

EUA-BFUG
Doctoral Programmes Follow-Up Project
Report from the workshop on 23 – 24 March 2006, Brussels

The workshop on 23 – 24 March 2006 was one of the activities within the follow-up project on doctoral programmes under the responsibility of the BFUG. The workshop focused on two thematic topics:

1. Supervision, assessment and monitoring;
2. Generic skills training.

The workshop was attended by 58 participants from 19 countries. About 25% of the participants were academics who were partners or coordinators in the EUA Doctoral Programmes Project (2003 – 2005). Most of case studies were presented by the project partners. In addition to the case studies, there was a EURODOC presentation on each topic.

Overall, the model of a small workshop with a clear focus, case studies presentations and in-depth discussions in working groups proved to be very successful. The debates were live and brought a fruitful exchange of examples of good practice. Participants publicly emphasised the importance of EUA work in this area. It was stressed that EUA started a debate on the new vision of a doctorate in Europe and initiated discussions at universities about it and about institutional implementation of it.

EUA activities (especially EUA project on doctoral programmes) contributed to strengthening of collaboration among universities from different countries. Project partners continue working together and develop new projects together (e.g. Granada School – summer school on generic skills training for 7 universities from different countries which participated in the project; or a new Tempus project of the University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in Ukraine organised with several project partners). Project participants invite other project partners to their universities to talk about their institutional experience on doctoral reform.

The workshop also served as an exchange of information about various new national reports on doctoral programmes and forthcoming events.

Main outcomes of the workshop:

I. Supervision, assessment and monitoring

1. Results of latest studies and evaluation reports (e.g. Finland or Denmark) show that there is a **great need to develop new supervision practices** in doctoral education.
2. **Signed agreement between the supervisor, the doctoral candidate and the institution** with clearly defined research plan of the candidate, and responsibilities and rights of all parties is a useful instrument that can help if any problems appear.
3. **Multiple (team) supervision** is becoming more common. There are several models of it:
 - two or three supervisors with one of them as a principal one (e.g. Finland);
 - one supervisor who is responsible just for administrative and quality part of the doctoral training and one who is responsible for the research progress. E.g. at the Politecnico di Milano doctoral candidates have a tutor responsible for the administrative part and quality (a member of faculty) and a supervisor (can be external) responsible for research.
 - three supervisors, e. g. University of Bradford (principal supervisor – focus on research topic; supervisor with complementary skills with respect to the main one; and pastoral supervisor who bears in mind the professional development of the candidate after getting the degree).

- one supervisor and the Scientific Board of a Faculty (providing assessment of the progress) – P.J. Safarik Kosice, Slovakia

Advantages of multiple supervision: coverage during a sabbatical or in case of long absence of the supervisor; easy change if problems occur.

4. Who can be a supervisor:

In most countries a Professor or Assistant Professor; or at least a person who has a PhD degree. Most important: S/he should be a good professionally recognised scientist (although not every good scientist is a good supervisor) – a combination of skills is necessary.

5. Recognition of a supervisor/ supervision and motivations to be a supervisor:

- Supervision should have a proper recognition. Some universities deduct teaching load depending on the number of candidates.
- In some countries supervisors are paid extra money (premium) for supervision.
- Being a supervisor is one of the conditions in academic promotion.
- Being a supervisor to doctoral candidates means less undergraduate teaching.
- Working with doctoral candidates is stimulating (new ideas, enthusiasm, creativity, curiosity).

6. Workload of a supervisor:

- Supervision is a part of a research and teaching work.
- Workload models are important (but difficult) to develop to ensure that a supervisor gives enough time and quality of dedication to the candidate.
- In some countries the law prescribes a maximum number of candidates per a supervisor, e.g. 5 candidates per 1 supervisor in Slovakia and Czech Republic.
- However, there is no evidence that the number of candidates per supervisor has any impact on the number of successful completions of PhD studies.
- Important: to protect doctoral candidates from overloaded supervisors.

