



The case of the European University Institute: 3 key issues: profile or supervision fit, TTD and size.

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Summary

This case study deals with some of the important issues which had to be addressed in the recent years, resulting from the meta forces such as growth in the education sector and developments in the labour market. The demands generated by the enlargement of the European Union were solved partly by the increased efficiency of the doctoral programme.

1. Introduction

The European University Institute was created 30 years ago as an institution exclusively dedicated to doctoral education¹. It provides doctoral training in the social sciences, such as economics, history, law and social and political science. It is located in Florence, it has the legal structure of an inter-governmental organization funded by the European Union member states, currently 19. Extension with the remaining 6 new EU member states is being negotiated so that there should soon be 25 Contracting States at the EU.

The Institute's objective for 2006 is 600 doctoral research students, 100 postdocs and over 50 full-time professors supported by 150 administrative and technical staff, all working in various historical buildings on the hills of Fiesole just north of Florence, Italy.

2. The changing doctoral landscape

During the nineties changes took place at an increasing speed that can be characterized by five distinctive aspects:

1. Growth
2. Diversification
3. Substitution
4. Professionalization
5. Competition

¹ See short summary of the Institute's history in annex

2.1. Growth

Although in the seventies the literature in the United States predicted a decline in postgraduate education – also in Europe based on demographic assumptions – a considerable growth took place in both the United States and in Europe. In the U.S the number of doctorates went from 33000 per year to over 45000. In Europe some countries had a more than tenfold development in the wider postgraduate educational sector now producing 70.000 PhDs per year.

2.2. Diversification

In reality the postgraduate education sector grew much more if one looks beyond the doctoral education sector. Where doctoral education was the core activity in the postgraduate education market 25 years ago, today it only represents 10% of the market. So if one extrapolates the real growth in doctoral education representing only 10% of the market one can get an idea of the explosion of postgraduate activities in the U.S. and in Europe. This development is mainly caused by the exponential creation of new degrees for a non-academic market.

2.3. Substitution effect

By introducing the Bologna model governments have tried to limit the time spent on the first degree, but obviously this will result in a large spill-over in a newly created postgraduate education sector which was formerly covered by traditional longer first degree education. This substitution effect will lead to an increased demand for mid-level postgraduate education training of a professional or academic character.

2.4. Professionalization

Doctoral education in the past was very much a type of “in-house, master-disciple” training and a start in a career for a professorial job, particularly in the social sciences and humanities. Most of those who started an academic career 25 years ago were appointed in assistant, or assistant professor jobs that made them a university employee. On average in the first 6-10 years one dedicated part of one’s time working under the wings of a supervisor but at the same time started to teach, to organize practica and to carry out some research alongside the normal doctoral work. There were no or very few structured courses or structured training programmes. After the first ten years generally a doctorate was delivered that provided the requisites for the first appointment as assistant/associate professor.

In the mid-eighties this tradition was abolished in a number of European countries and a number of appropriate structures for doctoral education, following the American model of the graduate schools in various formats (*Ecole Doctorale*, Graduate School, *Graduierntenkolleg*, *Onderzoekscholen*) were created. In some countries the legal position of the doctorandus changed fundamentally: from a normal university employee position one became a grant holder.

2.5. Competition

Dramatic changes in the labour market in the late nineties resulted in a decreasing interest for doctoral training positions, especially in areas such as economics. Universities are in competition with each other for the best graduate students, resulting in concrete measures taken by the LSE, with its policy to stimulate the undergraduates to continue at the LSE, “Warwick offers cash bonus to keep graduates at the University” headline in the THES and the Max Planck Society offers special grants to attract foreign students to come to Germany, etc. The US still attracts several thousand doctoral students per year. Other countries such as the Netherlands provide additional funds related to PhD numbers and also provide attractive 4-year grants.

3. The European University Institute 1990-2005

After 15 years of existence the EUI had reached the following situation as summarised by the first strategic report: 40 full-time professors, 300 doctoral/research students and 40 postdoc fellows. The committee set up by the High Council (Board of Governors) stated that: ... *the changes in the Institute’s environment in terms of higher education systems of member States and the upheavals in Eastern Europe offer an occasion to ask what the*

Institute's future should look like over the coming decades. Highlighting the major issues from the above mentioned report will provide insight in this changing European landscape. It must be added that a pilot role was also being played by the ESRC in the UK which was obliged, under pressure of the government, to review their postgraduate training practices.

