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MARDS
REFORMING PHD STUDIES

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Key Action 2 – Capacity Building in Higher Education

Guidelines and recommendations for WB academics and professionals in doctoral studies

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Report prepared by:

UMB in Banská Bystrica

UNIVERZITA MATEJA BELA

Partners in the Project

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P15: Association for professionals in doctoral education – **PRIDE**

P16: Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania – **UCCIAL**

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1. Introduction

Guidelines and recommendations for West Balkan academics and professionals in doctoral studies were produced within the MARDS project in autumn 2020. They aim at supporting sustainable capacities in the field of doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania. The main objective of the MARDS project has been to rebuild doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania in lines with the *Salzburg Principles*[1] and the *Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training*[2] and to establish sustainable and modern pilot joint (collaborative) doctoral programmes or schools between two partner countries that would serve as an example of good practice for the whole West Balkan Region.

These guidelines and recommendations have been prepared first on the basis of three deliverables written during the MARDS project: D1.1 – Report on the State-of-the-Art in Doctoral Education in Montenegro and Albania and Comparison with EU Practices; D3.1 – Report on Funding of Doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania and D2.1 Report on academic and professional training of WB staff/ professionals/ administrative. Additionally, numerous European reports, studies and recommendations have been used in order to prepare this document.[3]

Doctoral Education in Europe: a Short Overview

Doctoral education in Europe has gone through a significant transformation in the first two decades of the 21st century. This transformation has been a result of several challenges: the changing nature of the labour market in the globalised economy; the European Union's common agenda in research and education, which tends to make Europe the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world; and the intergovernmental European initiative called the Bologna Process, the aim of which has been to create the European Higher Education Area by implementing reforms that would improve cooperation among European universities, raise

[1] Salzburg Principles: https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/salzburg%20recommendations%202005.pdf;
[2] Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training: https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/policy_library/principles_for_innovative_doctoral_training.pdf
[3] References can be found in the list of references at the end of the document.

quality, foster mobility of students and academic staff, and increase the employability of graduates. The Bologna Process has been driven by participating forty eight countries (2020) from across wider Europe, including countries with a long history of the continuous development of higher education as well as those that joined the European mainstream only after the collapse of communism in the 1990s.

The reform of doctoral education in Europe (but also elsewhere) has to be seen in a broader context of the global social and economic changes affecting universities, their competitiveness, their pursuit of quality and their competition for talent. Approximately on the turn of millennia, doctoral education became a target of strong criticism, being described by critics as very costly, taking a long time, requiring highly-qualified research labour, producing unemployed people and showing low success rate as only about half of doctoral candidates complete their degree (e. g. Leonard 2000; Kendall 2002; Taylor-Beasley 2005). Critics from the business and industry world argued that the system only produced researchers for academia, and not for other sectors. In response to these arguments, numerous measures and instruments including structural changes have been introduced with the aim to improve quality and effectiveness of doctoral education in the first decades of the 21st century. The effort to change doctoral education was a common work of many stakeholders – universities, governments, public and private bodies, funding organisations, industry and business. They all collaborated in the belief that a sustainable supply of highly qualified researchers with doctoral degrees, capable of working in different sectors of the global economy, is the key to meeting Europe's ambitious policy goals.

Universities as the key institutions awarding doctoral degrees played and still play a crucial role in the doctoral education reform. Many of them have been involved in debates and activities initiated by the European University Association (EUA) and its Council for Doctoral Education (EUA-CDE). The main objective of EUA-CDE initiatives in this area has been to promote the exchange of good practice examples among universities and to encourage institutional, national and European cooperation in doctoral education and training.

Doctoral education in the course of history

Doctoral education (as a research education) has been since its beginnings in the early nineteenth century at the Humboldt University in Berlin and Université Pierre et Marie Curie in Paris based on an individual doctoral student´s original research project under the supervision of an experienced researcher. Originality of this research is at the heart of doctoral education. The degree PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) is awarded „to someone who has subject-matter mastery and has made a unique contribution to their field of knowledge.“[4] This key fact differentiates doctoral education from the first two cycles of higher education (Bachelor and Master). The third cycle is significantly different from these two cycles because its main component is original research performed by each doctoral candidate in an original and unique way. Doctoral education requires 3-4 years full time education (after the Master degree) and is based on an individual study/ research plan established for each doctoral candidate.

