



»To advocate for positive change in the policies, culture, and environment that affect the quality of training, well-being, and employment conditions of early career researchers«

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The European Council of Doctoral
Candidates and Junior Researchers

Quality Assurance of Doctoral Education Across Europe and Its Role for Higher Education's Democratic Mission

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The Multiple Roles of Doctoral Education

The university has 3 (4) core tasks: **learning, teaching, research**, outreach/
democratic mission (CoE, EHEA/BFUG)

a research education:

centered on candidates' individual
research projects and their contribution
to furthering academic knowledge

*(The Salzburg Principles, European University
Association 2005)*

PROVIDES

the HEIs with research (incl. publications
and teaching personnel (and admin!))

TRAINS

future senior staff of HEIs; highly
educated citizens; highly skilled
workforce for other sectors

Doctoral education occupies a space in both the **European Research Area (ERA)** and the
European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

- **Doctoral education is shaped by HEIs, but also significantly shapes them: potential to
serve as an effective lever for anchoring the democratic mission and collaboration**



EU commission report on the Bologna Process: “The rise of quality assurance in higher education has [...] been one of the most remarkable and transformative developments within the sector in the last two decades. **Quality assurance systems have become a key driver of change in European higher education institutions.**” (2020, p. 10)

Bucharest Communiqué: “As the education and training of doctoral candidates has a particular role in bridging the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA),” the ministers are to “**explore how to promote quality, transparency, employability and mobility in the third cycle.**” (2012, p. 3)



QA of Doctoral Education

QA has to account for

- **individual education** centred on **research** (with its own unique form of QA)
- educational environment ↔ research and work environment
- **evaluation of research** often used as **proxy indicator** of the quality of doctoral *education*

importance of both **institutional responsibility and autonomy**: “Doctoral education must be developed by **autonomous and accountable institutions** taking **responsibility to cultivate the research mindset**.” (Hasgall et al., “Doctoral Education in Europe Today” EUA-CDE report, 2019, p. 7)



Survey of 10 Select Countries: National Policies and QA of 3rd Cycle

Is the following in place per general frameworks, i.e. are they true for all doctoral candidates in the country	CHE	DEU	DNK	HUN	ITA	NOR	POL	ROU	SWE	UKR
Establishing doctoral programmes: institutional autonomy and the role of public authorities										
(A1) HEI can introduce new doctoral programs without governmental approval	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Trust in higher education: the doctoral defence and awarding the PhD degree										
(B1) HEI awards the doctoral degree	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
(B2) Right to defend	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	?	Yes	Yes
(B3) Public defence	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	?	Yes	Yes
Supervision and individual scholarly freedom										
(C1) HEI guarantees supervision	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
(C2) HEI guarantees other resources than supervision	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
(C3) Right to change supervisor	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
(C4) IDEP is mandatory	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
TABLE 1: Frameworks for doctoral education across Europe										



Establishing Doctoral Programmes: Institutional Autonomy

- 7 out 10 countries: universities decide on doctoral programmes
- Italy, Romania and Ukraine: doctoral programmes **established at the national level by public authorities**

Poses a **challenge** to

- institutional autonomy
- responsiveness to bottom-up, dynamic developments in a given research field
- fields that do not neatly fall into the conception of traditional disciplines (interdisciplinary work) or emerged later (such as e.g. gender studies)



Doctoral Supervision and QA: the Challenge

“Doctoral Education in Europe Today” (EUA-CDE, 2019): quality of doctoral education QA through research assessment

- academic publications by doctoral candidates
- staff qualifications (publications)
- completion rates
- satisfaction of doctoral candidates (numbers drop off)
- QA (like first and second cycle) that looks at [linked to accreditation?]:
 - **regulatory frameworks** in place
 - **existing QA processes** at the institutions (e.g. exit interviews, regular surveys, mentoring of supervisors, evaluation and feedback for supervisors)
 - **Individual Doctoral Education Plan** (IDEP): framework that can be QA and acknowledges the individual dimension of 3rd cycle (4/10 countries national standard)



Doctoral Defence and QA: Trust and Fairness

Doctoral defence is a moment of assessment, but also needs quality assurance

Framework conditions of **doctoral defence** (questions in grouping (B)):

- **fairness:** mitigation of the candidate's dependence on their supervisor to ensure a fair examination and to protect the doctoral candidate and their research
 - **transparency:** ensure trust both within as well as outside of academia through transparent and public procedures
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- often primarily assesses the quality of research
 - holistic view of the defence: **research assessment** *and* **education assessment** for both the **field(s)** specific understanding as well as for being a member of the **academic community** (good practices/standards)



Conclusion

- Assuring primarily the quality of research/using research as a proxy measure **disregards crucial dimensions of doctoral education particularly regarding the missions of HE.**
- Across ERA and EHEA: **Develop shared criteria for quality assurance of third cycle education** (analogously to first and second cycle education) that pays respect to the **specific nature of doctoral education** and thereby connects doctoral education to the **HEIs core tasks** (research, learning, teaching, and the democratic mission)
- **Doctoral education can be a key lever to securely embed HE's democratic mission**, foster interdisciplinarity, and strengthen intersectoral cooperation – and QA can be an accelerator for this transformation (tie to accreditation).