Hacettepe University Graduate School Of Health Sciences (HU-GSHS) has been a member of Organisation of PhD in Biomedicine and Health Sciences European System, ORPHEUS since 2008. During past ten years all the responsibilities and requirements of the membership have been fullfilled and HU-GSHS are presented in some of the annual ORPHEUS meetings.

ORPHEUS aims to disseminate best practices and basic standarts in PhD education thus to increase the standards of proficiencies acquired by PhD graduates and thesis projects (1). The institutes documenting that their programs are in line with the ORPHEUS standards are awarded by ORPHEUS label.


Prof. Zdravko Lackovic and Prof. Seppo Meri was appointed to evaluate the HU-GSHS Self Evaluation Questionnaire by Chair of the Labeling Committee Prof. Micheal Mulvany. The feedback regarding the questionnaire was recieved in April 2017.

Self Evaluation Questionnaire has two main parts: Basic Requirements and Quality Development. As it is stated by Prof. Micheal Mulvany, Chair of the Labeling Committee specifically for HU-GHS and in other talks in various meetings basic requirements include the issues that should be met to obtain best practices in PhD education.

As a result of the first evaluation of our responses to ‘Self Evaluation Questionnaire’, we are informed that the following three topics should be revisited.

1. Too much emphasis on theoretical courses
2. Low number of publications originated from research projects
3. Objective assesment of PhD thesis, i.e. supervisors role and voting in thesis defence.

In the meeting with Prof. Micheal Mulvany, in May 2017, it is agreed that the evaluators perform an in-site visit to HU-GSHS. In addition Richard Harris, Chair of the Executive Board of ORPHEUS announced HU-GSHS as eligable for labeling in the annual meeting of ORPHEUS in Lithuania.

The evaluators, members of the ORPHEUS Labeling Committee visited HU-GSHS at 5-7 December 2017. (http://www.saglikbilimleri.hacettepe.edu.tr/en/menu/orpheus_labelling_process-162)

In the first session of the visiting program which took place with the wide participation of PhD candidates, active supervisors of the programs, program coordinators, chairs of the departments, deans of the faculties, Rector and vice Rectors of Hacettepe University, we tried to express the research
infrastructure getting wider and stronger provided to HU-GSHS and PhD programs and the credit given to graduate education since the establishment of the University and explain to our visitors that our University pioneers graduate education in health sciences in Turkey as it does in many fields.

The members of the labeling committee independently met with the program coordinators, active supervisors and PhD candidates in separate sessions. Afterwards they had a evaluation meeting with HU-GSHS leadership and prepared their final report.

(http://fs.hacettepe.edu.tr/saglikbilimleri/dosyalar/ingilizce_web/Menüler/Hacettepe%20PhD%20Programme%20evaluation%20211217.pdf)

They summarised the visit as “very informative, we were met with a warm reception and all discussions were held under a mutually respective, open and transparent fashion”. They also expressed the pioneering position and tradition of the Hacettepe University can be reflected to PhD education without difficulty.

The final report received after the visit was emphasising the similar topics of the first evaluation.

In the light of the final report and conversations with the members of the labeling committee two General Board Meetings were gathered on 20th December, 2017 and 10th January 2018 to make the necessary changes in the specified topics in line with the legal regulations.

Our responses and changes in the rules and applications in the light of the final evaluation report are presented in detail below. The major three topics are given priority.

According to the final evaluation report of the ORPHEUS labeling committee;

“BR4.5. The overall length of the PhD programme is in general 4 years, but it can be extended by 1-2 years, if requested and deemed necessary. The first 3 semesters (i.e. 1.5 years or 120 study credits) are usually spent in courses. The amount of credits is determined by the Turkish Council of Higher Education. However, the total amount of theoretical training appears quite long, and the danger is that valuable research time is being consumed. According to the ORPHEUS best practices the training of transferable skills should be about 15% of the total PhD training time (30 ECTS credits).

