

Doctoral Education in European Perspective

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CiCe guides
for research
students and
supervisors

6



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Doctoral Education in European Perspective:
*Scoping the Potentials of an International,
Interdisciplinary Doctoral Degree*

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Contents

Introduction	1
Schools in Iceland offering a PhD	4
PhD education in Hungary	8
Doctoral Studies in Italy	11
On PhD courses in Sweden	14
Doctoral study in the UK	16
References	20

Introduction

Márta Fülöp

The doctorate is the highest academic degree that a university can award to a student who has successfully completed a defined programme of work in a particular field of study. PhD education forms a very significant part of higher education across Europe. There are many more PhD students than ever before and with significant expansion during the last decades in the numbers of undergraduate students these numbers are likely to increase still further (Davies et al, 2006).

The doctoral award signifies an ability to contribute to the relevant discipline or professional area (Powell and Green, 2007) and despite different traditions and actual processes of doctoral education the PhD is recognized all over the world and seen as a standard for entry into research and academic professions.

Still there is a growing need in all stakeholders to compare, to tune and to have a common framework for a common action. For example the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Young Researchers <http://www.eurodoc.net/> is an international federation of national organisations of PhD candidates, and more generally of young researchers from 33 countries of the European Union and the Council of Europe. EURODOC's objectives are among others: to represent doctoral candidates and junior researchers at the European level in matters of education, research, and professional development of their careers and to advance the quality of doctoral programmes and the standards of research activity in Europe.

The European University Association (EUA) launched the Doctoral Programmes Project in order to identify good practices in doctoral education within Europe and published its first results in 2005 <http://www.unimc.it/sda/internazionalizzazione/doctor-europeaus/ed.pdf>

It was found that there is considerable diversity in the structure and organisation of doctoral programmes. However, increasing harmonisation of the higher education landscape across Europe, driven by the Bologna Agenda (van der Wende, 2000), will inevitably promote further convergence of national systems of doctoral education.

International degrees

Because the doctorate takes a number of different forms in different countries to establish international degrees is a complicated task, and the idea of a European Doctorate implies the joint efforts of higher education institutes to establish collaboration. For a long time comparative studies, that may be able to provide basis for setting up joint degrees, have been almost completely lacking at the level of the doctorate. Powell and Green (2007) in their book *The doctorate worldwide* systematically analyze the structure of doctoral education in 18 countries including seven from Europe (Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, and the UK) to inform the sector about the current state of doctoral awards worldwide.

The University of Rome La Sapienza (IT), took a pioneer step, when as a coordinating university, it developed the first EU-approved European Doctoral Programme with 12 other partner universities around a particular scholarly topic i.e. Social Representations and Communication (De Rosa, 2008).

In her summary of her accumulated experiences Annamaria de Rosa (2010, http://www.europhd.eu/html/doc/derosa_cordoba.pdf) describes that an international/joint doctorate commits institutions to integrate all the phases of planning, implementing and awarding of a joint diploma. According to her, the future model of doctoral education is based on cooperative research teams, multiple mentors, international mobility, multi-language skills etc. She presents in detail the “musts” for establishing a joint/European International Doctorate. The list includes all phases of doctoral education from admission to awarding the degree. Obviously this means jointly established and accepted procedure for admission requirements, fees, length of study, credits, choice of supervisor, number of supervisors, composition of the dissertation committee etc.

Interdisciplinarity

In addition to internationalisation (Europeanization) of doctoral degrees there is a growing tendency to promote interdisciplinary doctoral education as well. The EUA Council of Doctoral Education in its newsletter (December, 2010, issue 10, http://www.phdcentre.eu/nl/publicaties/documents/EUANewsIssue10_LYpublicatieHS.pdf) discusses the implementation of the so called Salzburg principles (2005) underlining that doctoral programmes should reflect interdisciplinary approach.

But interdisciplinary doctoral programmes are relatively rare, in spite of the fact that the study searching for good practice in European doctoral education conducted by the EUA in 2005 considered it good practice if instead of disciplinary based knowledge production doctoral students worked in multidisciplinary research projects.

Manathunga et al (2006) define four key dimensions of potential interdisciplinary doctoral pedagogy: 1. situated learning experience; 2. intercultural knowledge to enable research students to move beyond disciplinary cultural relativism; 3. enhancing higher order thinking to cope with multiple disciplinary perspectives; 4. increasing students' epistemological understandings of their original discipline and how this knowledge relates to and sometimes conflicts with that of other disciplines.

