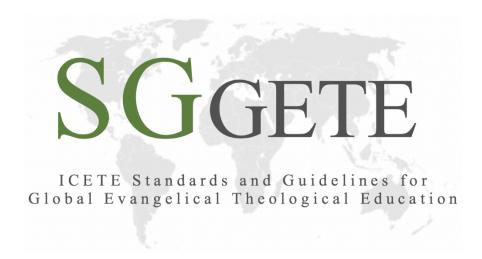# GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES

To be used as a supplemental resource to the Standards and Guideliens for
Global Evangelical Theological Education (SG-GETE)
https://icete.info/resources/sggete/

In 2021, the SG-GETE was revised to include standards and guidelines for doctoral level research programmes. However, the Doctoral Initiative Steering Committee (DISC) felt that an integral appendix would be useful, in which a focused overview and further details were provided in relation to the guidelines for research doctoral programmes. This appendix serves this purpose.

1 - Introduction

PREAMBLE

There are several reasons why evaluating doctoral programmes is important and beneficial. A few of the more pressing reasons include:

- Doctoral education is costly, a significant investment by any school, thus it is important to do well at equipping students for the kinds of research, teaching, and leadership in the church and in theological education needed in your region.
- Doctoral education differs in some important ways from undergraduate and master's level programmes and needs to be assessed with some different concerns in mind. Though similar in some respects, doctoral education programmes cannot be treated or assessed as if they were the same as other kinds of academic programmes.
- Graduates will go on to serve in teaching and leadership roles, impacting the next generation of ministry leaders through their teaching, leadership, research, and writing. They should be equipped well for the tasks and challenges they will face, for the sake of those who are to come, and for God's Kingdom purposes.

Assessment then is an effort to be faithful to God with the resources He has entrusted to us for the fulfillment of the purposes for which doctoral programmes were created.

BACKGROUND

Before getting into the specific guidelines we offer for assessing research doctoral programmes,[1] let's first begin with a brief orientation regarding why this document was developed, what its purposes are, why assessment is important, types of assessment that need to be carried out, and how to best use this document if you are: (1) school leaders doing self-assessment, or (2) regional accreditation reviewers tasked with assessing a school's research doctoral degree programmes.

There were three events that serve as a foundation for the development of these guidelines. First, in 2010, after several years of meetings, members of the ICETE Doctoral Consultation published The Beirut Benchmarks, a statement of the purposes and outcomes of research doctoral programmes within evangelical theological institutions. This document, translated into several languages and available on the ICETE website[2] establishes basic expectations for quality research doctoral study and is useful for both programme development and assessment.[3]

Second, in 2015, Ian Shaw, Scott Cunningham, and Bernhard Ott, members of ICETE's Doctoral Initiative Steering Committee (DISC), edited the book, Best Practice Guidelines for Doctoral Programmes (Langham Global Library), as a guide for schools for developing research doctoral programmes in the majority world context. This document provides more extensive detail on best practices in programme design, resources, faculty work with doctoral students, and programme administrative support needs.

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[1] This document addresses research doctoral programme assessment (e.g., PhD, ThD), not professional doctoral degrees (e.g., EdD, PsyD, DMin). Some issues will be similar, but there are significant differences.
[2] https://icete.info/resources/the-beirut-benchmarks/
[3] A similar statement of benchmarks for professional doctoral programmes is also available on the ICETE website.

Third, in October 2018, at the ICETE Triennial Conference in Panama City, Panama, Kevin Lawson and Theresa Lua, current and former DISC members, offered a breakout session entitled "Assessing Doctoral Level Programmes: Recommended Guidelines and Procedures." Following this session, it was proposed that the committee develop a document regarding assessment guidelines for research doctoral programmes (e.g., PhD, ThD). The purposes of these guidelines is:

(1) To provide ICETE related schools that offer research doctoral degree programmes (e.g., PhD, ThD) with guidelines to assist in the self-assessment and ongoing development of their programmes.

(2) To provide regional accrediting agencies with guidelines to assist in the development of their accreditation review procedures with schools that offer research doctoral degree programmes.

(3) To stimulate more thoughtful reflection on doctoral programme goals and educational processes, and encourage the development of stronger, contextualized doctoral education programmes in ICETE related schools.

This document is the result of these efforts, and we pray that it will be useful both to schools and to regional accreditation group leaders in growing and strengthening research doctoral programmes to serve the needs of the church around the world.

The intent is that these guidelines for research doctoral programme assessment be used in conjunction with *The Beirut Benchmarks* (ICETE, 2011) and *Best Practice Guidelines for Doctoral Programmes* (Langham, 2015) in developing and carrying out assessment efforts within institutions and by regional accreditation groups within ICETE. To unify the practices of quality assurance in the ICETE across all levels, in 2021 these guidelines have been incorporated into the SG-GETE. In this way, we hope to ensure that ICETE school research doctoral degree programs are of similar high quality around the globe and clearly addressing regional needs.

QUALITY ASSURANCE, ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES

As described above, these guidelines were created with two groups in mind, and a particular approach and spirit we would encourage be adopted in their use:

(1) **Institutional self-assessment** is carried out by school leaders so you and your faculty can develop your programme over time to accomplish what you believe to be important and at a high academic quality. We recommend that school leaders establish a regular schedule for the assessment of their research doctoral programmes so they can be strengthened over time.