Our recommendations are the following:

1) Participation to the courses is made more flexible, i.e. that they do not necessarily need to be started at the beginning of the PhD training but rather at times, when they are most relevant. Thereby, the research work could be started earlier.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:
By taking this recommendation into consideration, to have the student to be involved in thesis studies from the first semester on and to increase the credit of the thesis work, three new courses “Research Studies on Thesis-I, II and III” are defined.

(http://fs.hacettepe.edu.tr/saglikbilimleri/dosyalar/ingilizce_web/Menüler/ORPHEUS%20Tez%20KARAR%20ing.pdf)
The PhD candidate is obliged to code one of these courses in each of the first three semesters. Thus the student will be working on his/her thesis for the total duration of the PhD education and the direct credits related to thesis project will be 150 ECTS. In the meetings held with students and supervisors it was also advised to choose the selective courses in addition to obligatory courses (i.e. Seminars, Scientific Research Methods and Ethics which are compulsory courses in every PhD program of the HU-GSHS) on subjects that will support the thesis of the candidate.

Regarding the transferable skills, as we also showed in our presentation during the visit of the labeling committee, the figures are in line with the recommendation.

“2) If possible, the required (minimum) amount of courses could be reduced from 3 semesters to 2 semesters (60 ECTS). This is still twice the amount of that recommended by ORPHEUS (30 ECTS – 1 semester). Because of the large amount of course training we wondered, whether the ECTS calculation differs from the general way of counting the credits, but this was not the case.

3) The number and composition of PhD programmes could be revisited. There is plenty of overlap and many related programmes could be combined.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:

The programs are revisited so that “Research Studies on Thesis-I, II and III” are included in all of the PhD programs, this now enables thesis studies to start from the first semester and continue until it is defended. With this reorganization theoretical courses now make up 60 ECTS as recommended and 30 ECTS is shifted to the thesis project. Even the 60 ECTS courses includes considerable amount of transferable skills such as journal clubs, seminars, ethical issues, research planning, statistics etc. in addition to some theoretical lessons and practical work.

One of the most important points ORPHEUS raise about the programs of HU-GSHS is that duration of the theoretical courses is too long consuming the “valuable research time” which further results in low publication output from the thesis projects.

During the site visit, we tried to explain the evaluators that the general framework of the programs are determined by Turkish Council of Higher Education (YOK) so that the duration of courses is four semesters including “preparation for proficiency exam” and thesis work is four semesters and 120 ECTS. Despite this fact we as the HU-GSHS leader ship and the members of our general board all agree that the theoretical courses should be on the topics related to the thesis work of the candidate and/or the fields that will contribute to the professional development of the candidate rather than the theoretical knowledge that normally should be completed during undergraduate and/or master of science education.

As we stated above the General Board gathered on 20th December 2017, accepted three new coures (one for each of the three semesters) that aims the candidate to start studying on the thesis project as soon as he/she is involved in the PhD program (Appendix 1). A candidate completed these three courses during the first three semesters of the PhD program will have been determined the thesis
project, mastered the literature on the field, completed preliminary studies, application for ethic permission and funding if necessary and will be ready to work on thesis project right after proficiency exam. This arrangement will enable the distribution of thesis work to whole duration of PhD program which naturally end up with more extensive and quantitatively and qualitatively better PhD thesis.

Another topic in the final report is;

“BR6.2. The ORPHEUS benchmark for the PhD thesis from 4 years’ research is 3 publications in international peer-reviewed journals or the equivalent in cases of exceptionally high impact publications. Currently, at HUGS-HS for the most part this criterium is not met. This merits major attention because good quality publications should be one of the main indicators of scientific quality and output. While the ORPHEUS benchmark remains as the main aim the following minimum requirements for a PhD degree were proposed and accepted for HUGS-HS:

One published (or accepted) paper in a journal listed in PubMed or Science Citation Index (SCI) and

one published or accepted article in a relevant, peer-reviewed, respected journal, and

one submitted manuscript, which is reviewed and accepted by the assessment jury.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:

As ORPHEUS states the PhD thesis from 4 years’ research is equivalent of 3 publications in international peer-reviewed journals or the equivalent in cases of exceptionally high impact publications. Our programs are now adjusted to extend research time starting from the first semester on. So the publication requirement is also arranged accordingly. According to November 26, 2016 dated HU Graduate Education and Examination Regulation one Clarivate analytics (SCI, SCI-E, SSCI, AHCI) indexed published/accepted manuscript on thesis where the student is the first author, is a must before the thesis defense. Now this requirement is increased to three (Appendix). But under special circumstances as also suggested by ORPHEUS less than three publications can be accepted by the thesis assesment committee.

Updated terms for the PhD candidates to be admitted to the thesis defence is given in Appendix and announced at the web site. (http://fs.hacettepe.edu.tr/saglikbilimleri/dosyalar/ingilizce_web/Menüler/ORPHEUS%20Yayin%20KARAR%20ing.pdf)

Another issue mentioned in the evaluation report of ORPHEUS is;

“BR7.4. Although the current governmental regulations state that the supervisor should be a member of the Thesis Assessment Committee it is the conviction of the evaluators and of ORPHEUS that the supervisor should
“not be present at the final decision making meeting or the Thesis
Assessment Committee. In any case, the supervisor should not have voting
or comment rights.”

Response of the HU-GSHTS:
This issue is discussed and accepted with consensus in the General Board of
HU-GSHTS on 20th December 2017.
Thesis assessment committee was decided to be composed of six members
including the supervisor, but the supervisor cannot vote. At least two members
of the committee should be assigned out of the Hacettepe University.
(http://fs.hacettepe.edu.tr/saglikbilimleri/dosyalar/ingilizce_web/Menüler/O
RPHEUS%20Juri%20KARAR%20ing.pdf)6.

Besides these basic and major changes our responses to additional points are as
follows;

“BR1.4. Financial restrictions often limit research stays abroad. In principle,
stays in foreign countries are acceptable as parts of PhD education, either
as study credits or as a part of a research project. They can be counted as a
credit if they include training in transferable skills or work related to the PhD
project. If possible, a reasonable amount of funding from PhD programmes
should be available for this kind of visits.”

Response of the HU-GSHTS:
Since financial restrictions may limit duration of stays in foreign countries, it
was recommended that these stays are included in PhD program and credit is
given.

The regulations of both Turkish Council of Higher Education and our
University is so, and our applications in practice is exactly what is recomended.
There are various resources available for PhD candidates, HU Scientific
Research Project Coordination Unit (HU-BAP), Turkish Scientific and Technical
Research Institute (TUBITAK) , Turkish Council of Higher Education (YOK),
Health Institutes of Turkey (TUSEB), ERASMUS+ and private organisations
such as Fulbright, Turkish Educational Foundation (TEV) etc.

Our students are informed on these funding possibilities regularly via e-
mails, thru web site and seminars.

“BR2.2. Currently, HUGS- HS has a relatively small number of students that
go out from the academia after finishing their PhDs. However, the need for
PhDs in industry and other areas of society is increasing. Therefore,
appropriate research training, acquisition of transferable skills, critical
thinking and performing scientific work in other areas, as well, are needed.
Currently, training for industry and private sector is provided in courses
provided by the institutes of Social Sciences, Educationa Sciences,
Informatics and Science and Engineering. Thus, it is advisable that students
participate in the training for leadership, research economy, intellectual
property, project management, entrepreneurial and IPR skills. These will
allow an easy transfer also to e.g. pharmaceutical industry, medical
technology rehabilitation centers and related fields.”
Response of the HU-GSHS:
Increasing number of Universities in Turkey and related increase in need for Faculty, leads to PhD holders to be employed easily in Academy, that's why our graduates don’t seek positions in the industry too much. Despite this fact, as HU-GSHS leadership we tried to help career development and planning by monthly seminars and the wide elective course pool of the University. By taking ORPHEUS recomendations into consideration we planned “HU-GSHS Career Development Day” where a strucrted program to prepare the candidates to profesional carrera and enrich their portfolio. The participants will be certified and the first of the Carreer day will be on 22nd February 2018 then will be repeated every semester. (http://fs.hacettepe.edu.tr/saglikbilimleri/dosyalar/duyurular/BMY%20ve%20KE%20programı.pdf).

