

MW Academic Practice Group, Villa La Fonte, Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2009, 11.10-13.00

Comparing doctoral programmes: What is the purpose of a PhD and how should it be structured?

The predecessor of the modern doctorate has its roots in the universities of Bologna and Paris of the 12th century. Higher education across Europe was at that time united in terms of its subordination to a common religion, a common language (Latin), a uniform program of study and a uniform system of examinations.

With the emergence of nation states throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, however, national governments left their imprints on the development of higher education, including doctoral education. Add to this different educational philosophies that emerged in the past two centuries and influenced higher education since then, and a much more varied pattern of doctoral education and training emerges today. Despite recent efforts to homogenize educational programmes worldwide and institutional calls for a “global” PhD, doctoral degrees differ widely in purpose and format.

In some countries and universities, the doctorate is still a sign of the highest intellectual competence; in others, it is an acknowledgement that the holder possessed the capabilities to be an independent scholarly investigator and capable of leading an academic role. More recently, however, as the economic and social fabric of societies has become increasingly knowledge-related, doctoral degree holders have become vital players in the work force – and not only in academia.

In this Academic Practise Group we shall discuss the different purported goals of a doctorate and its varied formats, which differ according to both geographical regions and academic disciplines. Max Weber fellows are invited to take part and share their personal experiences and opinions on the doctoral training they received. What is the role of the PhD supervisor and how involved should he be in guiding a student’s research? Should the doctoral programme be structured or should it rather be focused exclusively on writing one’s research? Why do we have different formats of PhD varying from a collection of published articles to a thesis consisting of rigorously unpublished work? What should the admission requirements be for a PhD be and what are the possible professional careers for doctoral degree holders? At what point should the student come up with a research project? These are just some of the overarching questions that shall be debated.

The EUI’s director of academic services Andreas Frijdal will also be taking part in the discussion. Member of the steering committee for the EUA Council for Doctoral Education, Frijdal has written numerous articles and reports on research management and doctoral training for the European Union and other governmental bodies. In attachment (and on moodle) you will find two of his articles on the evolution of doctoral training at the EUI.