and what support you will receive. Faculties and academic chairs often offer help with teaching-related issues. Some faculties organize **open days** for teachers, sometimes offering help specifically for new teachers. In addition, Technische Universität Berlin offers information covering general aspects of teaching on central websites. The [Teaching Portal](#) on the on the intranet is particularly helpful, as are the [central pages of the TU Berlin website](#).

The **Center for Scientific Continuing Education and Cooperation (ZEWK)** offers introductory training courses specifically for new teachers. These include the course "Teaching for University's Best." **Tutors** can also be referred to relevant introductory courses and support services. For individual questions on the subject of teaching, [Björn Kiehne](#) among others is available as a contact person.

[ZEWK services on offer for research associates](#)

[ZEWK services on offer related to teaching](#)

## Continuing education

**Take advantage of the extensive range of continuing education opportunities<sup>2</sup>** available to you. The ZEWK offers numerous courses, e.g., on project and research management, teaching, writing, and presenting, as well as science communication and career development. A particularly important topic is "**good scientific practice**" – the ZEWK offers a self-study course on this subject, among others. As a doctoral researcher at TU Berlin, you can also take advantage of the workshops offered by Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt Universität Berlin, and the Berlin University Alliance. You can search the respective websites or consult the Center for Junior Scholars' listings of workshops in the coming months.

Together with your supervisor, you can consider **which continuing education courses are useful for your individual development**. Continuing education is a requirement for teaching and/or research associates and is done during your working hours. If you have special needs (e.g., for your team), you can also contact the ZEWK.

[Continuing education courses offered by the Center for Scientific Education and Cooperation \(ZEWK\)](#)

Workshops at the [Dahlem Research School of the FU Berlin](#)

Workshops at the [Humboldt Graduate School \(HU Berlin\)](#)

[Graduate Studies Support Program](#) (Berlin University Alliance)

Topic overview Continuing education at the [Center for Junior Scholars CJS](#)

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<sup>2</sup> [TU Berlin/Staff Council Agreement on continuing education for staff of TU Berlin](#)

## Setting the course for a successful doctoral phase

We hope that the ideas in this brochure have provided you with inspiration as regards onboarding at your institution. We would be delighted if we could contribute to making the onboarding process at TU Berlin even better. If you have any suggestions for this brochure or would like to share a best practice example from your own field of work, please do not hesitate to contact us. Please send your feedback to Dr. Andrea Adams: [a.adams@tu-berlin.de](mailto:a.adams@tu-berlin.de).

### Further information, advice and contact

[Center for Junior Scholars](#)

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