4. PhD training programme
HUGS-HS has a large number of PhD programmes, currently 71. Thus, the students have plenty to choose from. They are free to choose both the programme and available supervisor. Also, the number of courses available for acquisition of transferable skills is high and includes appropriate courses in research ethics and animal experimentation. The entrance to the courses did not appear to be a problem.

3) The number and composition of PhD programmes could be revisited. There is plenty of overlap and many related programmes could be combined.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:
It does not seem likely to decrease the number of programs due to the concept of “Fields of Associate Professorship” of YOK for the near future. But the currently present programs are required to be revisited by the departments and revised to minimize the overlap with the associated fields in addition new programs are specifically encouraged to be prepared with an interdisciplinary approach even in partnership with industry. This we propose will contribute to decrease the overlap among programs and also increase the number of MD’s in PhD programs.

5. Supervision
BR5.1. In general, PhD students had one supervisor each, but it is not uncommon that other researchers have provided help at different stages of the training and research. ORPHEUS recommends one main supervisor and if needed another one or a cosupervisor. To recognize the role of other experienced professors who helped realizing the project credit to them should be provided and they could under certain ciscumstances also be provided a supervisor status. Thus, the ot- her researchers could also gain experience in cosupervision before they become actual super- visors themselves. It is acknowledged that becoming a cosupervisor also includes responsibility in the PhD training. Therefore, acceptance of the cosupervisor should be done in harmony with the existing supervisor and the candidate and be approved of by the PhD program.”
Response of the HU-GSHS:

Every student has a principal supervisor and the conditions to be appointed as a supervisor is clear. Due to change in needs and also regulations “HU-GSHS Supervision Guideline” is updated and approved. When needed co-supervisor is appointed with the opinion and the suggestion of the principal supervisor and academic board of the program.


“BR5.2 Currently the maximum number of PhD candidates per supervisor is 12 at HUGS-HS. This appears somewhat high as according ORPHEUS “the number of PhD candidates per supervisor should be compatible with the supervisor’s cumulative workload”. In reality, however the maximum number of PhD candidates per supervisor that we encountered in the review was 5-7, and the average was reported as 1.1. In cases, where the workload for supervisors becomes excessive the appointment of an additional supervisors (or a cosupervisor) or setting up hierarchical supervision in the research group could be a solution.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:

The maximum number of graduate (MSc and PhD) students a supervisor can be responsible of is determined by YOK as 12. Due to very high numbers of graduate students registered in some of our programs compared to the number of supervisors, supervisor/student ratio is quite high. This disturbs both HU-GSHS leadership and the supervisors. This condition has been developed due to a program of YOK, called “Program to Educate Faculty” where considerable number of students is placed to the programs of HU-GSHS to be educated in the name of other Universities where there is no graduate school and/or program. Since there was no severance of candidates until 2016, the number of graduate students increased cumulatively. But, to control this number, the quotes are decreased and gradually the students who complete their legal time in the program but can’t graduate will be deregistered, so this ratio will become more compatible with the workload of the supervisors in the next semesters.

In addition, during this transition period the graduate students tried to be distributed in a balance among supervisors and to appoint co-supervisors to prevent the overload of supervisors.

“BR5.3. Currently, to become a supervisor previous experience from supervising MSc students or PhD students is required. In addition, being a cosupervisor can provide experience for supervision. For the supervisor to be qualified, he/she needs to have the sufficient research experience and be an independent research. One way to verify this would be to establish a Principal Investigator status to those individuals, who have sufficient research and supervision experience.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:

As it is clearly stated in the “HU-GSHS Supervision Guideline” to be appointed as the principal supervisor he/she should have publication or registered patent in the
last three years which can be the result of continuing research. In addition a similar position “Corresponding Investigator” is present.