Scoping for an interdisciplinary doctoral education in citizenship: the future

Authors of the present Guide are members of the CiCe Network's Capacity Building: Future Researchers Working Group. They represent a range of expertise across 5 European countries (Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Sweden and the UK) and different academic disciplines and professional contexts (education, history and psychology).

The group has been working together for three years and ran three successful research student conferences and workshops focusing on research topics related to citizenship issues. Altogether 36 research students of different disciplines and national origin participated in the programme that consisted of paper presentations, peer reviews, group discussions, tutorials, and research related workshops. Work that has been done addressed those key dimensions that Manathunga et al (2006) mention in relation to interdisciplinary doctoral pedagogy and what Lattuca (2002) suggested i.e. to create personal, interpersonal and communal intellectual contexts that are conducive to interdisciplinary exchange.

In this guide we provide five case studies i.e. we describe five different doctoral programme traditions and practices in five European countries: Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Sweden and the UK. In order to do this we all followed the same 'template' addressing pre-specified issues. We paid attention to the structural characteristics of the different systems in order to point to those practices that are antagonistic and to those that are relatively easy to harmonize. For instance in Sweden all supervisors have to undertake training before taking the lead of a doctoral work, this is not the case in the other four countries. The length of full-time doctoral studies is 3 years in Hungary, for example, and 4 years in Sweden. There is no official credit system at the doctoral level in the University of Rome La Sapienza in case of history but a very strict credit system in the psychology doctoral education in Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary. In the UK there is no public defence only the examiners and the director of studies are present, while defence is public in Iceland and even family members can participate with questions.

In this guide we provide some insight into the structural aspects of research degree studies in certain European countries that are highly different in terms of their expenditure on research and development, Sweden spending the biggest proportion of its GDP and Hungary the smallest (OECD, 2005 cited by Powell and Green, 2007). The reader, in making comparisons along the provided dimensions, will quickly see that there is no aspect that is the same in all five examined countries. This means that in order to set up a joint/international/interdisciplinary doctoral degree there are many compromises to be made. Furthermore, it may be a much greater challenge to construct the intellectual content and research direction of a doctoral programme around a particular topic, in our case citizenship, especially in consideration of multidisciplinary approaches. Based on the rich experience that has been accumulated within the CiCe Network on doctoral research work in relation to citizenship and having an understanding about the crucial practical issues to be solved, we consider ourselves well prepared to make progress in this respect and indeed plan to develop a European Centre of Excellence in relation to research in identity and citizenship.

Schools in Iceland offering a PhD.

Sigrún Adalbjarnardóttir

In Iceland, the Ministry of Culture and Education develops the rules for doctoral programmes in universities in the country,¹ including the goals for doctoral studies and the general qualifications of supervisors. The ministry also provides permission to universities to run doctoral programmes, based on requirements for accreditation, which the universities must fulfil.

A Short history

Founded in 1911, the University of Iceland (UI) is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2011. The other six universities were established in the past 20 years. Those that do have a licence to run a doctoral programme have a short tradition of doing so, and have very few doctoral students at this point. Accordingly, this report focuses on the doctoral programme at the University of Iceland.

As of the year 2000, a total of 89 persons had completed a PhD degree at the UI. Over the last ten years (2000 to 2010) a total of 92 persons completed a PhD. Thus, the UI has experienced considerable growth in doctoral studies in recent years with an increase in the number of students and diversification in the courses offered. The number of registered doctoral students at the university is ten times that of a decade ago (500 in 2011).

The UI began its formal PhD program in 2004. Until then the tradition was that when a student had worked on a specific academic issue, often for a long time, she or he handed the thesis in for evaluation. Most Icelandic students who wanted to complete a doctoral degree went abroad to universities all over the world. They came back with various experiences that have been viewed as strengths within academia in Iceland. Many citizens of Iceland still go abroad for their doctoral studies.

The objectives and regulations of doctoral studies at the UI

In 2004 UI approved a frame of reference and quality requirements for doctoral studies at the UI. These documents state that the objective of doctoral studies is to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct independent scientific research and to acquire new knowledge and do practical work requiring skilful use of scientific methods, both in Iceland and abroad.