(2) **Accreditation assessment** is an opportunity for a school to be evaluated by regional peers in theological education as it pursues excellence in its educational efforts. It requires both a spirit of trust and of humility. We recommend that whenever accreditation assessments are done of member schools by a regional review team, the guidelines in the SG-GETE and in this document be used as a resource in the review of any research doctoral programmes offered by those schools.

(3) **Formative vs. summative assessment**. Generally, we recommend approaching all assessment in higher education as formative in nature, as part of an ongoing improvement process. We are always seeking to strengthen and improve what we offer for God's purposes. This is the spirit in which we recommend that the assessment of research doctoral programmes be carried out. Strong programmes develop over time, beginning because of a need in the region and starting out with the basics to address the need, so we should expect to see areas where

development is needed. As a school invests in their programmes over the years they grow stronger. But even when a programme is strong, assessment can identify areas worth developing further. Only over time, if a school is unable to reach important expected standards, might this change from formative to summative assessment, regarding whether or not a programme should be continued.

The guidelines for assessment offered here can be useful to school leaders in at least three different ways.

(1) **Preparatory Assessment** before beginning a programme. As schools consider starting a research doctoral programme, reading through the SG-GETE and these guidelines can help school leaders identify important aspects to give attention to in the design of the programme, both in terms of what to develop before the programme begins, and how to carry out the programme to ensure that important outcomes are accomplished and assessed. Giving attention to the issues raised in this document will help school leaders develop and launch stronger doctoral programmes.

(2) **Regularly Scheduled Institutional Self-Assessment** of the programme. Having a schedule to review the doctoral programmes you offer so you can address any needs or concerns that have developed over time is an important aspect of educational leadership. Programmes are designed with particular goals in mind, and it is important to take time to assess whether or not those goals are being achieved, and what may need to be adjusted to help achieve them more fully. These guidelines can be useful for teams of school leaders and faculty to use in their own programme assessment efforts.

(3) **Preparing for Accreditation Assessment**. As a school begins preparations for an accreditation review, the SG-GETE and these guidelines can be useful in understanding what a review team may want to know about the doctoral programme(s), allowing your school leaders to gather information that address these guidelines and prepare better for the visit.[4]

2 - Guidelines for Research Doctoral Programmes

2.1 - A FOUR-FOLD FRAMEWORK FOR DOCTORAL PROGRAMME ASSESSMENT

In approaching educational programme assessments, it can be helpful to think in terms of at least four major aspects or dimensions that should be part of the assessment effort

2.1.1 - Purposes and Desired Programme Outcomes (SG-GETE B2.9). Doctoral programmes may be developed with different kinds of purposes in mind. These often include equipping those who will research, write, teach, and give leadership in theological education and in other aspects of the life of the church. As time goes by, new needs may arise that should be addressed within a doctoral programme as well. It is beneficial to begin assessment by clarifying the general purpose and more specific goals being pursued within a doctoral programme. Assessment begins with an

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[4] It is important to consult with your regional accreditation group to understand the degree to which the SG-GETE and these guidelines may be used by them in their review process, or whether they have been adapted in some important ways to better fit your context. In some cases, due to government accreditation processes, there may be other criteria that are important to address beyond what is described here.

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examination of these purposes and goals and confirming if they are indeed clear and important to pursue. Then, in light of these purposes and goals, developing "programme learning outcomes" that students are to achieve is a critical step for later assessment of programme effectiveness. It is highly recommended that you make use of The *Beirut Benchmarks* in thinking through the important aspects of what your doctoral programme is designed to accomplish in terms of student learning outcomes.

2.1.2 – Resources (SG-GETE A5). All doctoral programmes need certain kinds of resources to accomplish the purposes they are designed for. These resources include personnel (e.g., faculty, library staff, administrative assistants, qualified students), facilities and equipment (e.g., classroom space, audio-video equipment), library/research resources, distance education and communication support (e.g., on-line interaction software, strong Internet connections), and financial support (e.g., scholarships). No programme has every resource desired, so it is important to identify your areas of strength and the critical areas that need to be addressed to provide a strong learning experience for your students.

2.1.3 - Educational Content and Processes (SG-GETE B3.3). In addition to having the appropriate resources to support doctoral level education, students and faculty need to engage in the kinds of processes that support doctoral level learning outcomes. What you do in your class sessions, the kinds of learning activities students undertake, the ways you evaluate student achievement and give feedback, the mentoring you provide as students carry out their own research efforts, all contribute to a strong doctoral education experience.

2.1.4 - Outcomes (SG-GETE B3.6). If a research doctoral programme has appropriate purposes, good resources, and good educational processes, it should result in students achieving the kinds of outcomes that support the accomplishment of the programme purposes and goals. A doctoral programme needs to have clear ways of assessing students' achievement of the "programme learning outcomes" (PLOs) that together are part of the fulfillment of the purposes for which the programme was offered. Assessing student achievement of these outcomes is key for identifying whether or not the programme purposes and goals are being achieved and what might be needed to do so more effectively. Assessment of outcomes also includes reviewing graduate placement and the impact they are having in their leadership and teaching roles. More on this below.?

When these four aspects are assessed regularly, they help school leaders develop both short-range and long-range goals and plans for programme development. They are the "feedback-loop" that helps a school respond to changing needs and conditions and ensure that the doctoral programme remains vital and effective in serving the needs of the church (see **SG-GETE B2.1 and B2.8**).

