



CHEI

Centre for Higher Education
Internationalisation

Doctoral Programme in Internationalisation of Higher Education

Prospective Student Guide

October 2024
(revised March 2025)

Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation (CHEI)

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CHEI – Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation



This document provides key information for students interested in pursuing a doctorate in Internationalisation of Higher Education at the Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation (CHEI) at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, Italy.

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1. General information

Awarding institution	Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore
Academic bodies and location	Doctoral Schools within the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Modern Languages, Milan, Italy
Final award	<i>Dottore di Ricerca in Scienze della Persona e della Formazione/Dottore di Ricerca in Scienze Linguistiche e Letterarie</i> (Doctorate in Education/Doctorate in Modern Languages)
Programme title	Higher Education Internationalisation and Education Strategies and Practices.
Mode of delivery	On-campus seminars and electronic communication with supervisors and tutors
Programme duration	3 years
Language of delivery and research	English
Unit managing the programme	Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation (CHEI)
Date of production/revision of specification	October 2024 (revised March 2025)

2. Overview and programme aims

The CHEI Doctoral Programme focuses exclusively on the Internationalisation of Higher Education and has developed a distinctive identity within the framework of national regulations that govern doctoral studies in Italy. Within Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, the programme is located in the Doctoral Schools in the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Modern Languages.

The programme has been conceived for professionals in the field of international higher education who continue their careers whilst undertaking their research. It is offered in English with teaching and supervision provided both by the wide international network that the Centre has built up over the years and academic staff at Università Cattolica.

You will join an international and diverse cohort and participate in the in-person seminars that are held twice a year in Italy, and in the online programme that takes place between the seminars. In the interim periods, you will study independently with regular on-line coaching and supervision, and participate in peer learning groups.

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The programme aims to develop “the reflective professional” by providing you with deeper knowledge, understanding and awareness of what it means to be a practitioner and researcher in international higher education settings, and by enabling you to undertake relevant research and create new knowledge that makes an original contribution to the field.

The Italian PhD is a full-time three-year programme and in order to make it possible for you to undertake your studies while working, CHEI has developed its own pathway programme that prepares you for doctoral studies and enables you to extend the period of time available to complete your dissertation. The pathway programme lasts between two to three years making the overall study period between five and six years.

While every student works at a different pace, we can provide an indicative study workload that can help you consider how best to organise your research time. In the first phase of the Pathway Programme, we suggest that you dedicate 8-10 hours per week to your studies. In the second phase of the Pathway programme, this will most likely increase to around 10-12 hours per week. Once you are on the PhD programme, your workload will be heavier and we estimate around 12-15 hours per week.

Undertaking doctoral studies on a part-time basis while in employment requires careful preparation, dedicated time, and strong commitment. For this reason, we encourage you to seek the support of your employer when applying for a doctoral programme in order to facilitate your studies, and possible requests for flexibility of working hours and study leave in the later stages of your research.

3. Pathway programme for entry to the CHEI PhD programme

Application to the CHEI PhD programme includes the submission of a detailed research proposal, and we have prepared a pathway programme that enables you to work towards this goal. The pathway phase varies from individual to individual, depending on how many seminars you attend before starting the research proposal, and on your own level of readiness and availability, but on average it lasts between two to three years. If you complete the programme successfully and apply for a place on the PhD programme, you will study for a further 3 years.

Given that you are working full time, a total of five to six years is a reasonable length of time to complete a doctoral programme on a part-time basis. We encourage all prospective students to take part in the pathway programme, as it provides a strong foundation for the application process to the Università Cattolica’s doctoral schools.

From Newcomer to Prospective Student

CHEI accepts a limited number of newcomers each year to join the Pathway Programme at its Spring Seminar in March/April. The intake is generally 8 students but this number varies from year to year based on capacity. Applications are invited in January of each year via the CHEI website, and confirmation of acceptance is given by late February. Students may be placed on a waiting list.

You will be invited to submit your curriculum vitae, together with a letter of motivation and a short description of your proposed research topic.