Doctoral studies at the UI come under two sets of regulations. First, as mentioned above, the UI has a general framework for regulating doctoral studies.² The Centre for Graduate Studies oversees and follows the criteria and requirements that ensure the quality of

¹ Rule no. 37/2007, Article 7 of law no. 63/2006, issued by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture on 17th January 2006: <http://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?ID=e38bc3ce-a822-4c6c-af76-d4e5766a7d02>.

² Rules for the University of Iceland nr. 569/2009 regarding master's and doctoral graduates (articles 66-70).

graduate studies, at both the M.A. and PhD. levels. The criteria form the basis for quality control. Three sets of key criteria are (1) the general criteria, including the frame that refers to internationally acknowledged prerequisites for the quality of doctoral studies; (2) professional criteria, such as minimum requirements for the education and the supervisory experience and research activities of teachers and specialists; and (3) physical criteria that refer to the physical environment that supervisors, programmes, and departments provide to doctoral students, such as conditions of study and opportunities to participate in research, conferences, and collaboration internationally.

Second, in line with the general framework of regulation, each of the five schools—Education, Engineering and Natural Sciences, Health Sciences, Humanities, and Social Sciences—has special regulations. They and their faculties organize doctoral studies in their area, and faculties are responsible for content, structure, and implementation.

For example, within the School of Education issues concerning doctoral studies fall under the auspices of the Doctoral Board. The Doctoral Board comprises representatives from all faculties in the School of Education, in addition to a representative of the dean and a student representative. The role of the committee is to formulate policy on the organisation and implementation of the doctoral studies. As a form of quality control, the UI plans to have the doctoral programmes at each school evaluated every four years.

The entry process and admission requirements

Admission qualifications and fees.

Faculty regulations stipulate the university degrees (research M.A. or M.S. degree) required for individual admission to doctoral studies, along with minimum grades in previous studies (usually an average grade of 7,25 out of 10). In addition to this information applicants must provide a CV, recommendations from previous professors, and a detailed research proposal. The annual fee for study is around EUR 250.

Grants and loans.

Two funds within UI offer grants to full-time doctoral students: the Eimskip fund of the University of Iceland, and the Research Fund of the University of Iceland for Doctoral Studies. In light of the amount of grant money available each year, the grants awarded are based on the qualifications of the applicants (the professor and the PhD. student) and the research plan. Professors can also apply for a proposed doctoral student; if a grant is offered in a specific area it is advertised both nationally and internationally so that it will also attract students from abroad. In 2011 almost 30% of the applicants will receive a grant for up to three years. Doctoral candidates can also apply for travel grants to present their research at international conferences held abroad. Furthermore, the UI offers grants for teachers' assistants supervised by the university's various schools.

Outside the UI, Rannis, the Icelandic Centre for Research, administers the Icelandic Research Fund and offers grants comparable to those provided by the university. The Icelandic Student Loan Fund provides doctoral students with loans.

Credits and length of study

Doctoral studies at UI are usually conducted on an individual basis and take 3 to 5 years (180-300 ECTS). For example, within the School of Education the PhD. programme comprises a 120-180 credits (ECTS) dissertation and 30-60 credits (ECTS) of coursework. Based on their background, and in consultation with their supervisor/s, doctoral students enrol in courses in theory and methodology to provide them with knowledge and skills to carry out the research project, ending in the doctoral defence. Faculty regulations specify the accepted and maximum duration of studies. Most schools require that doctoral students spend at least a semester during their course of study participating in scholarly activities at a university or research centre abroad. All requirements must be met within four years if the candidate is enrolled in full-time studies.

Supervisor and doctoral committee

The main emphasis in doctoral studies is on research and students work under the tutelage of a supervisor. The supervisor must have completed a doctoral degree, have experience supervising research, and have published in respected international journals. A supervisor is appointed for each doctoral candidate when they begin their studies. In addition, the faculty appoint a doctoral committee of 3 to 5 experts for each doctoral candidate. At least one of them must be someone who does not hold a full-time position on the faculty. Doctoral students often conduct their studies in cooperation with foreign universities. They may conduct part of their studies abroad (required by some schools), or, quite commonly, a representative from the foreign university may be a member of the doctoral committee.

Dissertation and defence process

Dissertation requirements.

