

PhD Track regulations

(December 2025)

Context

Université Paris-Saclay has established a programme to attract and support more students in pursuing a doctoral degree: the *PhD Track*. The doctoral programme is a “training through and by research” pathway that enables students to deepen their chosen field(s) of study, diversify and enrich their skills, and develop high-level scientific expertise in a specific domain. It also facilitates the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes necessary to perform high-value-added activities in various academic institutions, the private sector, and senior public administration roles.

The *PhD Track* programme, recently launched in an experimental phase, is funded by the SFRI-FAIR project, which supports students from the Master 1 (M1) level through the doctoral level (28 students have been supported to date). The modalities presented here may serve as a basis for other *PhD Track* funding programmes (e.g., for specific scientific themes), with adjustments as needed depending on context and disciplinary focus.

Article 1 - Objectives of the *PhD Track* programme

Université Paris-Saclay has created this programme to attract and, above all, support highly qualified students who wish to develop a doctoral project after completing their master’s degree.

The *PhD Track* combines mentorship, guidance, and financial support for the two years of the master’s programme and the three years of the doctoral contract, allowing students to pursue a PhD in a Université Paris-Saclay research laboratory, provided their application is positively evaluated by the relevant doctoral school.

The support programme draws on the initiatives of the Graduate Schools (GS) and the university more broadly, aimed at strengthening training through and by research (the PhD master’s programme) to help students prepare for doctoral studies and construct their thesis projects.

During the experimental phase, the University has particularly highlighted specific research areas. For the academic year 2025–2026, this includes sustainable development (see Appendix 1), for which four contracts have been earmarked, while six other contracts are theme-neutral.

Article 2 - Organisation of the *PhD Track* programme

The programme is open to first-year master’s students at Université Paris-Saclay who wish to commit to a doctoral project. For 2025–2026, it is also open to second-year students in engineering programmes of the four *Grandes Écoles*, provided they complete a M2 at Université Paris-Saclay during the third year of their engineering curriculum and plan to pursue a PhD at the University.

The programme includes:

- Individual mentorship by a mentor from a Université Paris-Saclay research unit (14 units within scope¹)
- Support programme (the PhD master’s programme)

¹ The research units considered by the institutions concerned as falling within the scope of Université Paris-Saclay.

- Master's scholarship (end of M1 and M2 year)
- Doctoral contract, subject to a favorable evaluation by the relevant doctoral school
- Commitment to serve as an ambassador for Université Paris-Saclay in their field

a) Individual mentorship

PhD Track recipients are paired with a mentor (faculty or research staff from Université Paris-Saclay with excellent knowledge of university programmes) for the two years of their master's studies. The mentor helps develop the student's pre-doctoral and thesis project.

The mentor hosts the student in their research unit from the time of admission to the programme. This unit must not be the student's future PhD host unit. The mentor can be neither the future PhD supervisor nor the M2 internship supervisor.

The mentor guides the student in selecting seminars, events, and other university activities relevant to their trajectory within the PhD programme. A minimum of three meetings per year with the mentor is required. The student also participates in the life of the mentor's research unit.

b) Support programme

The support programme builds on the Graduate Schools' initiatives to strengthen research-based training. The PhD master's programme may take different forms depending on the scientific field, the host unit, and the student's Graduate School affiliation (see Appendix 2).

Students must have access to a variety of activities and events to help construct their research trajectory: familiarization with the research environment, scientific seminars, methodological research workshops, etc.

The support programme is designed jointly with the mentor at the start of the *PhD Track* and may be adjusted over time according to project developments.

c) Master's scholarship

A scholarship of €3,000 is awarded at the end of M1, and a scholarship of €10,000 is awarded in two installments for the M2 year.

At the end of each of the two academic years of the programme (M1 and M2), that is, at the end of the first year (M1) and the second year (M2), the student presents the progress of their project to their mentor. For this purpose, they provide a 2–3 page summary document. This document, approved by the mentor, is then submitted to the monitoring committee. At the end of M1, the focus is primarily on presenting the project to be implemented during M2 and the subsequent PhD.

Based on the mentor's recommendations, the monitoring committee decides whether the student may continue in the programme or not. If discontinued, the student completes their training without financial support for the following year.

d) A Doctoral contract pending the approval of the relevant Doctoral School

At the end of the two-year programme, students may receive a doctoral contract to carry out their PhD in a Université Paris-Saclay research unit, subject to approval by the relevant doctoral school. This approval may be granted following a review of the student's application, including their master's

degree results, the research proposal, and an oral presentation conducted according to the doctoral school guidelines.

e) Commitment to promote Université Paris-Saclay

PhD Track recipients commit to serving as ambassadors of Université Paris-Saclay throughout their PhD. To do so, they will participate in promotional activities for research-based training within their Graduate School and the university.