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You will attend your first research seminar as a newcomer and follow an introductory programme that prepares you for the Pathway Programme that starts each year in September.

During the first phase of the Pathway Programme you will begin to develop academic skills in research design, critical thinking and effective writing. You will produce written work after each seminar, attend online sessions and receive feedback in order to help you prepare for the next stage of the programme. At the end of this phase, you will submit a 5,000 word essay on your topic and make a presentation at the Autumn seminar in September. The CHEI Academic Board will assess whether you are ready to become an applicant and develop a more detailed research proposal, or whether you need to take another year to strengthen your academic skills and understanding of the topic. The maximum time available to complete the first phase of the Pathway Programme is two years.

From Prospective Student to Applicant

If the CHEI Academic Board considers you ready for the second phase of the Pathway Programme, they will assign you a tutor who will support you via online meetings to develop your ideas according to a specific template.

You will develop your research proposal over one academic year from October to May in which you will:

- identify the aims and purpose of the intended research;
- describe and analyse the research area;
- give an overview of the key relevant literature;
- identify an appropriate theoretical framework;
- formulate the research questions;
- describe the proposed research methodology and methods;
- provide a research schedule;
- indicate the publications you plan during the three years of the programme.

Your research proposal will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- knowledge of the relevant literature of the field and the research topic;
- theoretical understanding of the field and the research topic;
- understanding of research methods and methodology used;
- potential contribution to the field of internationalisation;
- alignment with expertise at CHEI;
- realistic research schedule and plan for dissemination;
- quality of writing;
- use of APA 7th edition;
- adequate advanced knowledge of English (minimum CEFR C1 level).

You will start working on your research proposal in October and submit a first version for feedback from the CHEI Academic Board at the end of January. You will present your progress in the Spring Seminar (March/April) where you will receive further feedback from the CHEI academic team. You will submit your

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final version of the research proposal in May and it will be read by the CHEI Academic Board for approval by the end of June. You will then be advised to make a formal application for admission to the Doctoral Schools at Università Cattolica that have reserved doctoral places on higher education internationalisation at CHEI.

Overview of Pathway and PhD programme

The diagram on the next page gives an overview of how the Pathway Programme prepares you for your application to the PhD programme. It shows the different stages from prospective student to applicant in the pathway programme, and from pathway programme to the PhD programme.

When you enrol the first time as a newcomer, there are special online sessions organised for you to induct you into the process and to understand what it means to undertake doctoral studies. Once you attend the in-person seminar, you are considered a prospective student.

The CHEI process

Year of Pathway or PhD programme	In-person Autumn Seminar	Online Programme and individual study with supervision	In-person Spring Seminar	Online Programme and individual study with supervision
Pathway Phase 1 (1-2 years) – Developing Academic Literacy and finding focus under the guidance of a tutoring team	Participate in seminar, present research idea and receive feedback from community	Undertake individual and peer work, write essay and receive feedback from tutors	Participate in seminar and present research idea and receive feedback from community	Undertake individual and peer work, finalise and submit essay for selection into second phase
Pathway Phase 2 (1 year) – Developing and submitting Research Proposal under individual tutor guidance				Undertake individual and peer work, finalise and submit research proposal for university application
Application to the University for a place on the PhD Programme via an open competition				
PhD Year 1 – Undertaking research under guidance of supervisory team				
PhD Year 2- Undertaking research				

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under guidance of supervisory team	Participate in seminar, make presentation on progress and receive feedback from community and oversight from Academic Board	Undertake individual and peer work towards agreed objectives with supervisory team support	Participate in seminar, make presentation on progress and receive feedback from community and oversight from Academic Board	Undertake individual and peer work towards agreed objectives with supervisory team support
PhD Year 3- Undertaking research under guidance of supervisory team				
Submit thesis and undertake a final two-stage examination process composed of an evaluation by external readers and a viva voce with an international panel				

4. Programme delivery

The Pathway and PhD programmes are delivered via the in-person seminars that take place in autumn and spring, the online programme, peer learning, coaching, tutoring and supervision. The in-person and online seminars are an integral part of the learning experience and offer a broad range of issues in internationalisation of higher education by leading scholars in the field, research methodology workshops, small group discussions, academic skill building and personal tutorials.