The doctoral dissertation must fulfil the UI's requirements for professional and scientific work methods and make an independent contribution to knowledge creation in the academic field. The dissertation can be in a traditional form (monograph) or can consist of several published journal articles. It can be written in English or Icelandic; in fact English is recommended to facilitate international collaboration.

Evaluation of the research proposal.

As one example of how work is evaluated in the doctoral process, within the School of Education the doctoral student submits a research proposal for assessment, no later than two years after beginning studies. Before that submission, the Doctoral Board first

discusses a request from the supervisor and the doctoral committee and decides whether the student should be given the opportunity to submit the proposal for assessment.

The proposal is assessed in two stages. First, the student presents his or her proposal to the school's staff and graduate students. Then a meeting is held with the supervisor/s (doctoral committee) and two evaluators who are external to the School of Education and are specialists in the relevant research field. The student's proposal and performance are assessed and the findings are submitted to the Doctoral Board which determines the next steps. The board comments on whether or not the student's knowledge and research skills are sufficient and what the student must do to respond to the findings of the evaluation committee.³

Doctoral defence and external examiners.

The doctoral candidate defends his or her dissertation at a ceremony, a public meeting at the UI led by the dean of the faculty. The opponents for the doctoral defence must be two independent experts who are not part of the doctoral committee. They are appointed by each school on the suggestion of the doctoral committee. One of the opponents must be from outside the school. The supervisor and the doctoral committee are not part of the defence panel. If the dissertation is written in English then one of the opponents must be from an overseas university. The opponents are required to write a report on the merits and shortcomings of the thesis and must state whether they recommend it for a public defence. They send their comments to the doctoral candidate and the committee before the public meeting. In some cases they send their questions a couple of days before the defence to give the doctoral candidate an opportunity to prepare answers, but in other cases they raise their questions during the defence.

At the ceremony, first the doctoral candidate gives an overview of his or her thesis. Then one of the opponents gives his or her comments and raises questions that the doctoral student responds to; the other opponent follows the same routine. At the ceremony, family, friends, fellow students, and faculty members gather and also have the opportunity to ask questions of the candidate. Towards the end, the opponents leave the room to discuss and come to an agreement about whether the candidate has passed. They sign a special form accordingly and announce their conclusion. Having completed the doctoral program the 'new doctor' gives a party to celebrate with all those who were involved in this long and challenging process.

³ Guide for Doctoral Studies, School of Education, University of Iceland, January, 2011.

PhD education in Hungary

Márta Fülöp

In Hungary the National Accreditation Committee has established certain criteria concerning which universities are allowed to offer doctoral education and in which areas of study. A Doctoral School can be accredited only where there are a certain number of professors who are full time members and where there are also professors who in addition hold the Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences degree. A professor can be a regular member of a Doctoral School only if he /she has been approved by the National Doctoral Board. Approval is based on the scientific degree, research and publication record and all have to be outstanding. In addition to this, professors can be a regular member of a doctoral school if they have at least one doctoral student who has successfully defended his/her degree.

The National Doctoral Board has an open website with details of Doctoral Schools, regular professors' achievement and also their accreditation. Professors who are accredited by the Board can use the MAB (*M (Hungarian) A (Accreditation) B (Board)*) marque on their website next to their name.

Professors publicise the range of topics they offer to doctoral students each year on the website of the Hungarian Doctoral Board.

Short history of PhD education in Hungary

Before 1993 there were three different academic degrees in Hungary: a doctoral degree awarded by the universities, a 'Candidate of Science' degree and a 'Doctor of Science' degree which were higher degrees than the university doctorate and were awarded by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The doctoral degree was typically given to young scholars, the 'Candidate of Science' to advanced researchers in their middle age and the 'Doctor of Science' for a lifetime of scientific achievement in old age.

This system gradually changed after the 1989 political changes. The main reasons were political and scientific. First of all, the three-level degree system was identical with the Soviet scientific system and after the political changes there was a clear intention to break with traditions that came from the Soviet Union. Another goal was to have a scientific degree system that was compatible not with the former Soviet block's system but with the western (US and European) degree system, based on the PhD, as the sole degree awarded (Fináncz, 2008).

Since 1993, following the legislative changes in Hungarian education law, the PhD appears as the only official academic degree, but the 'Doctor of Science' (the former highest level of academic degree) remains as a title awarded by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Fináncz, 2008). The new PhD and DLA (Doctor of Liberal Arts) degrees,

function under the control of higher education institutes (the first time since the end of the second World War) and are compatible with the requirements of the Bologna Process (Fináncz, 2008).