On the ICETE website you will find a self-assessment report model based on these four major areas. The following pages give a thorough introduction to how each of these aspects can be assessed.

2.2 - PURPOSES AND DESIRED PROGRAMME LEARNING OUTCOMES

In order to fairly evaluate a doctoral programme, it is important to begin with considering the purposes for which it was developed. A document of this kind is foundational to the programme design and how it is carried out. School leaders should have written documents clearly addressing the following issues

2.2.1 - What is the need this doctoral programme is seeking to address? (SG-GETE B2.1). A brief, clear written statement of what the need is and how this doctoral programme is the school's attempt to begin to address that need should be available for review. Is there any supporting evidence available that shows this need does indeed exist and is an appropriate one for the school to address?

2.2.2 - Does the degree type fit with the school's mission and the goals for this programme? (SG-GETE A1.3) Related to the above, given the school's mission and the needs this programme is designed to address, does this warrant a research doctoral degree design, or would it be more appropriate to address this need with a different kind of graduate level degree programme? Would a masters degree be more appropriate (e.g., Master of Arts, Master of Divinity)? Would a professional doctoral degree be more appropriate (e.g., Doctor of Education, Doctor of Ministry, Doctor of Practical Theology)? Does this area of study and type of degree build upon the existing mission and strengths of the school, or is it requiring a very different focus and different kinds of resources that may take away from the main focus and efforts of the school? A clearly written statement that reflectively addresses these concerns can be helpful in confirming the appropriateness of this school taking on this particular kind of doctoral programme, ensuring it is truly missional.

2.2.3 - Are there clearly identified "Programme Learning Outcomes" (PLOs) for student learning? (SG-GETE B2.2). Are they all relevant for the church in the contexts the graduates will be serving in? In light of the purposes and goals of the programme it is important to clearly identify the learning outcomes that you desire every graduate of the programme to have achieved. These directly grow out of the programme's goals and an anticipation of the work/ministry contexts that students will be involved in after they graduate. For example, while a PhD programme in New Testament studies may place high value on learning outcomes related to research and scholarly writing skills, if it is anticipated that most graduates will move into seminary or Bible college teaching roles, it will also be important to equip them for teaching and leadership and administrative work in a higher education institution. If it is anticipated that graduates will work extensively in cross-cultural contexts, then some training and experience in cross-cultural teaching may also be important.

Furthermore, are the qualities listed in *The Beirut Benchmarks* reflected in the programme learning outcomes? While PLOs may go beyond those identified in *the Beirut Benchmarks*, they should *at least* address the areas identified in the document.

2.3 - RESOURCES

All educational programmes need personnel and other resources to accomplish their purposes. In assessing the resources needed and available for your doctoral programme, it is important to examine four areas, including: (1) qualified students, (2) qualified faculty and support staff, (3) appropriate physical resources and resourcing, and (4) affordability and sustainability.

2.3.1 - Students: qualified and able to devote time to study (SG-GETE A5.3, B2.5, B3.3, B4.1, B4.4). Strong doctoral programmes require students who are well prepared and able to give time to their studies. There are several key issues to assess when it comes to how schools bring students into their programmes and support them as they move through their studies toward graduation.

Are there clear policies and procedures in place for both the admission of qualified students and their qualification for graduation (graduate profile)? It is important to carefully think through the application and admission process for potential students,

what qualifies them to be considered for the programme, and how and when applications will be reviewed and decisions made. How is this carried out to screen out unqualified students and ensure that all qualified students will be fairly considered?

As students progress through the programme, clear policies and guidelines are needed regarding the process by which a student accomplishes the requirements of the programme and demonstrates that they are qualified to be awarded the doctoral degree in this field of study. All programme components and requirements need to be clearly spelled out, and the procedures that ensure students are equipped and assessed along the way and meet the programme requirements for graduation. Students need to be able to know and understand all that will be required of them and how they move through the programme to completion. Clear statements about admissions and qualifications for graduation need to be clearly spelled out in the school catalog and available to potential applicants and students.

Are students entering the programme with the needed background and skills to succeed in this kind of doctoral programme? How are their applications reviewed, evaluated, and approved? Doctoral studies are not for everyone, and just because someone completed a masters programme does not mean that they have the skills and aptitude for doctoral study. In light of the type and focus of the doctoral programme, what required prerequisite knowledge, skills, and aptitude do students need to demonstrate to be accepted into the programme? A clear statement of these criteria should be developed and used in the applicant assessment process. How are their past academic accomplishments assessed to ensure that they are providing the relevant and sufficient preparation for the demands of the doctoral programme (e.g., grades, faculty references)? What other characteristics of the applicants are important in the application review, and how are they satisfied (e.g., character references, pastoral references)? How is the review of applications carried out? Who oversees this? How are the faculty who teach in the doctoral programme involved in reviewing potential candidates, having input into the decision of who their students will be?

Do students who are admitted have the necessary time and resources available to succeed in the programme and complete it in a timely manner? In evaluating students for acceptance into the doctoral programme, are the time demands of the programme being sufficiently communicated to them, and have they responded with workable plans for how they will manage their studies in the midst of other responsibilities? Are these working out, or do students constantly struggle to meet programme expectations and deadlines? Given the format of the programme, do students have the necessary resources to participate fully in the programme? This includes such things as: (1) computer, (2) strong enough Internet connections for any video conferencing required and access to on-line resources for course assignments and research, (3) traveling to campus for any on-campus participation required, (4) access to sufficient library holdings to complete seminar or course requirements.

