

PhD Fast Track

Técnico Doctoral School

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Handbook

1. What is the PhD Fast Track?

The PhD Fast Track is an optional route path to top-performing Bachelor and MSc students who have the ambition to pursue the PhD studies at Técnico. It has been launched by the Técnico Doctoral School in the academic year of 2024/25.

In the PhD Fast Track, the development of the MSc thesis is already aligned with the PhD research topic. From the second year of the MSc program, a PhD Fast Track student will be assigned a scientific supervisor who will guide his/her research work throughout both the MSc and PhD programs, advancing the submission of the PhD thesis.

During the MSc program, PhD Fast Track students are allowed to take selected courses from the PhD curriculum. From an early stage, research developments in the PhD Fast Track program are focused on the authorship of scientific publications. This may also provide significant advantages to students when applying for financial support during the PhD.

The PhD Fast Track is designed for a full-time 5-year period (10 semesters) shortening the overall traditional duration to complete a MSc + PhD by a year.

2. How does it work?

Students in the PhD Fast Track program are enrolled in an MSc program and accepted in a PhD program at Técnico. This allows students to initiate scientifically supervised research during the MSc, working towards their doctoral degree. Involvement in scientific projects at an early stage introduces students to Técnico's research ecosystem, increasing the likelihood of performing innovative research and publishing scientific results, which improves their chances of receiving financial support from national and international scientific agencies.

During the first phase of the PhD Fast Track program, students develop an MSc thesis that is aligned with the topic of their PhD research. During this period, students may take PhD-level courses, if they are considered relevant to their work plan. The MSc thesis developed by a PhD Fast Track student differs from a traditional MSc thesis. It may include a seed project and/or original exploratory results for the PhD research, and should outline a future work plan aimed at the PhD thesis. If not before, upon completing the MSc program and defending their master's thesis, PhD Fast Track students are immediately enrolled in the PhD program. Then, they complete the curricular requirements of the PhD program and continue with their PhD research plan, working towards the submission of a doctoral thesis.

3. Who and how to apply?

A prospective student aiming to enroll in the PhD Fast Track program must express this intention when applying for an MSc program at Técnico. Students already enrolled in the first year of an MSc program at Técnico can also apply for the PhD Fast Track.

To apply for the PhD Fast Track, students must submit:

- a) An application form for the PhD Fast Track;
- b) A short Curriculum Vitae;
- c) A copy of the Bachelor's grade transcript with final score (if available);
- d) Two recommendation letters, preferably from former Bachelor's teachers;
- e) A motivation letter.

Although not mandatory, it is recommended to include a reference letter from a Técnico professor/researcher endorsing the application as a prospective scientific supervisor for both the MSc and PhD work.

When applying for the PhD Fast Track, students must specify both the MSc and the PhD programs at Técnico they intend to pursue.

The selection of students to the PhD Fast Track is done by both MSc and PhD coordinators. Students must have an "A-level" Bachelor's diploma (ECTS grading) or a final Bachelor's classification equal or higher than 17/20 (or equivalent) to be accepted at the PhD Fast Track.

The acceptance of the student into the PhD Fast Track requires positive advice from the coordinators of both the MSc and PhD programs involved, officially endorsed by the Scientific Council.

Being accepted into the PhD Fast Track grants MSc students immediate acceptance, not enrollment, in the PhD program.

4. Schedule of the PhD Fast Track

The PhD Fast Track is designed for a full-time, 5-year period (10 semesters) combining an MSc and a PhD program. This pathway can be divided into three distinct stages, with a typical schedule outlined in Figure 1 ("S" stands for semester):

S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
MSc courses	MSc courses	MSc with PhD courses	MSc research (oriented towards the PhD) + MSc thesis defense	PhD research + PhD courses			PhD thesis defense		

Figure 1: Typical schedule of a PhD Fast Track (Orange: first stage; Green: intermediate stage; Blue: final stage).

First stage:

In the first year of the PhD Fast Track, students are enrolled and follow the regular MSc curriculum. Typically, in this first year, it is not yet possible to take PhD-level courses, depending on the MSc program.

In this initial stage, students should identify a scientific supervisor, or a scientific supervisory team, who will assist in developing the work plan and guide the student's research throughout both the MSc and PhD programs, leading to the submission of the PhD thesis. The composition of the scientific supervisory team must comply with Técnico's regulations.