7. Training of supervisors:

- Training of supervisors is important for both the supervisors and the candidates. However, the concept is not well developed and accepted in most European countries. The UK introduced training of supervisors following the Code of Practice. It is usually organised in an informal way of a one-day-out meeting, based on case studies, discussions, sharing of good practices and reflecting on their own experience. E.g. at the Bradford University a 1-day course includes:
 - 1) Understanding what supervising means. Discussion on the issues in groups.
 - 2) Key elements: discussion in groups.
 - 3) Administrative rules of the university (how the university works)
 - 4) Case study discussions: what to do and what not to do, how solve difficult situations.
 - 5) Quality assurance code of practice.
- Participants agreed that it is necessary to organise courses and debates among supervisors in order to introduce the new vision of the doctorate in Europe with a perspective for each doctoral graduate to be able to work in any sector of the society.
- Proposal: to organise a European conference on the training of supervisors.

8. Awards for best supervisors

Some universities in the UK introduced the annual Award for the best supervisor – doctoral candidates can nominate supervisors for this award.

II. Generic skills training

Generic (transferable, transversal, life) skills training in doctoral education has been developing in some countries and universities as a response to the changing nature of the global labour market and the need for higher employability of doctoral candidates in all sectors of the society. It is often seen as an instrument for doctoral candidates' empowerment, leading to raising awareness of skills they acquire during their doctoral studies and often are not able to identify. Its aim is to prepare the doctoral candidate better for her/his professional career.

Generic skills training can be organised in different ways. Participants, especially ESRs (early stage researchers) stressed that traditional courses with lectures are not always popular at doctoral level and that doctoral candidates prefer other, more student-centered ways of training (especially through learning by doing). Generally, there is a big demand for generic skills training among doctoral candidates, and workshops or courses are usually full.

1. Examples of good practices in organisation of generic skills training

- Summer schools (e.g. international Granada School - Improving the generic and professional communication of doctoral candidates across Europe – workshops on Relating business and research skills; Getting the message across; CV transformation);
- Organisation through a specialised centre (e.g. Graduate Training and Support Centre at University of Leeds offering Research Students' Training and Personal Development Opportunities Programme) and/ or faculty (post-graduate seminars, conferences, other research skills and language skills – Leeds);
- United Kingdom – UKGrad programmes – through regional hubs (Local Grad Schools; www.grad.ac.uk);
- Organisation at the university level (K.U.Leuven – Academic English; E-sources databases; Project writing; Didactic training)
- Important: to bring doctoral candidates from different disciplines and different levels (1-3 year) together to encourage interdisciplinary dialogue and creative thinking.
- United Kingdom – Social Sciences – every social scientist now has to take compulsory generic skills training to become a generic social scientist with specialisation (it has improved their employability).

2. What does generic skills training cover?

- research skills (analysis and interpretation of data)
- creative thinking (development of strategies; use and management of resources, evaluation)
- logistics and strategic planning
- research management
- communication and interpersonal skills (including presentation skills)
- networking and team working
- career management
- writing
- teaching skills
- speed reading
- talking to media and to the public
- etc.

3. Staff offering generic skills training

- Participants agreed that the staff involved in skills training should include both academics that are active in research and understand the need to teach other skills and external consultants (e.g. industry, companies). However, this is limited by financial resources. The university should commit itself to offer generic skills training.
- DAAD (Germany) provides money to set up Graduate schools which incorporate generic skills training.

4. Career development

- Bringing industry to generic skills training;
- Writing CV for different jobs – CV for academia and/ or for industry;
- Working with recruiters (Paris 6) – university cooperates with recruiters from companies and industries who follow personal development of doctoral candidates and offer them a job – recruiters are then invited back to reflect on their experience with young doctoral graduates;
- Competency profile of a doctor (K.U.Leuven) – the aim is to identify the skills and competences a PhD should gain during doctoral studies and to indicate an added value of a doctoral degree –important for the doctoral candidate and for the outside world (doctoral degree = a quality label); www.kuleuven.be/phd
- Proposal: Diploma supplement also for doctoral graduates (with a skills training description): Swedish School of Economics in Helsinki provides Diploma Supplement for PhDs.