On average, how long does/should it take students to complete the degree? What is the graduation rate compared to all those who enter the programme? For those programmes that have been carried on for a few years, it is important to assess the attrition rate and graduation rate of the students. Not every student who enters a doctoral programme will find that their life and work situations allow them to complete it, so some attrition is expected. However, when qualified students are admitted, prepared well for their dissertation research, and are able to give the

needed time to their research and writing, there should be a strong graduation rate. Along with a report on attrition and graduation rates, it is helpful to also note how long students take to complete the programme, and any identifiable reasons for the attrition observed. Which of the reasons for attrition are things the school can respond to, and which are outside their control? What steps, if any, can be taken to increase graduation rates?

2.3.2 - Personnel: sufficient number of qualified faculty and staff (SG-GETE A2.5, A3.1, A3.5, A5.1, A5.2, A5.3, B3.5).

The most important part of any research doctoral programme is the qualifications and effectiveness of the faculty who teach the students and supervise their research, guiding them to the successful completion and defense of their dissertations. In addition, both faculty and students need the support of dedicated office staff to facilitate the logistics of the programme. Any assessment of a doctoral education programme has to carefully consider the faculty who teach and supervise research and the administrative support provided to ensure the smooth functioning of the programme.

Faculty Qualifications. Given both the size of the student enrollment, and the doctoral programme curriculum components, are there sufficient qualified faculty both for teaching and for research supervision/mentorship? The majority of teaching and dissertation supervision should be done by faculty from the school offering the degree, not relying too heavily on adjunct faculty. While a programme may begin with significant outside assistance, over time the school needs to be equipping their own faculty for doctoral level instruction and research supervision. A summary report on all faculty who teach and/or supervise research in the programme, including full and part-time faculty from the school and any adjunct faculty as well, is an important document to help with the programme assessment. This summary report should describe the background and experience of each faculty member and their qualifications for supervising doctoral level student research. The report should also include the following:

- The number of faculty with doctoral degrees in the field of study in which the programme is offered (e.g., theology, OT, NT, Church history)
- Their experience in graduate teaching and research supervision
- Their own research and publication record
- If there are governmental requirements for those who can supervise doctoral student research, then this should be noted for each faculty member as well.

Faculty Workloads. The teaching and dissertation supervision demands of doctoral programmes cannot be simply added on top of full workloads that faculty already carry. While it may be possible for some aspects to be done as overload, with additional financial compensation, it is more sustainable to adjust faculty overall workloads in order to allow time spent on good quality teaching and research mentoring. A report on the full-time and part-time faculty who teach and supervise student research should include a summary of how this work fits within their overall responsibilities at the school, both teaching and administrative.

One important issue: Because doctoral faculty need to be experienced researchers and writing in their own right, doctoral faculty workloads need to allow some time available for their own research & writing, as well as their teaching, and supervision of student research. There ought to be a different expectation of faculty research and writing when they teach and supervise research by doctoral students, and this should be seen in how their overall workload allows time for this to occur. This is part of

developing a "research culture" at a school with a research doctoral programme. Faculty have to be role models, not just supervisors of other's work. The report on faculty workloads should address how their own research and writing is supported.

Also, in assigning responsibilities to faculty for the supervision of doctoral student research, it is important to have clear guidelines for the roles of the mentor/advisor/supervisor and those of other dissertation committee members, such as second readers and external readers/reviewers. There should be a document where this is clearly spelled out to help faculty members with their responsibilities.

Faculty Development and Evaluation. Because teaching and supervising doctoral student research is different from the expectations of faculty teaching undergraduate or masters level students, it is important to carefully consider the preparation and development needs of faculty who serve in doctoral education programmes, or who will be asked to do so in the future. Schools need to invest in a regular programme/pattern of doctoral faculty development. Areas of development to consider include: teaching at a doctoral level, assignment development and assessment, dissertation student supervision and support, and ways of effectively mentoring younger scholars. A report should include a description of the recent and near-future initiatives and activities that doctoral faculty are participating in for their growth as doctoral teachers and supervisors.

When it comes to faculty evaluation, it is not enough to rely solely on teaching feedback. Doctoral programmes may have some taught component in courses and/or seminars, but a major part of the educational experience is in the dissertation research and writing phase of the programme. Faculty assessment needs to include some kind of feedback on this aspect of their work, including both student and peer feedback where possible. A report should include how faculty are evaluated in both their teaching and their research supervision, and how that feedback is used to help faculty members develop increasing competence in their work with their students.

Staff and Library Research Support. Doctoral programmes tend to operate on schedules that may differ from the other programmes offered by the school, and students may have different kinds of needs for support, particularly when they are studying at a distance or only coming to campus for short periods of time. It is important to ensure that both faculty and students in the doctoral programme have the support needed to facilitate their work well and ensure that everyone understands how to fulfill their responsibilities at each stage of the programme. Schools should regularly gather feedback from both faculty and students regarding those aspects of the programme where they feel they have sufficient support from office staff and where there is confusion or there are needs for additional support. This information should be used to continue to refine the support provided by school staff members, and identify areas of training needed by those staff members.

