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Guideline on Bias in the Doctoral School NRW

from 12.07.2023

The Doctoral School NRW strives to ensure an objective, fair and transparent assessment of membership applications from professors and doctoral candidates, applications for Acceptance to doctoral studies, doctoral procedures and other decisions. In this context, it is important to ensure that all persons involved in decisions are impartial and free from bias. This policy is intended to help avoid bias and strengthen public confidence in the integrity of the Doctoral College.

This bias policy applies to all bodies, boards, committees, commissions and other groups and individuals involved in decision-making at Doctoral School NRW.

In principle, Sections 20 and 21 of the Administrative Procedure Act of North Rhine-Westphalia (Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz NRW) apply mutatis mutandis to dealing with bias. The following explanations serve as a guide.

The nature of bias

Bias occurs when a person authorized to make a decision is not in a position to make an unbiased decision due to personal, economic or other interests or relationships.

Bias generally exists in the case of

- First-degree relationship, marriage, civil partnership, cohabitation,
- economic ties outside the university and PK NRW area, such as the existence of a contract under private law,
- Presence of emotional conflicts, such as hatred, revenge, love,
- direct and individual advantages or disadvantages of the decision.

With regard to the commissioning of co-authors as reviewers for cumulative dissertations, the usual compliance rules in the specialist community must be observed.

Disclosure of interests and procedures to avoid bias

All persons authorized to make decisions are obliged to disclose interests and relationships to the decision-making body that could impair their independence and impartiality or give rise to suspicion of bias. Disclosure must be made prior to the decision-making process and recorded in the minutes of the meeting. In exceptional cases, interests and relationships may be disclosed confidentially to the person chairing the Body or Board or Committee.

If a person authorized to make a decision considers themselves to be biased due to disclosed interests or relationships or is considered to be biased by the person leading the decision-making body, they are excluded from the decision-making process. The person may not participate in the discussion or vote. In borderline cases, the Executive Board may be consulted when deciding on bias.

If several items on the agenda are discussed and decided at a meeting, the exclusion only applies to those items on which bias exists. In the case of collective items, such as the admission of several new members, the exclusion only applies to those persons in respect of whom bias exists.

Bias and exclusion may reduce the number of voting members of a Body, Board or Committee. The quorum must be ensured.

In order to simplify the procedures, the aim is to confirm compliance with the guideline on bias when applying for admission to the PK NRW. External committee members will be provided with a form.

Review of independence

The Executive Board of Doctoral School NRW reserves the right to review the independence and impartiality of members of Bodies, Boards, Committees, Commissions and other groups or individuals involved in decision-making.

Training of the members of the Body or Board or Committee

Doctoral School NRW will ensure that all groups or individuals involved in decision-making are aware of this policy and the importance of independence and impartiality. Where appropriate, training will be provided to promote awareness of bias and the need to disclose interests.

Examples:

Decision on admission as a professor or participation in doctoral procedures

- A member of the EA/PA/AR is related to this person by blood or marriage: Bias
- A member of the EA/PA/AR works with this person at the same university in the same faculty/department or on joint projects: no bias unless there is an exceptional relationship (e.g. emotional entanglement, extreme competition)
- Member of the EA/PA/AR is a doctoral candidate of the professor: Bias
- Member of the EA/PA/AR is employed by the person's private consulting GmbH: Bias

Decision on admission as a doctoral candidate, Acceptance as a doctoral candidate or opening of the doctoral procedure

- A member of the EA/PA/AR is related to this person by blood or marriage: Bias
- Member of the EA/PA/AR is supervisor: no bias
- A member of the EA/PA/AR works with this person at the same university in the same faculty/department/on joint projects: no bias unless there is an exceptional relationship (e.g. emotional entanglement, extreme competition)
- Doctoral candidate member of the EA/PA/AR publishes together with this person and wishes to submit the joint publication for a cumulative doctorate: no bias, unless the decision has a direct impact on the doctorate (e.g. dispute over first authorship)

Appointment of reviewers

- A co-author of a cumulative dissertation is proposed as a reviewer: Check whether this is possible according to the rules customary in the specialist community.

Entered into force based on the resolution of the Executive Board dated 12.07.2023.

The Chairman of the Executive Board

signed. *Sternberg*

(Prof. Dr. Martin Sternberg)