The entry process and admission requirements

The applicant should have a Masters Degree. To apply for doctoral studies in psychology it is not necessary to have a psychology MA, medical doctors, economists, sociologists etc. may also apply. In their case they have to cover and take exams in some extra courses during their doctoral studies. The applicant has to have at least one intermediate level of foreign language exam, preferably English.

The application requires a CV, the grade of the MA Degree (preferably outstanding), if possible recommendations of previous professors, and a detailed research proposal. Applicants also have to participate in an admission interview. The interview is carried out by the head of the Doctoral School and at least two additional regular members of the doctoral school.

Full time/part time status

Both full time status and part time status are allowed. The duration of the full-time doctoral studies is 3 years. Students are expected to cover a certain number of courses within this period. At the end of their 3 years of studies they must take a final exam, the 'absolutorium'. After the 'absolutorium' the student has exactly two more years to write the dissertation. Full time students get a salary during their 3 years of study from the university. The number of full time students all over Hungary is decided centrally by the Hungarian Doctoral Board each year and is open to the public. Part-time students do not get a salary, on the contrary they are expected to pay for each semester of their course.

Courses and credits

Each doctoral student has to collect 180 credit points (ECT) in order to proceed towards the final exam. At least 16 courses have to be accomplished during 6 semesters. During each semester at least 30 credit points have to be collected. One course is 7 credit points. Additional credit points are given for publications, research work and teaching. By the end of the studies at least 3 publications are required.

Length of study

The shortest length of study is 3 years, but it is highly unusual to finish the research work, the necessary publications and the dissertation itself during the study period. The most common length of time is 5 years (3 years courses + 2 years research and writing) and it is not uncommon in the case of part time students to finish only after 6-8 years,

Supervisors

Not only a regular member of the Doctoral School can be a supervisor, but the person has to be approved by the particular Doctoral School Board. The doctoral student candidate may indicate which professor's research topic he/she wants to join. The supervisor has to accept the doctoral student. Students may choose more than one supervisor and are also allowed to change supervisors (if permission is given) and there is a valid case. The supervisor guides candidates during the whole process of their doctoral study.

Dissertation and defence process

Once students have successfully completed their doctoral studies, passed the final exam and have a recognised research record, it is only the dissertation that is still left. The dissertation can be written in Hungarian or in English in the case of Psychology. The Doctoral Board of the university sets up a Dissertation Committee of 5 members (president, secretary and 3 additional members) and also appoints the two independent opponents who are supposed to review the dissertation. At least one opponent has to be an external examiner, being a professor at another university or research institute. The supervisor is not involved in any stages of the dissertation defence process. The two opponents are required to write a written report of the thesis highlighting its merits and criticizing its shortcomings. Finally they have to state if they recommend the work for public defence.

The candidate receives the opponents' opinions and has to prepare a written answer to the critical remarks the opponents raise i.e. defending the work.

The actual defence takes place in public in front of the Dissertation Committee. Sometimes even more than hundred people (professors, fellow doctoral students, family members, friends etc.) can sit in the audience. First the candidate gives a short presentation of the research and its results. Then the opponents read aloud their review and it is followed by the candidate reading aloud his or her answers. Then the committee withdraws and votes about the defence. In order to pass at least 66 percent of the votes (5-point scale) have to be gained. The voting is secret and the results – depending on the percentage of votes – can be "summa cum laude", "cum laude", or "rite". Not only the committee members, but also the opponents vote.

After a successful defence the new doctoral student gives a party for the committee members, opponents, supervisors, friends and family members.

Doctoral Studies in Italy

Luigi Cajani

General Regulations

PhD courses were first introduced in the Italian academic system in 1980. There is a common framework regulation for all Italian universities.⁴

Every university is free to activate its own PhD courses according to its resources, also in consortium with other Italian or foreign universities and with private or public institutions with a high scientific profile. All of them must contribute to the funding of the PhD course. In these cases the partner institutions create a mixed PhD Board.

The Rectorate of each university decides every year how many places will be available to students in each PhD course, and every year opens for this purpose an international competition.

The entry process/including admission requirements

In order to be admitted to the competition students must have an MA or similar degree from an Italian or a foreign university. In the latter case the equivalence of the degree is decided by the PhD Board.

