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Recommendation on the Use of Foreign Doctoral Degree Titles in Switzerland

1. Doctorate Title in the Higher Education Council Ordinance on the Coordination of Teaching at Swiss Higher Education Institutions

The "Higher Education Council Ordinance on the Coordination of Teaching at Swiss Higher Education Institutions" regulates admission to third cycle degree programmes and the titles awarded (Art. 10-11).¹ It states that a master's degree is the basic requirement for admission to a doctorate programme at a higher education institution (cantonal university or federal institute of technology). Continuing education qualifications do not entitle the holder to admission.

The higher education institutions can award the following third-cycle titles:

- Doctor (Dr, PhD)
- Doctor of Medical Sciences (MD-PhD)
- Dr med., Dr med. dent., Dr med. vet., Dr. med. chiro²

2. Legal Bases at Federal and Cantonal Level

2.1 Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education Sector (HEdA)³

The HEdA provides that the sponsors of higher education institutions are responsible for protecting the titles awarded to graduates.⁴

The title of 'doctor' without suffix and the abbreviation 'Dr' are not protected. The use of foreign titles is not regulated at national level.

2.2 Unfair Competition

The Bundesgesetz gegen den unlauteren Wettbewerb, UWG⁵ (Federal Act on Unfair Competition) does not protect the title itself but rather its unfair use in economic competition. The unauthorised use of titles is only of relevance if these titles are used to gain a competitive

¹ <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2019/722/de>

² Art. 11 let. c. HEdA

³ <https://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20070429/index.html>

⁴ Art. 62 para. 2 HEdA

⁵ <https://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/19860391/>

advantage and thus damage good faith in legal transactions.⁶ Persons who provide improper and misleading information, including claiming academic titles they do not hold, face civil action or prosecution.⁷

2.3 Cantonal law

In their legislation on higher education institutions, some cantons recognise the criminal offence of arrogation of an academic title, whereby anyone who claims without authorisation to be the holder of an academic degree or who uses the academic title of an institution which is clearly not equivalent to a similar degree awarded by a Swiss state higher education institution is liable to prosecution.

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3. swissuniversities Recommendation

In this context, swissuniversities takes the position that (in the absence of national regulation) foreign titles awarded by state-recognised universities in a regular study and research programme may be used in their original form with an additional reference to the awarding university. The decision as to whether and under what circumstances abbreviations of the acquired title (e.g. Dr) are also used, is the responsibility of the individual, subject to the applicable legal requirements.

⁶ Art. 3 let. c in conjunction with. Art. 2 UWG

⁷ Art. 23 UWG