Intermediate stage:

The intermediate stage is expected to last one year. During this stage, PhD Fast Track students complete the MSc curricular requirements, develop, and defend an MSc thesis. Students may take selected courses from the PhD curricular plan using elective courses from the MSc curriculum. The selection of PhD curricular courses should consider their relevance to the development of the MSc + PhD work plan and be approved by the student's scientific supervisor. Students will be exempt from taking these courses in the respective PhD curricular plan.

The intermediate stage concludes with the submission and defense of the MSc thesis. This defense can be used to update the student's PhD Thesis Advisory Committee on the research progress and the proposed PhD thesis work plan.

As a general recommendation, it is expected that from an early stage, the research conducted in the PhD Fast Track program is oriented towards the authorship of scientific publications. This can significantly benefit students when applying for financial support during the PhD.

Final Stage:

In the final stage of the PhD Fast Track program, students are enrolled in the PhD program. During this time, they complete the remaining courses required for the PhD, advance their research towards the PhD thesis, and eventually submit and defend their PhD thesis in front of a jury.

From the first year, each PhD student is assigned a PhD Thesis Advisory Committee. According with PhD regulations, a public presentation on the research progress and proposed PhD thesis work plan must be made to the committee within the first 18 months of the program. However, PhD Fast Track students may be exempt from this presentation by the PhD coordinator if the MSc jury provided a positive evaluation of the research conducted thus far and the proposed future work towards the PhD, as outlined in the Annex of the MSc thesis.

This final stage typically lasts from two and a half to three years, making the overall duration of the PhD Fast Track to full-time 5-year period (10 semesters) shortening the overall traditional duration to complete a MSc + PhD by a year.

PhD students must be enrolled in the PhD program for a minimum of two years, in accordance with Técnico's regulations.

5. MSc thesis and defense

The development of the MSc thesis in the PhD Fast Track is oriented towards the topic of the PhD research. Beyond a traditional MSc thesis, it may include:

- a) description of a seed project serving as the scientific foundation for the development of the PhD;
- b) presentation of original results, even if exploratory or preliminary in nature, that are relevant to the development of the PhD research, potentially in the form of a list of authored or co-authored publications.

The MSc thesis in the PhD Fast Track must include an Annex containing Future Work outlining the expected PhD thesis work plan, suitable for consideration by the PhD Thesis Advisory Committee.

The MSc thesis should be defended in front of a jury according to Técnico's regulations. The composition of the MSc jury must be agreed upon by the scientific supervisor(s) involved in the PhD Fast Track.

The MSc jury prepares a report with the evaluation of the research conducted by the PhD Fast Track student so far and the proposed future work towards the PhD as outlined in the Annex of the MSc thesis. It is advisable that the MSc jury invites for this purpose the student's scientific supervisors. This report is submitted to the PhD Coordinator which will decide whether the regular public presentation to the PhD Thesis Advisory Committee, in accordance with PhD regulations, is needed.

6. Tuition fees

PhD Fast Track students pay the tuition fee correspondent to the program they are enrolled. They have the option to enroll in the PhD program after completing the first year of the MSc program, allowing them to be enrolled in both programs simultaneously.

According to Portuguese law, if a student is simultaneously enrolled in both an MSc and a PhD program, they are required to pay tuition fees for each program.

Being enrolled in a PhD program, students can have access to a PhD scholarship from the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia which cover their tuition fees upon submission of the annual working report. Additionally, PhD students have the opportunity to be hired as Teaching Assistants at Técnico and be eligible for the "Prémio Brito Camacho", which provides financial support covering the PhD tuition fees.

7. When to apply?

The application to the PhD Fast Track will be announced every year simultaneously with the call for provisional applications to MSc programs at Técnico (typically in February and in June). However, the application to the PhD Fast Track remains open from February until the first week of September. Students enrolled in the first year of an MSc program at Técnico must submit their application for the PhD Fast Track in the same period (from February until the first week of September).

The MSc and PhD coordinators will announce the selected PhD Fast Track students promptly after evaluating their applications. Selected PhD Fast Track students receive the official confirmation of

acceptance in the MSc and PhD programs they applied for. During the first week of September, PhD Fast Track students must confirm their enrollment in the MSc program.

**The application is submitted online through the website of the Técnico Doctoral School:
doctoralschool.tecnico.ulisboa.pt**

Questions, doubts, don't hesitate to contact doctoralschool@tecnico.ulisboa.pt