Candidates first undergo a written examination, followed by the discussion of the research project with the board of the PhD course.

Foreign students can also be accepted as supernumerary students without a grant: in this case they will not undergo the written examination but must produce instead a dossier giving evidence of their curriculum and the research project (in Italian, English or French). If the dossier is positively evaluated, students will be admitted to the discussion of their project together with the other candidates.

Full time/part time status

At least half of the winners must receive a grant, whose amount is decided by every university. The grant can be increased by 50% in case of research time spent abroad, which must be authorized by the PhD Board. All PhD students are full time.

PhD students have to pay an annual fee whose amount is decided by the university. After the first year the PhD Board can decide that PhD students without a grant and with a very good performance can be exempted from the further annual fees. The PhD Board can offer PhD students the possibility of subsidiary teaching activities for no more than 50 hours per year.

The PhD course in history at the Dipartimento di Storia, Culture, Religioni (Department for History, Cultures and Religions) at Sapienza in Rome

The PhD course "Società, politica e culture dal tardo medioevo all'età contemporanea" (*History, politics and cultures from the late Middle Ages to Contemporary History*), activated by the Dipartimento di

⁴ Legge 21 febbraio 1980, n.28 and D.P.R. 11 luglio 1980, n.382, modified by Legge n°341/1990 and Legge n°210/1998.

Storia, Cultura, Religioni (*Department for History, Cultures and Religion*) at Sapienza in Rome was first established 1990 with the title "Politica e società nella storia dell'età moderna e contemporanea" (*Politics and Society in Modern and Contemporary History*). It is currently ruled by a PhD Board of 18 professors and lecturers of the Department.

Joint degrees have been activated with the following universities: Paris X Nanterre, University of Birmingham, Freie Universität Berlin, Université de Provence Aix-Marseille, Université Montpellier 3 "Paul Valéry". These are not additional bilateral PhD courses but joint degrees created for a particular student, if his/her research project makes it useful or necessary.

Supervisors

Every PhD students is given a supervisor selected by the PhD Board among its members. In case particular competences are needed, a second supervisor can be chosen outside the PhD Board. In case of joint degrees with PhD courses of other universities, each institution selects one supervisor.

Length of study

The course lasts three years and the continuation of students into the next year of their studies is decided by the PhD Board on the basis of the research done and their attendance of the teaching activities. PhD students can obtain from the PhD Board additional time for finishing their thesis.

Teaching program: courses and credits

There is no credit system. The PhD Board is free to decide about the internal teaching program, which is held by its members. There are general seminars, which all PhD students are supposed to attend. Their number and subject are very flexible. The very focus of a PhD course in history is on individual research. The PhD Board also organizes, according to the particular features of the research projects of every PhD student, stages and other research activities in other Italian and foreign institutions. They include the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris, the Maison de la Méditerranée in Aix en Provenne, the Istituto Europeo in Florence, the Italian universities in Trento, Venezia, Firenze e Palermo, the University of Freiburg in Germany and the University of Salzburg in Austria, and the most important research structures in Rome: the Archivio di Stato, the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, the Fondazione Gramsci, the Fondazione Sturzo, the Enciclopedia Italiana, the Centro di Ricerche su Roma in the Università di Roma Tre, the Biblioteca di Storia moderna e Contemporanea and the Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede.

Dissertation and defence process

The final thesis can be written in a foreign language, with the agreement of the PhD Board. There are no special requirements in terms of length etc.

The PhD Board selects externally, the three members of the examination Board for the final exam. At least two of the examiners have to belong to another university. The examiners read the thesis in advance but the student is not informed about this evaluation before the defense actually takes place. The supervisor cannot be part of the examination board and cannot vote. The exam is public and consists of an open discussion with the candidate along the examiners' questions. The Examination Board expresses the following grades (which are actually called "giudizio"): buono, molto buono, ottimo (= good, very good, excellent).

On PhD courses, Sweden

Roger Johansson

A short history

In 1969 the old doctoral degree was abolished, and was replaced by a doctorate, PhD (Br graduate studies, Am research study). It was turned into a more formalized post-graduate studies, more limited in time – four years – and with doctoral courses giving credit points and still, as its most important part – a dissertation.

Earlier on, the doctoral studies had been an individual project between the doctoral student and his or her tutor, and was also unlimited in time. Everyone who had the formal qualifications was accepted. Many, both doctoral students and tutors alike, had the idea of a dissertation as a result of a life long work. It could take 10-15 or 20 years before it – hopefully - was finished.