Article 3 - *PhD Track* bodies

The *PhD Track* jury comprises 20 members:

- Two vice-presidents of the university or their representatives
- Two representatives from the Research and Higher Education Graduate School (MRES)
- Six representatives from other Graduate Schools
- Five representatives from master's programmes
- Five representatives from doctoral schools

The jury is appointed annually by the university president.

The jury meets in plenary session to assess eligibility and admission based on evaluations by audition committees. The jury splits into two commissions for admissions according to research themes. A subset of the audition commission forms the programme monitoring committee.

Article 4 - Selection and monitoring procedure

The selection schedule for the 2025 session is presented in Appendix 3.

a/ Capacity and eligibility

For 2025, the *PhD Track* offers 10 positions.

The programme is open to any student enrolled in M1 or equivalent programmes at Université Paris-Saclay who aims to pursue a PhD at the university.

PhD Track recipients cannot:

- Take a gap year during the programme
- Combine programme funding with other excellence scholarships

Exceptions:

- If the student benefits from an Idex, Hadamard, or another excellence scholarship, they complete M1 with the existing scholarship; financial support from *PhD Track* begins in M2. The student still benefits from *PhD Track* programme
- Other situations are reviewed case by case.

Ineligible candidates:

- Trainee civil servants

b/ Eligibility

Before completing this form, please check that you have the following items:

- Curriculum Vitae

- Application file (maximum 3 pages, in a single PDF) must include the following elements :
 - your project and motivations
 - your perspectives in terms of research themes and host research teams for an internship (M1/M2 level), and potentially for a doctoral project, within Université Paris-Saclay.
- Academic transcripts of L3 level and of the first semester of the current academic year (documents merged into a single PDF)
- Intended M2 programme(s) within Université Paris-Saclay
- Recommendation from your M1 supervisor or equivalent

A short description of the project will also need to be provided.

The application will be reviewed by the GS in charge of the relevant M1 training (or, for engineering students, in charge of the planned M2). Each GS may pre-select up to three students.

Evaluation criteria:

- Academic excellence
- Quality and coherence of research project and motivation and how the project fits within the chosen theme (if appropriate)
- Alignment of project with previous experiences

c/ Admission

Admission includes a 5-minute oral presentation followed by a 15-minute interview, during which the student must:

- Highlight previous experiences in line with the training programme and career goals
- Explain the M2 project and doctoral perspectives

Evaluation focuses on the quality of argumentation, project alignment with career goals, and thematic relevance.

d/ Programme monitoring

The monitoring committee meets at the end of each academic year to review programme progress. It decides on continuation or discontinuation for each student based on mentor recommendations and discusses with the mentors potential improvements to the support programme.

Appendix 1 - *PhD Track Themes*

Theme 1: Sustainable development

Sustainable development is central to research and teaching missions at a research-intensive university. Aligning research trajectories with sustainability requires profound transitions across all human activities (energy production, infrastructure, urban planning, food production, industrial processes, etc.).

Effective measures involve both technological and nature-based solutions, coupled with resource demand management, and must consider ethical, equitable, and justice-related dimensions for resilient and sustainable development.

Students may frame their project within one of the following areas:

- Environmental changes and associated risks to human societies and ecosystems
- Transformational approaches for sustainability
- Resource sharing and equity

Theme 2: Open theme

All scientific fields other than sustainable development are eligible.

Appendix 2 - The *PhD Master's programme*

The *PhD Master's programme* is a support programme designed to help Master's students build their thesis project and prepare for their entry into doctoral studies.

Support is open to all students and can take various forms:

- presentation seminars on the research environment: gaining a better understanding of the French research system, the different types of funding, the role of each player, etc.
- discovery of research structures through immersive experiences in a variety of formats, access to seminars, etc.
- presentation seminars on research methodology (acquisition of research methods, bibliographic or archive studies, etc.) and scientific production (role of publications, how to build them, conferences or reviews, awareness of research ethics and scientific integrity, open science).

For students who want to make a stronger commitment, the GS can offer a *PhD Master's programme* with mentoring:

- One-to-one support by a scientific mentor (post-doctoral student, researcher or lecturer from a research unit of interest to the student) to help build the student's project, career path, etc.
Please note: Mentoring can be financed by the SFRI-FAIR project, particularly for new students. Mentoring also makes it possible to involve researchers who are familiar with the courses.
- Support for international experience (excluding international students)
 - mobility to international research laboratories for students who have an appropriate project, for example through outgoing IDEX scholarships
 - international summer schools as part of the SFRI-FAIR project

Appendix 3 - The Timetable

- The official launch of the programme took place through two webinars held on November 14 and 21, 2025.
- The chosen timeline is as follows:

Applications	January 5 to March 5, 2026
Eligibility	March 23, 2026
Oral presentations/interviews	April 6 to 10, 2026
Admission	By April 13, 2026 at the latest