



**University of Debrecen**

**Quality assurance system**  
**Section of Literary and Cultural Studies**  
**Doctoral School of Linguistics, Literary and Cultural**  
**Studies**

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## The Section's mission statement

The primary mission of the Section of Literary and Cultural Studies is to, through a training programme as well as support and assistance, prepare students with an interest in literary and cultural studies for pursuing independent academic research, equipping them with the skills and knowledges necessary for meeting the requirements of obtaining of a PhD degree alongside with all that is necessary to become intellectuals capable of independent and critical thinking as well as high-level verbal and visual literacy. In the course of putting together the curriculum and advising our students, the Section strives to help doctoral students acquire the knowledges, skills and attitudes listed in the description of Level 8 of MKKR (Hungarian Educational Framework System). The idea is that, having obtained their degrees, our students are capable not only of pursuing independent research but also of building an academic career, innovative thinking and leadership. An important part of this objective is to encourage and aid our students' institutional and academic socialisation. By creating the institutional and personal conditions for internationally competitive research, as well as through its talent management and the encouragement of innovation, the Section thus contributes to the development not only of the region but also of territories with Hungarian populations across the border.

## Institutional frameworks and mechanisms of quality assurance

### *1. Quality assurance frameworks and procedures of the University of Debrecen*

The quality assurance system of the University of Debrecen is based on organisational procedures of self-evaluation which, in the course of implementing the quality assurance policies, take into consideration the following guidelines: the directions of the Acts of Higher Education in Hungary currently in force; the guidelines of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB) as formulated in Resolution 2019/6/VIII/1; international recommendations regarding quality assurance, in particular the European standards for quality assurance in higher education, the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG) adopted in 2015. The management of the University is fully committed to operating and improving a quality assurance system, playing an active role in both, with a view to providing its students with upgradable knowledges and skills of the highest quality, usable in the domestic and international labour market. The quality assurance system of the University – in accordance with the objectives defined in its Deed of Foundation – involves the university as a whole, serving the realisation of the objectives specified in the university's quality policy, with a primary focus on satisfying the needs of direct and indirect partners and stakeholders, in particular the needs of our students (irrespective of the kind of training they are enrolled in and of the type of financial scheme under the auspices of which they are pursuing their studies), the employers, our clients and customers (whether in the field of research or of other services), and the international and Hungarian professional and academic communities. The documentation scheme of the quality assurance system is prepared by the quality assurance officer (director) of the University, evaluated by the Quality Development Committee of the University Senate, and accepted by the Senate. Besides the development of the quality assurance system of the doctoral schools, the tasks of the quality assurance officer (director) include ensuring that these systems are all aligned with the guidelines of MAB.

*2. Internal quality assurance policies and procedures of the doctoral section.* Within the University of Debrecen, all doctoral schools and sections implement a coherent and unified quality assurance system, conforming to the principles on which this system is based. The supervision of the quality assurance system is the duty of the school/section director. The

quality assurance (MICS) representative of the section is elected by the Section Council (SC), receiving their mandate from the Section Director. All doctoral schools and sections have their quality assurance system approved by the University's quality assurance officer, who invites the quality assurance representatives of doctoral schools and sections on a regular – at least yearly – basis to the sessions of the extended Quality Assurance Council to discuss the best practices with a view to improving the quality assurance systems of doctoral schools and sections. Quality assurance documentation is prepared by the section's quality assurance representative, approved by the section director and accepted by the Section Council. When developing their quality assurance system, doctoral schools and sections must take into consideration the opinion of all stakeholders. Therefore, every doctoral school/section conducts satisfaction surveys among its students. As a starting point for these surveys, the schools/sections use the sample questionnaires provided by the university's quality assurance officer, who – with their associates – also provides the software (EvaSys) where these surveys can be safely conducted.