In addition to programme staff support, doctoral students need well-informed guidance from library staff to support their research efforts. Schools need to invest in equipping library staff members to support doctoral level research in the fields of study the programme focuses on, both while students are on campus and when they are working from a distance. Assessment needs to examine the strengths in place and any particular areas of need for further equipping of library staff members.

A report on the doctoral programme should include the identification and description of the office staff who are assigned to address the needs of faculty and students in the

programme, what time is available in their workloads to attend to these needs, and how they have received the training needed for any technical aspects of that support that is required (e.g., software training, IT support). The report should comment on what areas are being addressed well, and what areas, if any, need more attention to serve students and faculty well and help them accomplish their work.

2.3.3 - Physical resources and resourcing (SG-GETE A5.2, A5.3, A5.5, A5.6, B3.3). While the faculty are the most important foundation for a strong doctoral programme, it is also critical that students have access to the kinds of resources needed to facilitate their study and research, ensuring they are able to complete and defend a genuine contribution to their field of study. For many schools in the majority world context, this is one of the greater challenges to supporting strong doctoral education and it calls for considering alternative ways to help students access the resources they need, particularly in their research. Any assessment of doctoral programmes needs to consider the following resources and resourcing strategies and whether they are sufficient to support doctoral level work by their students.

Library Resources and Resourcing. Do doctoral students have ready access to the kinds of books, journals, and dissertations to support doctoral-level research in the field of study that is the focus of this programme? Large holdings in general are not the issue, but holdings within this particular field of study that support doctoral level research and writing. How are the library holdings (physical and digital) in this area managed, and what is the plan for developing these holdings over time? A5.3

If the school's library holdings are not sufficient, what else do students need access to, and how is that being facilitated through other institutions? Are arrangements in place to secure interlibrary loans, or allow students access to other schools' library holdings?

Facilities. Given the programme and course formats used and the size of programme enrollment, is there sufficient office space for faculty and meeting/study space (e.g., classrooms, library study space), and housing available for students when they are on campus? If this is a challenge, what strategies are employed or are being developed to remedy the limitations experienced?

IT for Instruction and Research Guidance. Given the programme and course formats used, do faculty have the resources and assistance they need to use technology well in the courses they teach? For example:

- Do faculty have sufficiently up-to-date computers and word processing software to use in their interactions with their students? Are faculty sufficiently trained in the use of the relevant software used in the programme?

- Are faculty up to date on relevant databases to access to assist students with their research efforts? Do they have access and experience in using these databases themselves?

- If online courses are being offered, are faculty trained in the learning management software being used to facilitate student interaction and assignment assessments?

- Do faculty have access to sufficient Internet bandwidth to ensure good connections with students online for live interaction when it is needed (e.g., Zoom, Skype, etc.)?

IT for Student Needs. Given the programme and course formats used, do students have the resources and assistance they need to use technology well in the courses they take? For example:

- Do students have access to sufficiently up-to-date computers and word processing software to use in their interactions with their faculty and fellow students? Are students sufficiently trained in the use of the relevant software to support their studies?

- Are students up to date on relevant databases to access to support their research efforts? Do they have access and experience in using these databases? If these are not available on the school campus, how else might students be able to access them? (see below for ideas)

- If online courses are being offered, are students trained in the learning management software being used to facilitate their interaction with their instructors and fellow students?

- Do students have access to sufficient Internet bandwidth to ensure good connections with faculty and fellow students online for live interaction (e.g., Zoom, Skype, etc.)?

Students Off-Site Educational Support. If a distance education model is used, how do students gain access to the kinds of resources they need to support their coursework (if any) and dissertation research? What resources are available on-line through the school's library? What resources are students expected to access through other institutions near where they live? What arrangements are made for distance students to have sufficient study time on the school's campus so they can make good use of the resources of the school's library to carry out their studies? Are faculty sufficiently available to interact with students at a distance, supporting their progress in courses, seminars, and independent dissertation research? How is this carried out?

We recommend the development of a website that brings together in one place all of the library and study resources (e.g., access to the library catalog, digital databases available for research), helping students at a distance with their research.

Institutional Partnerships. If your institutional resource holdings are limited in your field of study, what partnerships with other institutions support your students' research? Are your current arrangements sufficient for doctoral-level work? If not, what collaborative arrangements are being developed and how will students benefit from them.

Other Relevant Resources. Given the field of study addressed by your doctoral programme, are there other resources needed to support doctoral-level study? Having identified what is needed, to what degree are these available through the school, and what, if anything, needs to be pursued to benefit student training? This can be particularly challenging when a student is doing inter-disciplinary research, needing access to research publications in fields outside those normally addressed through a seminary library collection. What options are there to help students gain access to the kinds of materials they need?

2.3.4 - Financial resources: affordability and sustainability issues (SG-GETE A3.5).

For doctoral education to be done well, it requires significant financial resources to support it, and it has to be affordable enough to enable students to pursue and complete their studies without crippling debt. Covering the expenses of theological education is always a challenge and research doctoral degrees require more financial support per

student than masters level degree programmes. There are two temptations that school leaders must resist as they design and offer research doctoral programmes.