These days doctoral education has become more institutionalised and structured. Most responsibility for doctoral education is put on the institution, its structures and rules (as a result of criticism mentioned before). This means that also the rights and duties of both doctoral candidates and supervisors have changed, and the role of the supervisor has become more institutionalised and monitored.

Within the Bologna Process, doctoral education was defined as the third cycle of higher education in 2003. In many European countries it used to be known also as “postgraduate education” or “research training” before 2003. After the Bologna Process implementation, applicants accepted for doctoral studies started to be defined in most countries as “doctoral candidates” (in a position of either students or employees, depending on the country´s legislation). This means that up till now, doctoral candidates in different European countries might have a legal status either of students or of employees (or a combination of both). Despite their status, it is important to stress they should be considered early-stage researchers at the beginning of their careers and should be given all commensurate rights, including health care, social security, and pension rights.

Expected outcomes of the doctoral degree and description of skills and compenences that a doctoral graduate should demonstrate have been defined in the so called Dublin descriptors.[5]

[4] Cahusac de Caux, B. 2019, p. 9.

[5] The Dublin Descriptors are the HE cycle descriptors presented in 2003 and adopted in 2005 as the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area. They offer generic statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with awards that represent the end of each of a Bologna

According to these decriptors, qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;
- have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;
- have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication;
- are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;
- can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;
- can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.[6]

The next paragraphs present the (selected) major trends in the development of doctoral education in Europe, followed by targeted guidelines and recommendations tailored for the institutions in the West Balkan Region. These guidelines and recommendations have been built on the chronology of all steps important to follow in any doctoral programme or school.

2. Guidelines and recommendations for the development of doctoral education in the WB Region

2.1. Structures, rules, procedures and processes

Criticism of doctoral education mentioned before led to na number of legislation changes in many countries and to restructuring of doctoral education at the institutional level. Universities, but also governments and funding bodies (e.g. institutions awarding doctoral scholarships)

cycle or level. A level descriptor includes the following five components: A/ Knowledge and understanding; B/ Applying knowledge and understanding, C/ Making judgements; D/ Communication; E/ Lifelong learning skills (see http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Dublin_Descriptors).

[6] http://www.ehea.info/cid102059/wg-frameworks-qualification-2003-2005.html

started to insist on more institutional responsibility for doctoral education and on establishing new structures that would manage doctoral education in a more professional way (instead of letting doctoral education just on the relationship between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor which was often the case before). In many countries a model of doctoral schools was introduced, in other countries doctoral programmes are still a prevailing structured model. Whatever the structure is chosen and legally possible, it is important to define and introduce clear regulations, procedures and processes in line with national legislation as well as with European standards and good practices. While the structured doctoral programmes meet very important requirements, e.g., in terms of transparency and quality assurance, the doctoral schools generally fulfill another important role: they additionally elevate the responsibility for a good doctoral experience to an institutional level. While the quality reference systems of the structured programmes can be found to a large extent in the contexts of the disciplines, then the doctoral schools fulfill more strongly the general promise of universities of preparing young scientists for their role in the rapidly changing knowledge society.

Recommendations:

1. Decide about the most suitable structure of doctoral education (doctoral programme or/and doctoral school) and establish clear rules and regulations (such as Directive on doctoral education) at your university.
2. Form a university committee of experts (ideally representatives of all faculties - if possible) responsible for doctoral education reform at your institution. Clearly define the committee´s main responsibilities for doctoral education at the highest university level.
3. Create a position/ positions (at the highest university level) of a professional in doctoral education who will be responsible for operative implementation of doctoral training and coordination of activities at the university level, such as data collection, surveys and their analyses as well as organisation of professional development courses for supervisors or transferable skills courses for doctoral candidates (in case doctoral schools with their administration cannot be established yet). This includes researchers who (for a limited period) take on an operative and leadership task, e.g. as Head of School or Programme Manager, as well as employees of the general administrative staff.

4. Allow individual (disciplinary) doctoral programmes or schools to define their own specific selection and assessment criteria, based on general institutional selection and admission criteria.
5. Support joint/ collaborative, interdisciplinary and intersectorial doctoral programmes or schools by discussing and defining specific conditions and criteria in these programmes.
6. Continuously support building and strengthening research capacities at the university in order to create an attractive research environment.