All education in Sweden is free, without any fees for Swedish citizens. Although there was a change in 2011 for foreign students. Up to last year foreign students were also included, but now foreign students have to pay a fee to enter Swedish Universities.

In the reform for higher Education at the Universities in 1998 new regulations for PhD education were decided. The most important change was to limit the number of PhD students and the time for the PhD studies to four years. The way of doing this was to give every PhD student a monthly salary – at present – 2000-2600 Euros monthly. The salary is paid for four years and for full time studies, and there are normally no possibilities to expand the time limit for the doctoral studies.

The entry process and admission requirements

There is an allocation of resources every year to the faculties and the Institutions within the University and – on a national scale – to the different Universities in Sweden and from research foundations outside the Universities. When the University/Institution has got enough money to accept a PhD student, the institution has to advertise it in public for an open application process, where admission requirements and rules for admission are announced.

Normally an MA degree is required as a qualification in a relevant subject for the application. The staff meeting at the Institution decides about who will be in the committee to handle the applications and to rank the applicants. The committee consists of Associate Professors and Professors, all full time staff at the Institution.

When the committee has ranked the applications the Staff meeting decides who will be accepted and sends the decision to the faculty board who (normally) confirms the decision. The decision and the ranking list with reasons for the decisions will be public so all applicants can appeal against the decision within three weeks.

Every PhD student must have an *individual study programme* decided by the PhD student and the tutor together, and once a year sent to the faculty board for confirmation.

Full time/part time status

Normally the time for a doctorate is four years full time studies. It is not allowed to have less than half time (50%) studies (except for a short time). In that case the time for the studies will be expanded to eight years.

Supervisors

Every PhD student must have two tutors and in some cases it can be three. The staff meeting at the Institution decides who they will suggest (normally it is Professors or Associate Professors and at least one of them has to be a full time member of the faculty staff), and propose those names for the PhD student, who must agree. Alternatively, he or she can suggest other professors for tutors.

Nearly all Universities in Sweden have a programme for tutors which qualifies them to be a tutor for PhD students. The number of days differs between different Universities. In Malmö University it is 15 days full time and you must have fulfilled the programme to qualify to apply for an Associate Professor or a Professorship.

Courses and credits

The time for the doctoral studies is four years and gives 240 credit points (ECT). Normally the courses give 60 or 90 credit points and the dissertation 180 or 150 credit points.

The average length of the doctoral process according to the Degree Ordinance is four years, but as a result of traditions and the international discourses, the length is in reality often longer, but without financial support from the Institution..

Dissertation and defence process

The dissertation has to be defended in public with an opponent decided by the faculty and a grade committee of three Associate Professors or Professors. There is always an audience and sometimes there can be more than hundred listeners. After the opponents have finished and the grade committee have asked their questions, it is up to the audience to ask questions.

Finally the committee withdraws for closed discussion and after one or two hours they announce their decision, if they have give their approval or not. There is no graded marking scale.

Doctoral study in the UK

Penelope Harnett

Historical background

The PhD degree was introduced into the UK following the first world war in order to provide a similar level of graduate research training to countries such as Germany and the USA. Previously, the only doctorates available were the doctorates which were awarded in recognition of an illustrious and significant research career. This still continues today and most British universities award degrees honoris causa in order to recognise individuals who have made a substantial contribution in a particular field.

In the past 50 years there has been a considerable increase in the number of doctoral programmes covering the full range of disciplines in UK universities. Doctoral research is seen as the highest level of research and encompasses both taught and research elements. The past 20 years have seen the growth of professional doctorates – for education, health and social workers for example. Professional doctorates are required to include elements within the dissertation which analyse the impact of the research on professional practice. They also require students to complete a number of assessed pieces of work together with a dissertation.

UK Context

Doctoral programmes within the UK are under the remit of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This agency has the responsibility for ensuring the standards of higher education qualifications. It also informs and encourages continuous improvements in the management of higher education quality.