Not a "cash cow." One temptation is to think of research doctoral degree programmes as a new source of funding for the school that will draw in more money than they cost. Research doctoral programmes are time-intensive, taking faculty members away from other teaching that could draw in more tuition. Any programme worth offering will have some expenses beyond its income, not make money for the school. There are ways to keep these expenses low, but this will not be a money-maker for the school.

Bigger is not better. Another temptation is to try to grow a large programme, thinking that somehow the size of the programme will help cover its expenses and add to the reputation of the school. However, faculty cannot handle supervising an unlimited number of dissertations and keep up with their other responsibilities of teaching and staying current in their field of study and research (which is part of what qualifies them to be teaching at a doctoral level). It is important to consider the dissertation supervision load your qualified doctoral faculty can handle and from that determine how many students can be in the programme at any one time. If this is not done well, both students and faculty can suffer in the dissertation phase of the programme, damaging the reputation of the school.

With these cautions in mind, here are a series of questions that should be addressed in an assessment of the research doctoral programmes offered by a Christian higher education institution:

- What does it cost to offer this kind of doctoral programme in this institution with acceptable quality? What new expenses is the programme requiring over and above those of the other programmes the school offers. How does this impact the financial health of the institution?

- How are the programme expenses being covered? Where do the funds come from (e.g., fundraising, tuition, other grants)? If there is a gap between what is needed and what is currently available, what plans are in place to reduce that gap?

- If the programme is funded by external (overseas) sources, is there a plan to work toward becoming self-supporting and locally funded? If so, what is the plan, and how is the implementation of it progressing?

- What combination of tuition rates, scholarships, and work opportunities are available to enable qualified students to afford this programme? What more is needed to ensure students do not graduate with so much debt that they cannot serve in ministry leadership or Christian higher education settings? What is being pursued to address this need?

- Is there enough ongoing demand for the programme that will support its being offered over time? Some programmes spring up to address a temporary need, and once the initial group of students are admitted, there are not enough other applicants over time to sustain the programme. What evidence is there of an ongoing need for the programme?

- How is the added workload of the programme being addressed by faculty and staff? Is it manageable, or is it overloading them? What adjustments are needed to make this a sustainable workload over time?

2-4 - EDUCATIONAL CONTENT AND PROCESSES (SG-GETE A4.1, A5.1, A5.2, B2.9, B2.5, B3.3)

In light of the purposes for the research doctoral programme, the content of the programme and the instructional processes used need to help students accomplish the identified PLOs. In assessing the students' educational experiences, the following questions are important to consider.

2.4.1 – Relevance. Is the curriculum offered relevant to the goals of the programme and the career aspirations of the students? Are students being prepared well for these vocational goals? This gets at not only the disciplinary focus of the programme, but the vocational preparation of the students as well. Does the curriculum, the full range of what students experience in the programme (e.g., any courses taught, seminars, colloquies, internships), address both the growth of the student in the content and skills of the discipline of study and its vocational application? For teaching in higher education, how are the areas of academic research and writing, growth in capacity to teach, and preparation for educational leadership intentionally addressed in the programme? Are they sufficient for accomplishing the PLOs of the programme?

2.4.2 – Integration. Are all programme learning outcomes (PLOs), including the qualities identified in the Beirut Benchmarks, integrated into the curriculum? Typically, for most PLOs there should be a place early in the curriculum where they are introduced, places where they are developed over time, and a point where they are assessed. A clear "curriculum map" identifying how each part of the curriculum relates to one or more PLOs is a helpful resource for assessment. Everything in the programme should relate to one or more PLOs to justify its inclusion in the curriculum.

2.4.3 – Areas of growth. The Beirut Benchmarks highlight the importance of the following areas of growth in research doctoral programmes in Christian higher education institutions: (1) comprehensive understanding of their field of study, (2) critical thinking skills, (3) theological reflection and integration skills, (4) research and writing skills, and (5) spiritual formation and vitality. Careful thought to how these areas of growth can be integrated into the curriculum and research supervision experience is important. This should also include clear codes of academic and research ethics relevant to the kind of scholarship the students are engaged in and their future vocational service. It cannot be assumed that students will just pick these things up from their supervisors. In the curriculum map, where and how are these areas of growth promoted? A clear description of this can be very useful in the assessment process.

2.4.4 - Orientation. Are new students being oriented well to the demands of doctoral studies? Doctoral education differs in significant ways from masters level education programmes. As students enter the doctoral programme, are they being oriented well to the demands of the programme, the processes and experiences they will encounter, and how to successfully complete the various elements of the programme? Are they oriented to the kinds of academic rigor they will experience and how to grow in their skills through the earlier parts of the programme to prepare them for the independent research they will carry out in the dissertation? Do they understand the time this will take, and the necessity of creating room in their schedules for the demands of the programme? How is this being carried out?

2.4.5 – Formats. Are the programme formats (face-to-face, intensive, on-line, hybrid) sufficiently supportive of student learning given the goals and demands of the programme? Every school has to determine how much of their doctoral education programme requires time together in person on campus and how much can be facilitated well through distance education formats. Some programme goals can be readily addressed in distance education experiences, others are harder to accomplish

in that format and benefit from face-to-face instruction and counsel. Is there a good match-up between the goals for student learning and the programme formats that can support the accomplishment of those goals? How does the evidence of student learning collected within the programme demonstrate that the programme format used is facilitating and not hindering the successful accomplishment of the PLOs?