3.1. The first strategic review 1992: Beyond Maintenance

The major problems which were observed by the early 1990s review group can be summarized as follows. Completion rates were too low, time-to-degree was too long, there was an insufficiently clear profile/character of the European University Institute, and the governance structure of the Institute was no longer suitable since its establishment in 1976.

3.1.1. The profile: supervision fit and competitive recruitment

This issue might be more relevant to the EUI than to other graduate schools, but nevertheless in this case it had to do with the typically European debate about subsidiarity: a European initiative should not double what is already ongoing in the various national universities. A distinct profile of the Institute, which for many meant a kind of European-ness, then became rather difficult to define. There was also a debate about whether there should be a policy component, dealing with issues related to the European agenda. A lot of resistance existed at that particular time within the Institute itself as regards policy research, but this was a more generic and widespread issue in academia at the end of the eighties in Europe. Policy research had a kind of negative stigma, it was considered to be linked too much to contract research money, also referred to as 'soft money', and Europe was not yet considered to be an academic topic of interest – for many wrong reasons, of course.

Rather than put emphasis on this debate, the Institute in an additional effort decided to create a special Centre, called the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, which would get its own professors and attract people who would work in the various disciplines at the Institute but would be more interested in policy issues. The development of the Centre became an immense success and with this the EUI built up its reputation as being active in the foremost areas of discussion on the European agenda. At the same time, the quality of the research carried out in the Robert Schuman Centre also made the whole issue whether it would be second rate disappear. Simultaneously there was a strong development of the profile of research carried out within the departments, which was of direct relevance to the European agenda. A lot of comparative work was done both in the political and social science department and in the Law department, which actually developed over the years as the cradle of European law.

The relevance of a clear profile was immediately reflected in a redistribution of the applications to the different departments, those with a clear profile saw their share increasing significantly.

3.1.2. Time-to-degree and completion rates

The completion rates in the early nineties were only around 40% (up from 25% in the mid-eighties), but still considered too low by the review group. Also time-to-degree was too long. The review group therefore wanted to set the objective for the end of the decade at 75%, with a medium time-to-degree of 5 years. In order to achieve this, the structured first year was introduced, very much modelled on the first year in an American graduate school: a curriculum was developed with the necessary research skills and advanced training in the field, so that the young researcher acquired the proper tools for the future. Supervision was also considered a major issue and the spirit of the moment is best illustrated by the following phrase from the report, '*... the teaching should not only be done by excellent professors, but it should also be excellent*'. As a result the EUI introduced a two-fold system of seminars/teaching and supervision assessment. Since its introduction this was a permanent topic of fierce debate. The main questions became the anonymity of the assessor and the low response rate and validation of the result. This debate continues and needs further reflection.

4. The second strategic review 2000: Enhancing and Enlarging – The Future EUI

Earlier than foreseen the Institute reached the main objective of the *Beyond Maintenance* report. The Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS) developed to a very successful research centre of advanced studies, with a large postdoctoral component, and the TTD was reduced to 4.1 year with a completion rate of 76%. Due to a number of significant changes in the PGE landscape as mentioned above (see section 3.) the need was felt by the High Council for a new strategic plan and which served a major objective. The major objective (the first of the recommendations) was ... *to further develop its mission to be a top ranking doctoral programme and centre of excellence for European research.* Issues addressed in this review were caused by new developments such as the generalised introduction of doctoral schools, the Bologna declarations and the approaching accession of 10 new members to the European Union.

4.1. Time-to-degree

Although the objective of the *Beyond Maintenance* report had been reached (75% completion rate in 5 years) the report found that – the medium time to degree not being an average – it allowed people to exceed far beyond four years. Also, some people were leaving in the last year of study due to a lack of funding and therefore a solution had to be found to further increase the efficiency of the doctoral programme. The solution was fourth-year funding which should significantly speed up the completion of the thesis. Indeed, while the funding stopped after 3 years and only occasional 3-6 months grants were available for a limited number of people for writing up the thesis, a significant number of researchers were obliged to take up all kinds of small jobs of limited employment which in this crucial phase of writing the thesis is not an optimal solution. This was also recognized in England where the research councils fund a 1 + 3 scheme.

This proposal encountered very stiff opposition from some of the member but was finally introduced in the academic year 2004-5.