2.2. Selection and admission of doctoral candidates

Selection and admission of doctoral candidates is a crucial starting point in the process of doctoral education at any university. The university has to introduce clear and transparent procedures on the selection and admission of doctoral candidates. These procedures have to be available online. The key general entry requirement for doctoral education is a completed university education (the Master´s degree or equivalent). Specific entry requirements might be determined by individual doctoral programmes or schools. The selection of candidates should follow clear assessment criteria and is based on documented knowledge of the subject of research, motivation and other documented skills/ experience. To ensure a fair and high quality selection process, candidates are invited for a personal interview (which can be done also through online forms).

It is internationally accepted as common sense that the multiple-eye principle is applied in the admission process and that decisions are not made by a single person, whether it is only the supervisor or only the person responsible for the program. This also applies to interviews. Usually, 1) the candidate presents his/her research topic in front of a doctoral committee with a support of a potential supervisor; or 2) the candidate presents his/her research proposal in front of a doctoral committee, and the supervisor will be selected afterwards. Decision on admission is done by the doctoral committee. The selected candidates will be informed within a certain period of time (usually seven to ten days).

Recommendations:

1. Selection and admission criteria for doctoral candidates established by the university and faculty bodies (departments, institutes or doctoral schools) have to be publicly available on the official university and faculty websites, preferably in both the national language and in English. The call for new positions is enouraged to be published also on EURAXESS.
2. The publicly available description of each doctoral programme/ school and its specific requirements have to be clearly defined in order to encourage most motivated candidates.
3. Ideally, the doctoral programme's website also provides comprehensive information about potential supervisors and their research expertise.

2.3. Supervision

Supervision remains the key component of doctoral education – from the beginnings of its history up till now. The relationship between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor is crucial for the successful completion of doctoral studies. Numerous studies have been written about this important issue. However, much has been changed in the course of the recent developments in doctoral education. The change is related to institutional expectations of supervisors (and candidates as well). Instiututional expectations of supervisors now include numerous activities that should be defined in institutional guidelines.[7] They also propose a possibility (depending on national legislation) of a team supervision and offer opportunities for the professional development of supervisors.

Recommendations:

1. Define clear requirements for doctoral supervisors in the institutional doctoral education regulations or specific guidelines for supervision (e. g. define who can be a supervisor on the basis of his/her research achievements; describe supervisors´

[7] For more details see: Taylor, S. & Beasley, N. 2005. *A Handbook for Doctoral Supervisors*, New York, Routledge; or Brentel, H. 2018. *Doctoral Supervision´. Handbook for Establishing a Productive and Supportive Supervision Culture*, Nűrnberg: KDD.

duties and obligations; indicate maximum number of supervisees per supervisor or requirements for a minimum number of meetings).

2. Introduce clear procedures to terminate the right of supervision for those academics who do not provide sufficient research performance or repeatedly neglected their duties as supervisors.
3. Encourage new (but not only) supervisors to take part in professional development seminars for doctoral supervisors (various ways of this motivation and support are possible).
4. If legally possible, support multiple supervision (e. g. one principal supervisor and one or two co-supervisors/ mentors).
5. Define the procedure how to change a supervisor if the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee does not work (e. g. introduce a position of an independent doctoral education ombudsperson).

2.4. Establishing an individual study/ research plan

After the successful enrollment to doctoral studies, the doctoral candidate in close collaboration with his/her supervisor is expected to prepare an individiual study/ research plan. This plan has to include the project title and research project ideas (objectives, methodology), proposed subject-related as well as transferable skills courses (mandatory and optional) and timetable of all activities and milestones.

Recommendations:

1. Provide a template or form for the individual study and research plan as a guiding document.
2. Define criteria for an individual study and research plan (it should contain project title, research plan, study plan (courses), ECTS, timetable, supervision plan/ number of meetings and reference to institutional ethical guidelines).
3. Define reviewing of individual plans on at least an annual basis. Annual follow-up can take place individually or in a group and its aim is to follow the progress of work and to decide on required revisions. Each doctoral candidate prepares a report on his/her achievements prior the annual follow-up meeting.
4. Make sure that these annual follow-up meetings are documented on programme or school level.

2.5. Public defence

In all countries, a doctoral dissertation is required for the award of doctoral degree. It is usually presented and defended orally in public.

Recommendations:

1. Define transparent procedures of final public defence in the institutional regulations (the nomination of the Dissertation/ Examination Committee and its Chair; appointment of opponents – experts in the topic of the dissertation, coming from other institutions; timetable of all steps; the way how the date and place are chosen; structure of the event).
2. Clearly describe (available on the website) the required format and general structure of the dissertation (it may be a monograph or a compilation dissertation, based on a number of original papers with a comprehensive summary).
3. All dissertations must be checked for plagiarism.
4. Doctoral degree can be awared to a doctoral candidate who successfully defended the dissertation and fulfilled all other requirements (e. g. completion of the doctoral studies on time, achievement of required ECTS credits, publication of research results in peer-reviewed journals or books, participation in conferences etc.).