2.4.6 – Learning community. Is the programme intentionally creating a learning community of scholars that will hold members accountable to, and be supportive of each other? Whatever programme format(s) are used, part of the doctoral programme experience that has long-term value is the formation of a learning community, including students and faculty together, in ways that support students in the midst of the challenges of doctoral education and helps them be accountable to one another for ethical and good quality scholarship and successfully completing the programme requirements. This is especially critical for distance education programmes, because students can experience a feeling of isolation being separated from the rest of the group. How is the programme providing opportunities and experiences that help create that kind of supportive learning community? What is done when they are together and when they are in the online environment that facilitates this kind of community interaction? How are assignments crafted to help support this as well?

2.4.7 – Global community. Is the programme connected with the wider global academic community? Are students able to engage with global academic discourse? One of the values expressed in *The Beirut Benchmarks* and in the *Best Practice Guidelines for Doctoral Programmes* (Langham, 2015) is that students should be aware of and encouraged to interact with the wider global academic community in their area of study. How are students made aware of the critical issues being researched and discussed within their fields of study internationally? How does this influence the kinds of assignments given to students, the resources they access in their work, and the kinds of research projects they take on in their dissertations?

2.4.8 – Preparation for independent research. Are students being sufficiently prepared for the independent research work of their dissertations? Having completed a masters programme does not automatically equip someone for the rigors of doctoral research and writing. What is being done within any "taught" components of the programme, or through symposiums and seminars, to equip students with the skills and strategies needed for successfully navigating the demands of the dissertation research and writing effort? It can be helpful to list out the major skill areas needed to complete the kind of dissertations done in this field of study and then identify where in the overall curriculum students are oriented and equipped in these areas. This can be done as part of a curriculum map that addresses both programme PLOs and the particular skills needed for successfully completing the dissertation.

2.4.9 – Guidance and support. Is sufficient guidance and support available for students in the dissertation phase of the programme? As students move from any required courses or seminars to dissertation work, how do faculty guide and support them through this process? Are faculty sufficiently engaged in regular communication with their students to know how they are progressing, what their needs are, and how they might mentor them well? Do students know who they can approach regarding different kinds of questions as they carry out their research and writing? Is the support and feedback given available in a timely way so as to help the student maintain their efforts and not bog down?

2.5 - OUTCOMES (SG-GETE A2.5, B2.8, B3.6)

When it comes to assessing the outcomes of a doctoral programme, there are a few key areas that need to be considered. First, to what degree have the purposes and goals of the programme been accomplished in the lives of the students? Have they mastered the intended programme learning outcomes (PLOs)? Second, to what degree are graduates able to find placement in settings where their training is being put to good use? Are they finding opportunities in teaching, leadership, and other ministry settings where their new skills are needed? Third, over time, what impact are graduates from the doctoral programme having for the sake of the church and God's kingdom? What difference are they making in the organizations in which they serve? How are those organizations now impacting their communities and the work of the gospel? Assessing these kinds of outcomes is increasingly challenging as you move from the first level, to the second level, to the third level. Newer doctoral programmes may only be able to assess the first level, and to some degree the second. As time goes on, it will be important to strive to assess the third level well, helping the school review and revise its educational programmes in light of the feedback received to increase the positive contributions and impact of their graduates.

2.5.1 - Level One: Programme Learning Outcomes. Each programme learning outcome (PLO) should be intentionally assessed at some point in the programme, allowing faculty to see the degree to which students are achieving them and getting the feedback they need to determine if the curriculum needs some revision to ensure students achieve them well. In light of the PLOs identified for the programme (see "I. Purpose and Desired Programme Learning Outcomes" above), what assessment is being carried out to determine if students are sufficiently achieving these PLOs? These need to be objective assessment processes wherever possible. Traditionally, PLOs are often assessed through such things as:

- Key Assignments: These can be assignments in courses or as part of doctoral seminars, and/or specific aspects of the dissertation work prior to the final defense that are designed to have the student demonstrate their accomplishment of the particular PLO that is the focus of that assignment. For example: a Latin translation exercise, an analysis paper of a theologian's argument, teaching assessments gathered after the student taught an undergraduate or masters class, a literature review paper foundational to the dissertation effort. These allow the student to demonstrate the identified PLOs that are either foundational to their research efforts, or important for the kind of work they will be doing following graduation (e.g., teaching, educational leadership, writing).

- Capstone Course Projects: Some programmes use a "capstone course" approach, providing a focused time of study and assessment after some initial training and just before the student undertakes the key aspects of their dissertation work. In many ways this can be like the "Key Assignments" approach described above, but organized into a course or seminar that the student must successfully complete before they can move on with their research project.

- Comprehensive Exams: Where there are particular bodies of knowledge that the student is expected to master, after a period of time in guided study (e.g., individual, seminars, courses), a written exam can be crafted and given to determine the degree to which the student understands and can critically evaluate the material studied. When crafting an exam of this kind, decisions must be made regarding both the breadth of what is to be tested and the depth to which the student is expected to respond in terms of analysis and critique. Students need to be given guidance regarding what the exam is assessing, and the opportunity to prepare well for it.