4.2. Conditional funding of the 4th year and the introduction of a time limit

A further step was taken by introducing a maximum time to be spent on the PhD. After closely analyzing all data of completion at the EUI (we have a complete data set on all our research students from day-one) we realized that the attrition rate after 5 years increases dramatically. Therefore a maximum time for defending the thesis of 5 years was introduced which is now operational at the EUI.

Not only employment reasons influence attrition, but also a declining interest in the subject, a decision to switch interest/supervisor contributes to significant unpredictable outcome.

Deadlines are crucial ingredients in getting jobs done. In doctoral research a 4-5 year time horizon is fatal for most young researchers. Breaking down the whole process into a realistic set of short-term objectives contributes to increased completion. As a result, the structure of the four years was further fine-tuned in the sense that after each year, a clear objective in writing and in research was defined and only when those conditions were fulfilled, passage to the next year would follow.

For example, at the end of the first year a number of papers, written exams and a final “June-paper” allow an exam committee to decide on passage to second year. At the end of the 2nd year, one quarter of the thesis in research and writing needs to be accomplished. Finally, the funding of the fourth year is conditional on the progress at the end of the third year: 2/3rds of the thesis work, in writing (condition 1) plus the supervisor’s statement that there is sufficient evidence that the thesis will be finished (in first draft) in a further 6 months. If, after 3 years + 6 months a first draft of the thesis is submitted, then the remaining 6 months are paid.

Furthermore, if the 36 months deadline for delivering 2/3rds is not met by the end of the 3rd year, no first instalment is paid at the start of the fourth year. So if someone finishes in 37 months, s/he loses the entire chance of receiving the first instalment of the fourth-year payment. On the other hand, if the person reaches the 36 month objective, which we consider a very important criterion and is paid the first instalment, but if the first draft is delayed up to the 42nd, 43rd or 44th month s/he might still get

funding but it will be reduced by 1 month at the time in accordance with exceeding the time limit.

4.3. Enlargement

One of the major challenges the Institute was confronted with is the issue of enlargement. In May 2004 the EU was enlarged with 10 additional member states which meant that the Union’s population increased by 350 to 475 million inhabitants. Estimates made by the Institute showed that this would lead to an increase of about 40% in students in the years to come. This immediately revealed a number of financial problems. Firstly, because the GDPs in the new member states are significantly lower than the current member states, in the range from 1:10 to 1:4. From the general negotiations with the member states it resulted that the maximum increase of contribution that the Institute would receive from these member states was at that time only 4.6% while it should result in a 40% increase in the number of students – clearly a huge discrepancy would result.

The issue of the size and growth of the Institute came on the agenda. I will dedicate a separate section to this later on.

4.4. Size matters

Confronted with the issue how many researchers from the new member states the EUI should host the issue of growth/size came on the agenda. The various components of the Institute were consulted and there was a clear reaction from the researcher body at the Institute who stated: don’t grow too big because we are afraid of losing the special atmosphere that exists in the various departments. In order to analyze what would be a possible optimal size in a department and in graduate schools we analyzed the available statistics, discovering an interesting phenomenon in the NSF data published 1996. According to these data there is an optimal size for a graduate school. In other words, there is a convergence about the number of people in graduates schools, as the table below shows.

Observing the size of top graduate schools in the U.S., it became clear that they converged to 150. Based on this evidence, the EUI then decided that its total size should be limited to 600, with about 150 students in each of the departments.

Concentrating the minds: Quality (ranking) and Size(number of students)

Quarter	Econ	Soc	Pol	Hist	Biochem	Phys	Math	Chem
1	112	80	112	151	84	150	93	180
2	68	65	68	67	45	74	51	88
3	48	43	47	56	28	51	37	53
4	48	31	47	30	18	27	22	31
mean	70	55	69	76	44	75	50	88
corr.	-0,91	-0,99	-0,91	-0,92	-0,96	-0,95	-0,96	-0,95

Political Science		Sociology		History	
	students		students		students
Harvard	172	Chicago	155	Yale	188
UCLA	143	Madison-Wisco	221	UCLA	206
Yale	69	Berkeley	109	Princeton	68
Michigan	173	Michigan	163	Harvard	146
Stanford	89	UCLA	139	Columbia	334

source: "Research Doctorate Programs in the United States, Continuity and Change", NRC, Washington D.C. 1995.