Universities within the UK follow the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). This Framework provides national definitions on the nature of different levels of qualification. The Code of Practice for Higher Education provides guidance on good practice and the conduct of postgraduate research studies. It sets out what research students may expect of the university and what the university might expect from its research students. Both documents are available from the QAA website⁵

Universities in the UK do not have to observe all the guidance in the QAA documents as if they were regulations. However, most universities follow them closely since the quality of university courses are audited periodically and both the QAA FHEQ and the Code of Practice are key documents in the audit process. Universities are expected to demonstrate how these documents are applied within their own policies and operations

⁵ www.qaa.ac.uk

Application

Applicants should normally have a good degree – either first or second class honours degree from a UK university or from a university of comparable standard outside the UK. In addition, applicants are generally expected to have a Masters qualification as well. Their applications should be supported by references from academic staff who are familiar with their work.

Funding and resources

Applicants are generally expected to pay for their own studies. Many students register as part time students so that they can have employment which enables them to fund their studies. There are some full time bursaries available for students, but these are dependent of the funds within each university. Sometimes particular research projects or centres may offer bursaries. Both part time and full time students sometimes supplement their income through university teaching for a few hours each week.

Registration

Applicants generally select the university where they want to study, based on the expertise of the professorial staff, its proximity to their home or work or other personal reasons. Applicants may also apply for doctoral bursaries which are sometimes attached to particular research projects or research centres. Once the applicants have registered, they become a member of the university and subject to university rules and regulation.

The supervisory team.

During the initial registration the details of the supervisory team are confirmed. The team includes a director of studies and a second supervisor. In addition advisors or a third supervisor may be appointed to strengthen the expertise in the team if it is thought necessary. Applicants undergo a training needs analysis to determine the support which they will need and an appropriate research programme including methodologies and research techniques is devised for the applicant.

Length of study

In line with many other universities in the UK, at the University of the West of England, Bristol the normal time taken to complete a PhD is 2–5 years full time study and 3–6 years part time. For a professional doctorate which encourages professionals to research their own practice and profession, the time is 3–4 years for full time students and 4–7 years for part time students. Some students choose to study for a Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) which takes from 1–4 years part time. D Phil students are generally experienced researchers who have a substantial research record and publications. They are expected to write a theoretical commentary on their research and output to achieve a D Phil.

Research training

Students are required to undertake an assessed training programme appropriate to their needs to enable them to fulfil the requirements of the Doctorate.

The credit requirements for the assessed training may vary at different universities. At the University of the West of England, Bristol they are:

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) 60-120 credits of which at least 40 credits must be at Masters level.

Professional Doctorate 120-270 credits all at Masters level

Doctor of Philosophy by publication (D Phil) 60-120 credits of which at least 40 credits must be at Masters level.

Progression

Students' progress is monitored annually throughout their course of study. In addition following their first year of study, the student is expected to write a progression paper on the progress of his/her work. The paper is read by an examiner. A viva voce exam is then conducted where the student has to answer questions asked by the examiner and also the director of studies. At the end of the progression examination, the examiner writes a progress report on the student's progress and makes recommendations as to whether the student can proceed with his/her research.

Assessment

The final assessment is through the completion of a dissertation and a viva voce examination. There are at least 2 examiners, one of whom is external to the university and a recognised authority in the field of research. At least one of the examiners must have had experience of examining higher degrees previously.

The examiners first read the thesis and prepare a preliminary report which is sent to the university committee for research degrees. In the report the examiners comment on the quality of the work and state whether the thesis is of sufficient merit to move on towards the viva voce examination. The student does not see the report.

The viva voce examination is held after the preliminary report has been accepted. Prior to the examination, the examiners share their written reports with each other and discuss the questions which they will ask the candidate. The candidate, examiners and director of studies are the only people present. The examiners ask the candidate questions about the thesis. The director of studies does not ask any questions. Generally viva voce examinations last between one hour and one hour and a half, although they may take longer if the examiners have concerns about the quality of the candidate's answers.

Following the viva voce, the candidate is asked to leave the room. The examiners discuss the examination process and agree on the result. The results of the viva may be:

- The candidate be awarded the degree;
- The candidate be awarded the degree subject to minor amendments and corrections being made. The examiners have to indicated in writing the amendments and corrections which have to be made;
- The candidate be permitted to re-submit for the degree and be re-examined, with or without a viva voce examination;
- The candidate is not awarded the degree and is not permitted to be re-examined.

When the examiners have reached their decision, the candidate is invited back into the room and told the result.

Candidates are awarded their doctorate at a graduation ceremony which confers degrees on students who have studied across a range of programmes.

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