- Dissertation: Typically, the dissertation evaluation and defense is one of the major ways that at least some of the PLOs of a research doctoral programme are assessed. Here students demonstrate their ability to design, carry out, and defend an original research effort, contributing to the knowledge of their academic discipline. This is a "final assessment" of some of the important PLOs of the programme, but the dissertation may not be the first time that students are assessed on some of these items (see the three other options described above), and it is not the best way to assess some other items (e.g., teaching, spiritual formation). A "rubric" for dissertation assessment can be useful to develop and use, allowing faculty to see patterns of strengths and struggles in their students' dissertation work. In turn, this feedback can help in revising how students are prepared for and supervised during their dissertation work.

Of these options, which ones are best suited for evaluating student achievement for each learning outcome in your programme? Which ones should take place before the dissertation is well underway, and which ones fit well within the final dissertation assessment and defense? How are the results of these assessment methods collected and periodically reviewed to help faculty determine if any curricular or pedagogical changes are needed in the programme? In light of what is revealed from the PLO assessment efforts, how well are students achieving the identified PLOs of the programme? How is this information being used to strengthen the programme?

2.5.2 - Level Two: Vocational Pursuits of Graduates.
Doctoral programmes are developed to address particular needs of the church and of theological education in a particular identified region. One aspect of assessment is to observe where graduates go and what they actually end up doing with their education in their vocational roles. For example, if a programme is designed to equip graduates for teaching in theological schools, but none of the graduates pursues these opportunities, or if many pursue them but are not hired, this calls into question whether the purposes of the programme are being accomplished. There may be a number of ways that graduates can use their advanced education in teaching and leadership, and not everyone will end up in the same kinds of roles. But if the great majority of graduates do not end up pursuing the intended goals of the programme, it may be that the purpose of the programme should be reconsidered.

Part of assessing a doctoral programme over time involves tracking where your graduates go after completing the programme and what they end up doing, looking for patterns in how they are using or not using their training in light of the purposes of the programme. Creating and maintaining an alumni database with this information would be most helpful. An assessment report should provide data on the graduates of the programme and how their service since graduation relates to the purposes and goals of the programme.

B.5.3 - Level Three: Contribution and Impact of Doctoral Programme Graduates.
Long term, it is not enough to say that your graduates have achieved the intended PLOs and have secured the kinds of vocational roles intended for the programme. It is important to look for evidence of how these graduates are serving in their roles and the impact they are having in the institutions they serve in, helping their institutions accomplish their purposes and goals.

What feedback do you receive, or what evidence can you see of the effectiveness of your graduates in the roles they serve in after graduation? Are they viewed as well-prepared for these roles that they serve in? Are they effective in how they carry them out? What kind of impact are they having where they serve? This kind of assessment

is not easy to do when a programme is fairly young, but as time goes by these kinds of questions need to be asked and answered to help your school know whether the doctoral programme is having the intended impact and whether it is worth continuing to invest in. Intentional collection of feedback both from the graduates, and from those who employ them can help with this important assessment aspect. Surveys of alumni regarding the range of their involvements, the responsibilities they have taken on, and the fruit of their investments can be helpful. Inviting employers to offer their confidential perspectives as well can help corroborate what you hear from the alumni. Seeing good fruit at this level can be deeply rewarding and satisfying, helping to maintain institutional and faculty commitment in the face of programme challenges.

3 - Feedback, monitoring and programme development

Assessment of doctoral programmes is meant to be formative in nature. That is, the data collected and the review carried out should be used by the school as a feedback loop to help them continue to develop and strengthen the programme. A final part of the assessment report should reflect on the following questions:

- What factors have helped, limited, or influenced the development of the programme to date? An awareness of these influences can help in developing more realistic plans for programme development in light of what has been learned in the assessment effort.

- What are the areas for needed development over the next few years? In light of what you learned from the assessment process, what stands out to your leaders as important areas to address in the near future.

- What needs to be done to address these areas? How will weaknesses be addressed, and strengths built upon? Identifying the issues is the first step, but it is important to consider practical ways to address these areas. You may not have all of the answers right now, but what stands out as the most likely and reasonable things to pursue?

- What additional resources will be needed to develop or sustain programme quality? How will this be funded? Changes generally require some investment of time and money. What will it take in terms of personnel and funding to pursue the things identified above. Again, you may not have the full plan put together, but in general, what will this require, and how do you believe this can be funded?

These aspects are important to think through and put into writing to help you discern if the issues are indeed ones you can address and begin to count the cost (see **SG-GETE B2.8 and A2.5**).

4 - Conclusion and further resources

The goal is that these guidelines be useful to the accreditation groups that together make up ICETE in their assessment of doctoral programmes in their member schools. Where the accreditation, or other evaluation of doctoral programmes by an accreditation group is important to your member schools, we encourage you to use or adapt these guidelines to help you in your assessment efforts. These guidelines were developed by the Doctoral Initiative Steering Committee (DISC) with input from both school leaders and accreditation officers from the various regional accreditation groups where schools are offering research doctoral programmes. As such, this is our best consensus at this time regarding what aspects of research doctoral programmes need assessment and some ways these assessments might

be carried out. As these guidelines are used, we invite feedback regarding ways to improve them so they can be of more benefit to the school leaders and groups that use them.

Further resources can be found on the ICETE website:

(1) Tips for carrying out assessment of your doctoral programme in an ongoing fashion.
(2) Beirut Benchmarks for research doctoral programs and some assessment questions to ask in light of these benchmarks.
(3) A final self-assessment report model based on the issues discussed in the preceding pages.

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