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University of Applied Sciences

Fostering Interdisciplinary Research and Transfer Competencies in Doctoral Education at Universities of Applied Sciences in North-Rhine-Westfalia

Impact by Design

18.06.2026

EUA
Council of Doctoral Education
Annual Meeting
Galway, IE

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Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences &
Doctoral School for Applied Research in NRW

PROMOTIONS-
KOLLEG NRW

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Why look at North Rhine-Westfalia in Doctoral Education?

02

What do Universities of Applied Sciences do differently from traditional Universities?

03

How does this shape our Approach to Transfer and Transfer Activities?

04

Is there a different Kind of Impact of PhDs at UAS? Can we measure this?

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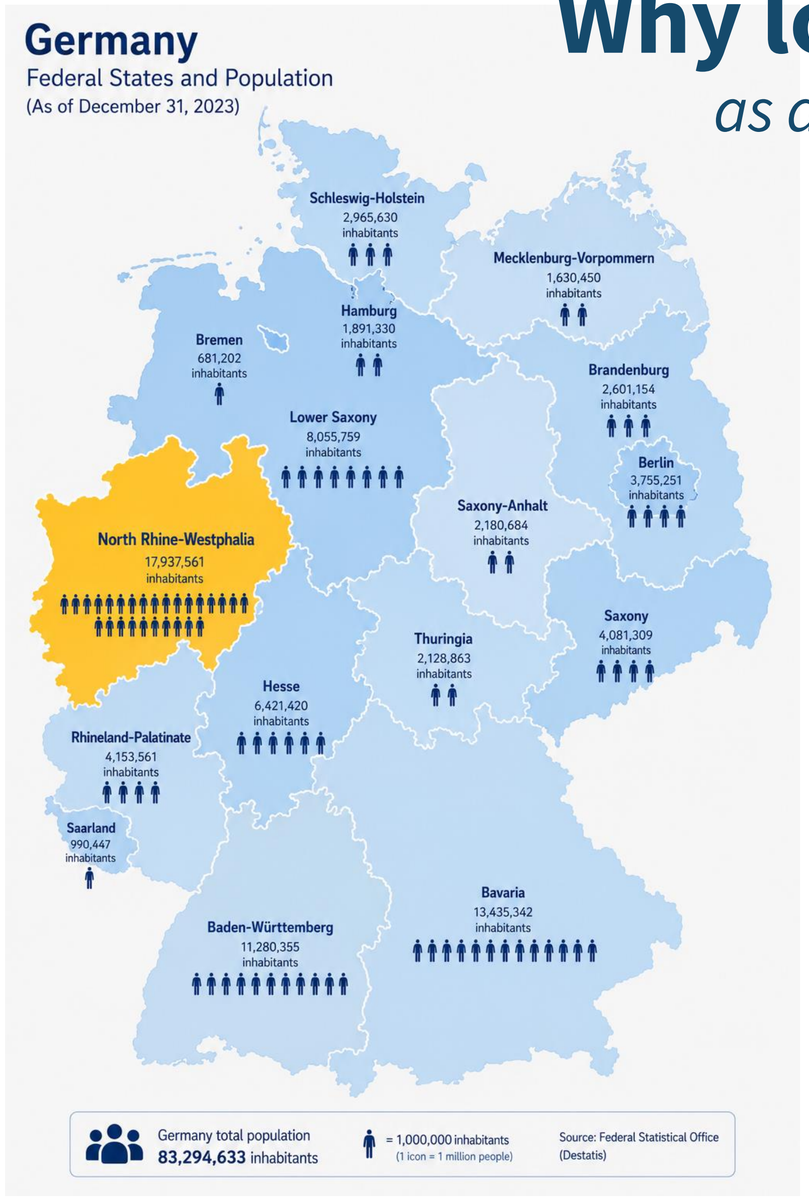
Why look at NRW?

as a federal State



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- ¼ of the German Population lives in NRW
- Good Connectivity within the State, within Germany and across Europe
- Strong industrial backbone with a mix of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and large international Companies
- Former Capital Bonn: Large Number of NGOs and Central Organizations

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Why look at NRW?

in Doctoral Education

Europe‘s most dense and diverse Higher Eduation Ecosystem

- 14 state-run classical Universites
- 20 Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)
- 700.000 Students
- 43.282 PhD Candidates
- Approx. 600 PhD Candidates at Doctoral School of Applied Research NRW (PK NRW) (still growing)

Source: Bochum UAS

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What do UAS do differently in Doctoral Eduation?