The University Council for Doctoral and Habilitation Affairs (EDHT) redefines its priorities regarding the operation of the quality assurance system of doctoral schools/sections regularly. Setting quality targets in the first session of each year, the Council evaluates the performance of doctoral schools/sections in the last session of each year. The quality targets and indicators are sent by the Council to the schools and sections. The section's quality targets and indicators are specified by the section council; always bearing in mind the recommendations of the EDHT, the section council is authorised to name targets and indicators beyond those specified by the EDHT. The documents are sent for approval to the doctoral council of the relevant disciplinary area (in our case, the Doctoral Council of Arts and Humanities). At the end of each year, the Section Council – with the assistance of the quality assurance representative – collects and evaluates data concerning indicators and the realization of quality assurance goals, and send them on to the Doctoral Council of Arts and Humanities. The Doctoral Council of Arts and Humanities gathers the data from all the subordinate schools in a summary document, sending it on to the University Council for Doctoral and Habilitation Affairs for evaluation and approval. The Section of Literary and Cultural Studies observes the principles of quality assurance implemented in the University of Debrecen.

- *The principle of academic control and quality.* Throughout the process of doctoral training and in its assessment procedures, the control of the international and Hungarian academic community is fully implemented.
- *The principle of publicness.* The main stages of the quality assurance system are fully accessible and visible for the academic and professional community; in other words, the principle of publicness is to be implemented through the entire process of the doctoral training and its assessment procedures. All events leading up to the conferment of the doctoral degree (including the dates of the complex examination, preliminary defence, public defence) are advertised on the home page of the doctoral school/section. In addition, the dissertations and thesis booklets submitted to public defence, as well as the reviewers' evaluations, are accessible in the DEA system. The date of public defences is made available on the page of the Hungarian Doctoral Council, which also displays all the successfully defended dissertations as well as thesis booklets.
- *The principle academic integrity.* In the course of the implementation of the quality assurance system, it is imperative to observe the fundamental principles of ethical research and publication. Should issues concerning academic integrity arise, they are handled by the doctoral section in accordance with the Ethical Codex of the University of Debrecen ([Quality Assurance Manual](#)). The Ethical Codex has been drawn up by the Senate of the University in full accordance with the ethical norms of the international academic community as well as with the relevant regulations of the Committee of

Academic Ethics and Integrity of the Hungarian Academy of Arts and Sciences (MTA). As stipulated in the Ethical Codex, the University has set up an Integrity Committee (Etikai Bizottság, EB) comprising instructors, researchers and students as voting members, authorized to implement integrity policies and initiate adequate procedures upon reports of breaches of integrity. The Section of Literary and Cultural Studies has also delegated representatives to the Integrity Committee: one instructor, one Hungarian and one international doctoral student. The Integrity Committee regularly reviews its policies and procedures, initiating their amendment by the Senate if necessary. Although, in general, the launching of procedures investigating alleged cases of breach is restricted by objective and subjective deadlines, some procedures can be initiated without regard to these restrictions – most importantly, cases of plagiarism, regarded as the gravest type of violating academic integrity. The launching of formal procedures may be requested by all citizens of the University as well as by individuals who, although having no formal employment relationship with the University, are affected by the alleged ethical breach. The Section is at pains to create an environment in which breaches of integrity do not occur, while, in its own sphere, it implements all the required mechanisms. As part of the submission process, all submitted dissertations undergo plagiarism check; based on its results, the designated reviewers formulate their recommendations regarding the continuation of the procedure. So far, no suspicions of breaches of academic integrity have arisen in our doctoral section (doctoral school until September 2025), just as the plagiarism check has never resulted in the termination of the defence process. Thus, the policies of the Section regarding academic integrity might be deemed successful. On the homepage of the Programme of English and North American Literary and Cultural Studies within the doctoral section, an English-language document expounds the nature of academic dishonesty in detail.

- *The principle of feedback.* The work of the doctoral section is predicated on the principle that all stakeholders, including students, instructors and the members of various bodies within the section, receive continual feedback regarding the quality of their performance, while, in turn, all of them have the opportunity to provide feedback about their experiences.
- *The principle of protecting intellectual property.* The doctoral training in the section fully conforms to legislation (in Hungary and in the EU) regarding the protection of intellectual property.
- *The principle of personal responsibility.* In the doctoral training, all agencies have their responsibilities and remits clearly defined.
- *The principle of documenting processes.* Each assessment procedure and checkpoint of the doctoral training, the submission of the dissertation and the obtaining of the degree is duly documented. On the other hand, the doctoral section strives to avoid imposing undue administrative burdens on instructors and researchers participating in assessment procedures.