Students are expected to attend all seminars and should contact CHEI as soon as possible if they are unable to attend for any reason. Lack of attendance can affect progress and students may be required to repeat the year if tutors or supervisors consider that the student is not able to meet the programme requirements.

CHEI expects all students to participate and contribute actively in all the learning activities, in a way that promotes their own learning as well as the learning of others. Students should also clarify with their employers that they are not able to undertake any professional activities during the seminar hours, such as attending online meetings, taking phone calls, answering emails and text messages. This causes disruption for other students. Equally, students should make sure that they can arrive on time for all seminar activities.

During the rest of the year, you engage in individual study and independent research, and meet online regularly with your tutors and supervisors according to an agreed schedule. In the first phase of the Pathway Programme you work as a cohort with a tutoring team, while in the second phase you are assigned a tutor. On the PhD programme, your supervisory team is made up of two academics with expertise in your research area. You are encouraged to set up peer learning groups for mutual support and exchange in both programmes.

Pathway Programme Objectives

The objectives for the Pathway Programme are as follows:

- *Prospective student phase (1 to 2 years):* Participation in the CHEI in-person and online seminars. Production of an academic essay according to the guidelines provided by the academic team, and in line with CHEI Rubric for Prospective Students.

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- *Applicant phase (1 year)*: Participation in the CHEI in-person and online seminars. Production of a Research Proposal according to the criteria described in Section 3, and in line with the CHEI Rubric for Applicants.

PhD Programme Objectives

The year by year objectives for the PhD programme are described below.

In the **first year** of research, you will normally focus on:

- Agreeing a plan of activities with your supervisory team to complete your research project over the next 3 years and producing a detailed plan of activities for Year 1;
- Establishing a regular routine of meetings with your supervisors;
- Completing a comprehensive literature review chapter on your topic;
- Completing a first draft of your research methods chapter; Obtaining authorisation from the University Ethics committee for your field research (if required);
- Participating in the CHEI in-person and online seminars.

In the **second year** of research, you will normally focus on:

- Reviewing Year 1 progress towards completion of research and developing a detailed plan for Year 2;
- Completing sufficient field research (i.e. most or all of your data collection) to provide a substantive body of material for discussion and analysis in the final thesis;
- Drafting two further chapters - Findings and Discussion;
- Presenting your work at a research seminar or conference, and/or submitting a first publication to an academic or professional journal;
- Participating in the CHEI in-person and online seminars.

In the **third year** of research, you will normally focus on:

- Reviewing Year 2 progress towards completion of research and developing a detailed plan for Year 3;
- Setting milestones for completion of complete draft copy of thesis, and final revised copy for submission with supervisors;
- Drafting your introduction and conclusion chapters;
- Redrafting all chapters;
- Completing and editing the final draft of your entire PhD thesis for submission;
- Presenting your work at a research seminar or conference, and/or submitting a first publication to an academic or professional journal;
- Identifying opportunities for publication of work from your thesis;
- Participating in the CHEI in-person and online seminars.

Student Progress

Demonstration of your progress is made via your written work, the presentations you deliver at each seminar and your level of engagement in the different sessions and workshops at the in-person seminars and during the online programme. During the course of your studies you will submit regular written work to your supervisory team and receive feedback. You are also required to submit a progress report and attend a meeting with the CHEI Director.

There is a formal assessment point at the end of Year 1 when you present your research progress to the CHEI Academic Board. In your presentation, you should be able to provide evidence that you are working towards the doctoral standard of demonstrating critical judgement and originality of thought equivalent to the standard of articles published in academic literature in your research area. The CHEI Academic Board will communicate their assessment of your progress to the relevant Doctoral School.

5. Programme learning outcomes and examination procedures

Programme Learning Outcomes

At the end of the CHEI PhD programme, you are expected to reach the learning outcomes for doctoral studies as set out in the European Qualifications Framework. This implies that:

1. you will have demonstrated a systematic understanding of internationalisation of higher education and mastery of the skills and methods of research within that field;
2. you will have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;
3. you will have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication;
4. you will be capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;
5. you will be able to communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;
6. you will be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge-based society.