“BR5.5. ORPHEUS recommends specific training for supervisors. At HUGS-HS the existing course “Educating Educators” is meant for all people entering an academic position. This course, however, does not include enough tailor-made specifics for PhD supervisors. Therefore, organising a specific “PhD Supervisor Training Course” is recommended.”

“HU-GSHS Supervisor Training Course” will be organized on 10th May 2018. Participation of all the supervisors to that course will gradually be ensured.

“BR5.7. The future careers of PhD students are important. This is also influenced by the supervisors. As the needs of the industry and society in general for PhDs is increasing one should be prepared. Thus, courses to both PhD students and their supervisors should include topics that help in the employment in various areas of health sciences and related industry. For MDs employment is usually not a major problem. In general, as for a balance, there is a need to recruit more MDs into the PhD programs.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:
This issue is tried to be explained above. (see our response to BR2.2)

“BR6.1. Inclusion of more independent evaluators outside the HUGS-HS and from abroad is recommended, whenever possible. To avoid travel costs and/or loss of time, this includes also the possibility to have evaluation online.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:
This issue is also regarded as very important by the HU-GSHS leadership and all the possible support is presented to all PhD programs whenever requested. Although not very common, there are examples of that.

“Quality development

On the basis of the review the following recommendations were made:

1. A contract between supervisor, candidate and the institute could be made to provide a legal framework for the PhD work”

Response of the HU-GSHS:
Student-Supervisor Agreement has been prepared approved and started to be used starting from the spring Semester, 2018. (http://fs.hacettepe.edu.tr/saglikbilimleri/dosyalar/ingilizce_web/Menuler/HUGSHS-SUPERVISOR_STUDENT%20AGREEMENT.pdf)

“2. Mentors for PhD students could help in possible conflict situations or problematic phases of the work or studies. Thus, they would be recommended but not considered as a requirement.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:
This will be evaluated together with our students, supervisors and program coordinators and employed if agreed.
3. “More of the theses at HUGS-HS should be written in English.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:
As the numbers of collaborative studies with other countries and international students are increasing, the demand to write thesis in English is increasing as well. We propose that this number will be higher than the previous every year, the thesis written in English in 2018 is seven (7) until 15th February.

4. “The contribution of the candidate in each publication should be explicitly indicated (Q6.2). This is the requirement of most journals, as well. Increasingly, shared authorships and collaborative work in general, especially in high quality publications, are becoming more common.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:
This topic is taken into consideration in Student-Supervisor Agreement (http://fs.hacettepe.edu.tr/saglikbilimleri/ingles_web/Menuler/H UGS-HS-SUPERVISOR- STUDENT%20AGREEMENT.pdf).

5. “A lay summary of the thesis is recommended (QD6.4). This is for the purpose of the general public, and especially when the thesis is published in English or other foreign language. Also a vocabulary to explain abbreviations and difficult phrases advisable.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:
Actually, in our thesis there are both Turkish and English abstracts and an index of abbreviations including their open writings. But the lay summary for general public mentioned in this issue will be discussed with our supervisors and program coordinators.

“6. If the thesis is written in Turkish a larger review in English is required.”

Response of the HU-GSHS:
This subject will be evaluated in the near future.

The corresponding links of the cited documents on the web site of the HU-GSHS

2 http://www.saglikbilimleri.hacettepe.edu.tr/tr/menu/orpheus_etiketi_sureci-161
4 http://www.saglikbilimleri.hacettepe.edu.tr/tr/menu/enstitu_kurulu_kararlari-145
5 http://www.saglikbilimleri.hacettepe.edu.tr/tr/menu/enstitu_kurulu_kararlari-145
6 http://www.saglikbilimleri.hacettepe.edu.tr/tr/menu/enstitu_kurulu_kararlari-145