#### Quality assurance in the doctoral section: policies and mechanisms

The Section formulates its own quality assurance policy in accordance with the Development Strategy of the University of Debrecen. The main objective of the Section is to retain its position as one of the leading centres of excellence of the region in the field of literary and cultural studies. It is with this objective in mind that the section continues to pursue its internationally acknowledged research and teaching activities.

The Section has formed its own quality assurance committee, comprising the Section's quality assurance representative (who is also the secretary of the Section and the Doctoral School) and one instructor from each of the doctoral programmes (preferably with no current supervising tasks, since a substantial part of the satisfaction questionnaire is concerned with evaluating the work of the supervisors). The quality targets and indicators of the section are defined on an annual or biannual basis by the section director in collaboration with the section's Quality Assurance Committee, in accordance with the criteria established in the Development Strategy of the University of Debrecen; the targets and indicators are approved by the Section Council. In operating its mechanisms, the Section implements the principle of the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act/Adjust) cycle, that is, we identify problems and plan our activities accordingly, we implement solutions to meet our goals, we evaluate the data gathered from the “do” phase, and, on the basis of this evaluation, we adjust or correct our procedures and policies.

The quality assurance policy of the Section is governed by the determination to maintain and improve the academic and professional standard of its doctoral training, thereby ensuring the continuing, and, if possible, increasing competitiveness of the degrees obtained here in the labour market. The structure of the doctoral training is reviewed regularly (every two or three years) by the Section Council, which then proceeds to define the major areas for improvement and the specific tasks this improvement entails. Any adjustment of our training programme and structure is made in accordance with recent developments in the academic fields pertinent to our training; this principle manifests itself in the list and contents of the subjects taught as well as in quality assurance measures (for instance, the contribution of the designated external reviewers and experts). Our instructors, publishing their results in prestigious Hungarian and international venues, have a sound knowledge of the changing trends in their respective fields of expertise. Course and curriculum development in the BA and MA programmes also receives impetus from adjustments of the doctoral training. The external researchers and instructors invited by the programmes within the Section as guest lecturers are available for consultation to our students. Additionally, the section encourages and supports the academic socialisation of our students through participation in international conferences. Both programmes of the section – within their means – subsidise conference participation.

With regard to the academic research of our students, the academic quality assurance system of the Section is built on strict principles that are implemented with the greatest consistency, from admission into the Section through to the public defence of the completed dissertation. These principles and criteria are made fully available on the online platforms of the Section. The criteria for admission to the section are those stipulated in the University's Rules and Regulations of the Doctoral Training: foreign language proficiency, an MA degree (at least “Good”) or a compatible degree obtained in a field that is related to the research and training carried out in the Section, a well thought-out research plan that is feasible in the given time-frame and promises to yield adequate results. (The admission requirements for any given academic year are available at a [Felvételi tájékoztató | Bölcsészettudományi Doktor Tanács.](#)) Thesis supervisors in our Section have to meet the requirements stipulated in the University's Rules and Regulations of the Doctoral Training. It is the duty of supervisors to support and assist the development of the students in their care, to monitor and guide their research, and to promote their academic socialization and networking. The preparation and scheduling of the candidate's research hypothesis are responsibility of the candidate and their supervisor, although any member of the section might be involved in a consultant role.