#1 *Structural Differences from traditional Universities*

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- **Construction and Culture**
- **Computer and Data Science**
- **Life Sciences and Health Technologies**
- **Media and Interactions**
- **Resources and Sustainability**
- **Social and Health Affairs**
- **Technology and Systems**
- **Business and Markets**

- 8 Departments
  10 Doctoral Programmes
- No classical Faculty Structure
- Challenge-driven Research Areas covering a range of social and technological topics

The Doctoral School has been designed not only to allow for interdisciplinarity, but to enforce and promote it organizationally and structurally.

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What do UAS do differently in Doctoral Eduation?

#2 *Team Supervision by 3 Supervisors*

	Primary Academic Supervisor	Additional Academic Supervisor	Mentor
Main Responsibilities	• Develop /refine topic • Chose research methods • Build supervision team • Identify reviewers • Develop research independence	• Scientific / methodological supervision • Regular feedback • Support with disciplinary expertise, access to academic networks, scientific independence	• Mentoring throughout the doctoral phase • Career guidance • Conflict mediation • Support during critical phases • May supervise academically upon approval
Formal Requirements	**Professoral Member of the Department**	**Professoral Member of PK NRW, any Dpt. or External Professor**	**Prof. Member or Associated Prof. of PK NRW or External Professor**

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What do UAS do differently in Doctoral Eduation?

#3 *UAS Professors are both:*
Scholars and Experienced Practitioners

• Professors at Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) in NRW must have at least **five years of professional experience, including at least three years outside higher education/university system.**

This means

• Doctoral projects are more likely to originate from **real-world Problems**.

• Easier access to **Professional Networks**, industrial partners and original data from industry, healthcare etc.

• Supervisors tend to actively encourage **Careers outside Academia.**

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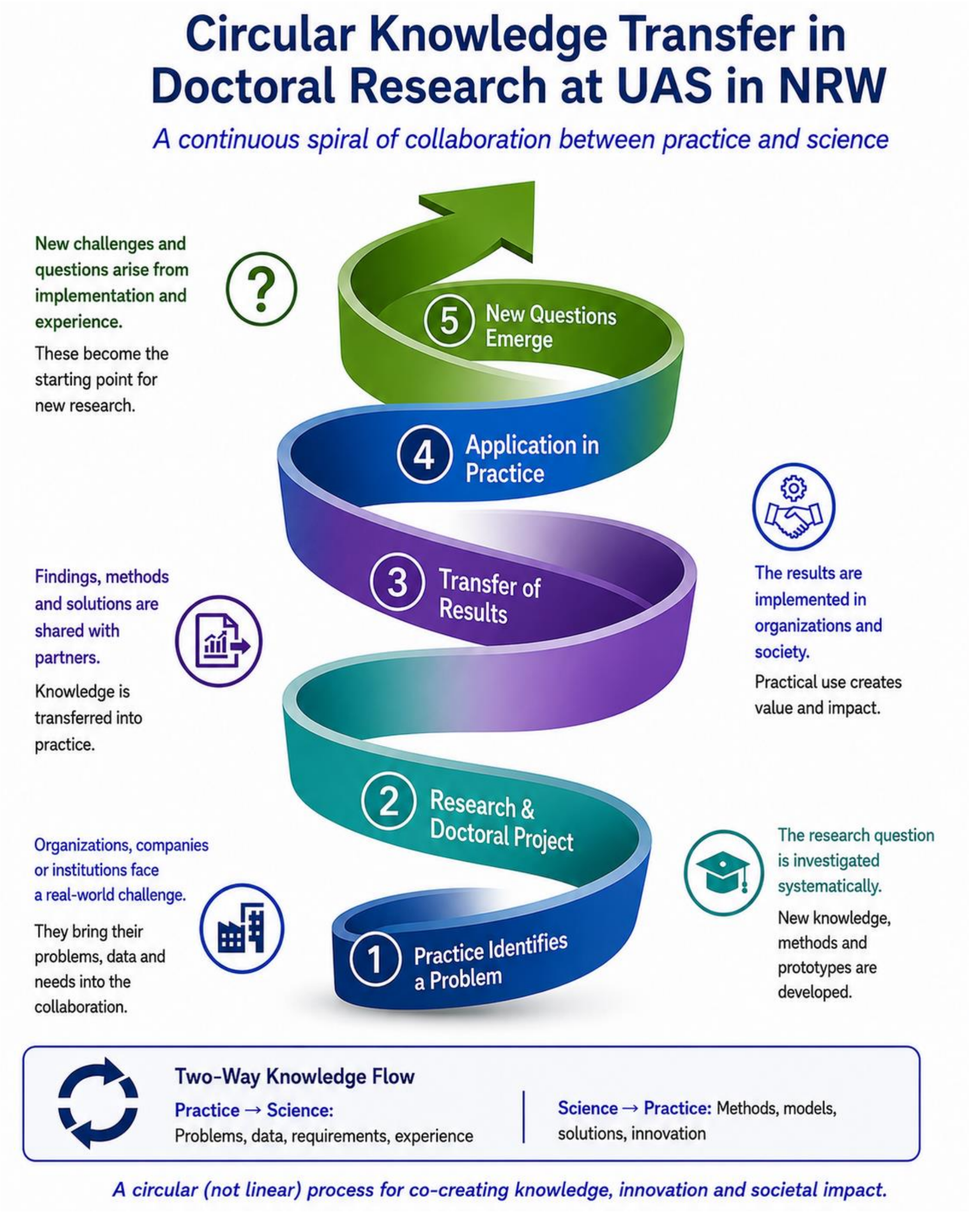
From Linear to Spiral:

Transfer as a Circular Knowledge Flow



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Interdisciplinarity and Transfer Put to Work

An Example from H-BRS University of Applied Sciences

#1: Joint Research Training Group

"Urban Future - Managing Change for Better Health in Blue Cities"

H-BRS/ Bonn University

Partners

- University (Bonn) & University of Applied Science (Bonn-Rhine-Sieg)
- University Hospital (Bonn)
- Non-University Research Institute (German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)
- International Partners
- Sponsor: German Research Foundation (DFG)

- ✓ **Interdisciplinary Topic** includes effects on humans, animals, plants and the environment
- ✓ **Scientists from 3 Departments** involved:
- ✓ Natural Sciences, Management Sciences and Social Policy and Social Security
- ✓ **Joint Supervision** with academic and external Partners

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Interdisciplinarity and Transfer Put to Work

Example from Doctoral School NRW

#2: Call for PK Research Training Groups

- 4 Professors
  4 PhD Candidates
  4 Years

- Teaching Relief
- Fully funded Doctoral Positions / Young Researcher
- Supervision Experience for new Professors

Research Focus

Excellent Research Projects aimed at addressing current Challenges of Society

Selection Criteria

- Scientific Originality and Excellence
- Impact and Plausibility of Work Programme
- Inter-/ Transdisciplinary Orientation
- Team Composition
- Concept for Doctoral Supervision & Qualification
- Networking and Cooperation
- Contributions to Sustainability & Internationalization

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Interdisciplinarity and Transfer Put to Work

Services (not only) for PhDs
Outreach & Cooperation

Central Units managing
Transfer & Entrepreneurship On-site

Centre for Science and Technology Transfer (ZWT)

CENTIM - Centre for Entrepreneurship, Innovation and SMEs

Co-Founder of **Innovation and Start-Up Hub** DIGITALHUB.DE accelerator programs, investments, coworking spaces, events, professional network

Hosting the regions largest **Career Fair**

Five **"CitizenLabs"** at the university e.g. sustainable design of home gardens

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A different kind of Impact
A different kind of Doctorate?

Balancing Practical Impact, Scientific Depth, and Strategic Career Value

Supervisors with practical Experience
+ applied Research Topics

Doctoral Candidates may be encouraged to produce

- Prototypes
- Policy Recommendations
- Implementation Frameworks
- Software Systems
- Organizational Innovations

in addition to classical Academic Output through Publications, Citations, etc.

Doctoral Education in Applied Sciences

- Ideally equally strong academic Expertise, potentially less Academic Recognition
- Knowledge Creation + Implementation
- Academic + Professional Networks
- Often Interdisciplinary Focus
- Scientific + Societal Impact

How to measure & evaluate this Output?

- Visualize Impact in Advance
- Make it Part of Proposal
- Implement Impact Criteria in Funding Programs

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Thank you for your attention!

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