

## European Doctoral Education: Programme Assessment within the Framework of Quality Assurance

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In the last decade European doctoral education has been going through significant changes, both in terms of the structure and content. We have recognized the whole process as a “quiet revolution” in which universities put a lot of efforts in reshaping the traditional system of doctoral education. A majority of European universities identified doctoral education as a core university activity that is crucial for training researchers as well as for institutional research status. Doctoral education gained a strategic role for the majority of European universities, emphasizing both international collaboration and industry-university partnerships. This kind of importance that has been attributed to doctoral education required rethinking both on the structural institutional level and in terms of the content and form of the doctoral programme *per se*. Educating and developing researchers has been recognised as central to the development of knowledge societies.

Presently, we have about 600,000 doctoral candidates and are ever increasing the number of graduates per year. At the same time our focus is on nurturing quality in doctoral education in order to increase doctorate holders’ accountability and to make them more attractive for employers.

Traditionally, many universities did not have structured doctoral programmes, the completion time was longer, and universities’ interest in completion rate was different. For many doctoral candidates the whole process of doctoral education has been based on a relation between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor. Universities were not much involved in what was happening with the doctorate holder after the graduation. There was little communication, if any, with the third party. Accordingly, all the efforts had been put on research itself and personal management of the relationship between the doctoral candidate and his/her supervisor.

With a shift in a doctoral education, there is a noticeable effort in professionalizing the process. Nowadays, doctoral education is performed predominantly through doctoral schools. Universities and doctoral schools are paying much more attention to quality enhancement. These way doctoral programmes gained a different role. Their relevance has been put on different coordinates. There are significant differences between quality assurance for doctoral education and the first two cycles, as we call them according to the Bologna Process (bachelor’s and master’s).

The European quality assurance system has been based on three main components—accountability, quality enhancement, and quality culture—which embrace everyone involved: teaching staff, doctoral candidates and management. This has also been a requirement

reflected in doctoral programmes. Universities needed to establish a system which will provide professionalised support both to doctoral candidates and research staff as well as to develop the system which will be able to monitor and further develop doctoral education.

Today we know that our doctoral programmes and doctoral education, in general, has been evaluated by various external and internal evaluations. There is ongoing monitoring of the system. We are aware of different models of evaluations and assessments, sometimes being focused more on institutional global level, sometimes more on individual programmes. There is a whole array of numerous different approaches going from the individual programme accreditation process to institutional audits, assessments within the national qualification frameworks and specific learning outcomes, internal regular and/or periodic evaluations and continuous monitoring of doctoral candidates' progress. A relevant question is what is specific about doctoral education and how to use the key performance indicators when assessing a doctoral programme.

Nevertheless, our main concern is good quality supervision. We have many good practices that show how to use supervision for enhancing the quality. A doctoral programme itself requires flexibility and possibility to be adjusted to the individual needs of a young researcher. It should also be responsive to different needs of doctoral candidates coming from different cultural and educational backgrounds. We perceive this global, international component to be extremely relevant for doctoral programmes and doctoral education. A good doctoral programme should also be capable of career tracking and developing services for career development. In this context, special emphasis has been put on transferable skills training.

Doctoral education is still facing many challenges. Although all three educational cycles share the same purposes for quality assurance, we need to be aware that there are different processes. When assessing doctoral programmes, one should never forget that the main feature of doctoral education is training through original research. Presently, there are many and regular evaluations of doctoral education and assessments of doctoral programmes across European universities. The fact is that doctoral education differs qualitatively from the first two cycles—that is research—and due to that fact, specific, customized forms of assessment and evaluation need to be administered.