Essays and articles written independently by doctoral students have full priority throughout the training: it is through the research and writing process that students develop their written skills of analysis, interpretation and expression to the level required for obtaining their degree, as well as other skills and abilities that are indispensable for joining the academic community and its ongoing dialogue. Writing essays that are developed into chapters also facilitates the completion

of the dissertation. Our section has installed several good practices in its efforts to help the process of writing; in the Programme of English and North American Literary and Cultural Studies, for instance, it is compulsory for students to take “Chapter writing” in each of the terms following the complex exam halfway through the training. The section has found many ways of promoting our students’ academic socialisation and the acquisition of the required abilities and knowledges: these ways include workshop seminars where students can share their work in progress and discuss their difficulties and experiences with their peers, the *Alföld* studió (for Hungarian students, affiliated with the prestigious journal of literary and cultural studies published in Debrecen known for its successes in talent management), the Faculty journal *Szkhólion*, written and partly edited by students, the annual Symposium of Young Researchers in Literary and Cultural Studies (in Hungarian), regular conferences in English where students can present their work, as well as the course in academic self-efficacy (offered in English in the Programme of English and North American Literary and Cultural Studies).

As part of the quality assurance system, students are expected to submit a written report about their progress (the form for these reports is available on the homepage of the Section). Before submitting the report, they have to have the data therein approved by their supervisor, who also evaluates the performance of the student over the given period. Research credits are endorsed by the supervisor in the electronic study system (Neptun). The student’s work is endorsed at the end of each academic year (in the spring term) by the section director and the school director on the basis of these written reports; if necessary, the Section Council may demand further information about the student’s progress. The annual reports are finalised by the student and their supervisor and approved by the Section Council.

The quality of the student’s research and of the dissertation is further guaranteed by the checkpoints or milestones of the doctoral training. These checkpoints and their assessment procedures are described in detail both in the Curriculum and the Section’s Rules and Regulations. Every element of these checkpoints and their attendant procedures is made fully visible and public by the Section. The first such checkpoint is the topic presentation at the end of the first academic year; this is followed by the complex examination at the end of the second academic year and the subsequent chapter defences. Most checkpoints after the topic presentation involve external experts. (For a detailed description of these checkpoints and their attendant procedures, see the Rules and Regulations of the Section).

One major element of quality assurance is the obligation for students to produce an acceptable number of academic publications of adequate quality before the complex examination, and then before the defence of the dissertation. Dissertations can be submitted for defence only if the minimum requirements concerning publications are fulfilled; it should be noted, however, that meeting the minimum requirements is not sufficient in itself to ensure the submission of the dissertation. The academic performance of the candidate (including the quality of their publications) is evaluated by the Section Council; this body makes the decision concerning the submission of the dissertation. (For the minimum publication requirements, see the Rules and Regulations of Doctoral Training in the Faculty of Humanities, the Rules and Regulations of the Section of Literary and Cultural Studies, and the page dedicated to the Publication Policies of the Section (<https://deidi.unideb.hu/en/publication-policies-dslcs>)).

Before the finalisation of the dissertation, it has to be submitted for a preliminary defence featuring experts whose number and qualifications comply with the relevant requirements of the University’s Rules and Regulations of Doctoral Training and the Rules and Regulations of Doctoral Training in the Faculty of Humanities. An essential part of the preparations for the preliminary defence is the plagiarism check. The minutes of the preliminary defence are recorded by the member of the board who serves as the board’s secretary. On the basis of the preliminary defence, the candidate finalises the dissertation. Before submitting the dissertation for the public defence, the candidate has to upload all their publications into the publication

database of the University of Debrecen University and National Library; the candidate's publication list is compiled by the Library, to be submitted alongside with the dissertation by the candidate to the Doctoral Council of Arts and Humanities. Although the process of defending the dissertation and obtaining a degree is co-ordinated by the Doctoral Council of Arts and Humanities, links to the protocol of the preliminary and public defence as well as all relevant information (including the formal and academic criteria regarding the dissertation, submission procedure, the thesis booklet) are available on the Section's homepage.

As part of its quality assurance policies, the Section Council, receiving feedback from all stakeholders, regularly reviews the situation of its training programme; consequently, the Section Council is in a position to assess the quality of the doctoral training. The Section maintains professional relations with a number of educational institutions both in Hungary and abroad; external experts, reviewers and lecturers also contribute to the feedback concerning the quality and efficacy of the training.