2.6. Supporting Quality Assurance

As doctoral education across Europe has been more structured and the number of doctoral candidates has been increasing, accountability has become very important. In addition to national evaluations and accreditations, internal quality assurance procedures have been implemented in many institutions. The reasons for setting up quality assurance in doctoral education have been not only to ensure accountability and transparency, but to engage in a process of continued quality enhancement. It is crucial to ensure that „*the necessary research capacity is at hand, that the research environment is inclusive and inspiring and that supervision is adequate*“ (Byrne, Jorgensen, Loukkola 2013: 42).[8]

[8] Byrne, J., Jorgensen, T. and Loukkola, T. 2013. Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education – results of the ARDE project. Brussels: EUA.

Similarly, the EU Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training (2011) also stress the importance of quality assurance. „*The goal of quality assurance in doctoral education should be to enhance the quality of the research environment as well as promoting transparent and accountable procedures for topics such as admission, supervision, awarding the doctorate degree and career developlment. It is important to stress that this is not about the quality assurance of the PhD itself rather the process or life cycle, from recruitment to graduation*."[9]

In this line, all principles of quality assurance should be seen as the key requirements in the preparation of new doctoral programmes / schools in the WB countries.

Recommendation:

1. Establish processes for evaluating and monitoring of doctoral education at your university:
    a. document annually time-to-degree and completion rates;
    b. monitor quality of the research environment;
    c. monitor quality of internal regulations and guidelines – such as guidelines for admission, for supervision and final defence;
    d. set up a system of tracking doctoral graduates and following their career development.

2.7. Joint/ collaborative doctoral programmes

Joint/ collaborative doctoral programmes are an excellent way to strengthen research collaboration between universities, research institutes (private or public), industries and start-ups. A joint or collaborative doctoral programme means that it is developed and provided by at least two universities, often in cooperation with other institutions, leading to the awarding of a double, multiple or joint degree. The candidate is usually registered at (at least) two universities/ institutions, „*having to comply with admission requirements and assessment regulations at both institutions*" (Mather-L´Huillier 2020). The reason universities prefer offering double degrees rather than jointly-awarded degrees is often practical in nature – for instance in case one country's legislation does not allow joint degrees. Joint doctoral education

[9] Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training, https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/policy_library/principles_for_innovative_doctoral_training.pdf

is not an easy option, however, it brings a lot of benefits both for the institutions involved and for doctoral candidates if it is organised properly.

Recommendations:

1. When planning a joint doctoral programme, set the criteria for selecting the right partners. „Mutual trust is essential for the development of successful joint programmes, it is therefore recommended to involve long term collaborative partners assessed both at academic and administrative level“ (JOIMAN Network Guidelines).[10]
2. Discuss possible legal differences and limitations from the start.
3. Discuss study workload and credit recognition, define a common strategy for credit transfer.
4. Prepare a detailed partnership agreement before the start, defining all academic, managerial and financial arrangements.
5. Negotiate common elements for quality assurance and produce a quality assurance charter with clear arrangements on methods and procedures to be used by all partners (including supervision – usuaally from both/ all involved institutions, study and research plans, ECTS, progress monitoring, procedure of submitting and defending final dissertation, doctoral degree certificate and diploma supplement)
6. Establish a steering committee with a clear division of tasks for communication, search for funding, and feedback for quality assurance.[11]

A first step towards internationalization and cooperation in the doctoral programme can already be the co-supervision of individual candidates with scholars from other/foreign universities. A next, more formal step would then be the setting up of co-tutelle agreements, still at the level of individual candidates. Even if these approaches seem less complex and therefore easier to implement, it should be noted that international quality standards are also applied here as referred to in this document.

[10] University of Bologna, 2011. How to manage joint study programmes? Guidelines and practices from Joiman Network: Guidelines and Good Practices from the Joiman Network. https://www.joiman.eu/ProjectResults/PublicDeliverables/How%20to%20Manage%20Joint%20Study%20Programmes%20-%20Final%20Publication%20of%20the%20project/How%20to%20Manage%20Joint%20Study%20Programmes__JOIMAN%20Network.pdf

[11] Ibid.

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