Examination Procedures

Your final assessment is your doctoral thesis submitted at the end of Year 3. It is read first by two external examiners who provide an evaluation of your work, based on the Programme Learning Outcomes, and make any recommendations for improvement. You will submit a revised version together with a report indicating how you have incorporated the recommendations, and once the external readers have approved the revised version, you can proceed to the *viva voce* examination in front of a panel of Italian and international academic experts. This entails a presentation of your thesis and a discussion with the panellists. Successful completion of this process leads to the award of the PhD.

6. Admissions

The PhD application process in Italy is a national one, and therefore the application dates are the same for all programmes in all universities. Generally, the application period is between July and early September each year. It is an online process and there is an application fee, currently set at €100.

All applicants must have a master's level qualification that gives access to doctoral studies, and professional experience in internationalisation of higher education. The following documentation is required:

- copies of academic qualifications;
- detailed curriculum vitae;
- a 5-page summary of the research proposal;
- a letter of reference demonstrating your academic and/or professional skills relevant to the field;
- a letter of support from your employer.

Your application is reviewed by the relevant Doctoral School at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, and if accepted, you will be invited to take part in an on-line interview, generally in September, with an Admissions Panel composed of Doctoral School members and the CHEI Director. You will receive notification of the Panel's decision shortly after the interview. If you have been successfully admitted to the CHEI PhD programme, CHEI will assign you a team of two supervisors who will support you for the duration of your studies.

7. Fees

Fees for the period 2025-2026 are indicated in the following tables. There is a separate payment policy for the Pathway Programme and the PhD Programme.

Doctoral students are entitled to a reimbursement of travel expenses up to a total of € 1600 per year. This does not apply to students on the Pathway programme.

CHEI is not currently in a position to provide scholarships. We advise you to look for other sources for funding to cover all or part of their expenses, such as your own employer, national scholarship schemes, private foundations and European or international mobility programmes.

CHEI Pathway Programme Fees

This includes participation at the 5-day seminar, the online programme, and tutoring for prospective students and applicants (September to February/March for the Autumn Seminar, and March/April to June/July for the Spring Seminar). Fees are adjusted annually.

<i>From September 2025</i>	<i>From September 2026</i>
€950	€1100

CHEI PhD Programme Fees

This includes participation in the seminar, the online programme, and supervision by 2 supervisors. The fees apply to students enrolling in the first year of the programme and remain at the same level for all three years. Taxes may be adjusted.

<i>For students enrolling in September 2025</i>	<i>For students enrolling in September 2026</i>
€3500 per year for 3 years (plus € 16 tax per year)	€4000 per year for 3 years (plus € 16 tax per year)

Fees are paid in instalments throughout the year, and detailed information is provided each year by the CHEI Office.

8. Conference presentations, publications and social media

Even in the early stages of your work, you are encouraged to present your ideas at conferences and to publish in a broad range of publication outlets. You will discuss this with your tutors and supervisors who will advise you on where to present or publish your research as it develops.

You may wish to use social media to promote your research or seminar experience at CHEI. We are very happy for you to do so and ask you to include reference to Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, when you mention CHEI, as the PhD is awarded by the University.

9. Location

Address: [Via Giosuè Carducci 28/30](#), 20123 Milan, Italy

Public transport: S. Ambrogio metro stop (Line M2 - green line)
S. Ambrogio metro stop (Line M4 - blu line)
Cadorna metro stop (Line M1 – red line) and 8 minutes' walk
Cadorna metro stop (Line M1 – red line)

10. Key contacts

If you are interested in learning more about the CHEI PhD programme, you can find further information on the [website](#), and you can also [contact us](#) directly. The Associate Director Fiona Hunter organises monthly information sessions to present the programme and answer your questions. She will discuss your research interests and motivations for undertaking doctoral study with you to help you ascertain whether this would indeed be the most appropriate programme for you.

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