The Section is committed to monitoring the opinion of the students concerning the quality of the training, thesis supervision and the general administration of the Section. To cater for the needs of our international students (most incumbents of the Stipendium Hungaricum stipend), the Section has modified and extended the satisfaction survey questionnaires supplied by the University. Surveys, conducted via the EvaSys software, are evaluated by the two instructor members of the Section's Quality Assurance Committee (the Section's quality assurance representative is left out of this stage in the process as there is considerable conflict of interests: a fairly large portion of the questionnaire is concerned with the evaluation of the section secretary's work). Analysing the responses, the two committee members formulate their suggestions and submit them to the section director. These suggestions, along with other relevant takeaways of the survey, are discussed by the Section Council. Corrective measure, if deemed necessary, are implemented after consulting the instructors and other stakeholders.

In the doctoral training, given low student numbers, the implementation of certain quality assurance procedures routinely used in undergraduate training is beset with difficulties. In particular, the anonymity of course evaluation by students cannot be guaranteed. In cases where student numbers are higher (as in the Presentation Skills course in the Doctoral Programme of English and North American Literary and Cultural Studies), course evaluation is conducted by the instructors themselves, always taking into consideration the particular features of the course (the starting point is the questionnaire in Appendix 1). Our students are also encouraged to express their opinions about the courses through various other channels – through the student representative in the Doctoral Council as well as in student forums.

Student feedback may also reach the Doctoral Council through the elected student representative in the Council. The student representative may raise issues that are left out of satisfaction surveys. The student representative is elected by the doctoral students without any interference by the Doctoral Council.

An important source of feedback relevant to quality assurance is provided by the opinion of our ex-students, whether they have completed the training with a degree or not. Although career tracking and other ways of maintaining continuous contacts with our ex-students are beyond the human resources of the Section, in 2025, we are introducing an exit questionnaire, to be filled by those of our students who abandon the training without obtaining a degree (see Appendix 2).



## Appendix one

### Sample course evaluation form

1. How well-prepared is(are) the instructor(s)?
2. How much did the instructor(s) help the process of learning by providing clear explanations, useful visual aids, handouts, etc.?
3. Did the course material match what was announced in the syllabus?
4. Was the evaluation objective and fair?
5. To what extent was the course useful for your general academic progress?
6. To what extent was the course relevant for your research topic and the dissertation.in-progress?
7. What could the instructor do to make the course more useful for the particular research topics of students?
8. Any other comment.

Exit questionnaire of the doctoral section

**What made you first consider the possibility of terminating the doctoral training without completing your dissertation? (you may tick more than one category)**

financial reasons

I was not given sufficient support

conflicts with my instructors

dissatisfaction with the running of the doctoral school

dissatisfaction with my supervisor

I wasn't making sufficient progress

I realized that the academic world is not for me

I felt that my work wasn't appreciated

personal/family/health reasons

Other:

**What was the most important impulse behind your decision to depart?**

**Was there anything the doctoral school could have done to make you stay?**

**Which aspects of your doctoral studies did you like best?**

**Which were the least agreeable aspects of your experiences in the doctoral school?**

**How would you assess the work of the instructors and administrators of the doctoral school/programme?**

Poor

1

2

3

4

5

Excellent

**How would you rate the work of your supervisor?**

Poor

1

2

3

4

5

Excellent

**Rate the extent of your general wellbeing during the time of your doctoral studies**

I felt really bad

1

2

3

4

5

I enjoyed it very much

**How would you describe your relationship with your instructors?**

Very bad

1

2

3

4

5

Very good

**Rate the competitiveness of your doctoral stipend (in relation to your current job)**

It is not competitive at all

1

2

3

4

5

It is fully competitive

**Rate your satisfaction with the academic/personal support you received during your doctoral studies.**

I received no support

1

2

3

4

5

I was given all possible support

**If circumstances change, would you consider resuming your doctoral research?**

**If yes, what do you think should change for you to rejoin the doctoral school/programme?**

**Do you have any suggestions as to what should change so that other students do not abandon their postgraduate studies?**