4.5. Programme efficiency

How was the Institute going to deal with this increase, if there were already over 500 students at that time, taking into account all the years of study? As mentioned earlier, there were two ways for approaching the problem. First of all, the introduction of the fourth-year grant and conditional funding should significantly increase the programme's efficiency. Indeed following the reasoning of Bowen and Rudenstine² as to student year cost,

$$SYC = \frac{\sum \text{Student Years Invested}}{\text{Number of PhDs Earned}}$$

we wished to reduce the number of years invested in each doctorate, which is even used in the allocations of funding to the various departments. As a result two years ago, a component of output funding was introduced in order to stimulate the departments to further promote their students finishing within the foreseen limit of 4 years. At that particular moment there was a large number of 6th, 7th and sometimes even 8th-year students who were still using the infrastructure up to their defence date. Using the carrot of the 4th year grant to stimulate the fast completion within 4 years, and secondly as a stick there the 5-year limit was introduced. These two elements are expected to sufficiently reduce the number of students participating in the programme to free up positions for additional students from the new member states.

References

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² "In pursuit of the PhD", Bowen and Rudenstine, Princeton University Press, 1992. p.163

Genesis and creation of the EUI of Florence

(extract from Jean-Marie PALAYRET, "A great school in the Service of a great Idea". The Creation and development of the European university Institute in Florence, in *EUI Review*, Summer 1997 pp.1-3)

The idea of a European Institution, complementing the construction of Europe in the field of higher education, appeared early on in the philosophies of the "founding fathers". It was already put forward in the programmes of the pro-European movements Congress of the Hague (May 1948) and during the European Cultural Conference (December 1949). The project however only took shape at governmental level on the occasion of the "relaunch" of Europe initiated by the Messina Conference (1955). Walter Hallstein, German Secretary of State for External Affairs, was then the promoter of a full-scale European University, to be inserted in the future Euratom treaty. In his initial conception, the University was to offer a training centre for nuclear sciences and was to be a direct emanation of the Community. Conceived as a fundamental instrument of integration, it would educate the elite of the up and coming generations in a spirit remote from nationalist views.

However, in spite of determined action on the part of the Italian government (G. Martino, A. Fanfani) and by the interim committee set up by the European Commission (chaired by Etienne Hirsch) as well as the support given by the European Parliament, all attempts to realise the European university failed, due mainly to its rejection by General de Gaulle and to the drastic opposition of national academic circles.

Stubborn defender of the idea of "Europe des Patries", the French government wished to avoid a university institution under Community law and was anxious to preserve State prerogatives in the sphere of awarding degrees. Along the lines of the project drawn up by Gaston Berger (Director General for Higher Education), Paris preferred to concentrate on co-operation among existing Member states national universities and on special recognition for their "European vocation". In particular, Charles de Gaulle launched the Fouchet Plan, which had an important cultural facet. It was the occasion for the French Head of State to re-examine the question (Pescatore Commission) outside the framework of Euratom and in connection with cultural co-operation among the Six.

The reluctance of academics was the second obstacle to the European university project. The fear of German, Italian and Belgian universities was that the European University would lack adequate cultural roots to grow, attract the best students and drain public funds.

It was therefore in an inter-governmental framework that the Heads of State and of government met in Bonn on 18 July 1961, then -after an interruption due to the "empty chair crisis" and a second relaunch, motivated by the university crisis in 1968 at the Hague on the 1st and 2nd December 1969, brought the project under study again, recording their resolve to consecrate through a solemn commitment their participation in funding a "European University Institute in Florence". The two conferences which followed in 1970-71 in Florence and Rome, on the initiative of the Italian government, led to a project that both in size and content was more modest than the initial ambitions, as it would no longer have an institutional place within the Communities and the Institute to be created would only be reserved for post-graduate studies. The first attempts to tackle the education issue inside the European Commission oriented the difficult negotiations that followed and led to the signing by the Six in 1972 of a Convention creating a "European University Institute" on which the Ministers for Education had marked their agreement in principle during their first meeting within the Council of the Communities in November 1971. The three New Member States (United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark) had in the meantime applied to join the Institute and participated in the work of the preparatory Committee set up to put in place the administration, the staff and a profile definition to be conferred on the Institute. The Institute eventually opened its doors in November 1976 to its first 70 research students.

The European University Institute was created by the Member States of the founding European Communities and started its activities in 1976. Now, 30 years later, it is one of the largest doctoral programmes in the social sciences in the world. Its alumni are in academic posts all over Europe and occupy leading professional positions internationally.

After the recent enlargement process of the European Union, new members States are acceding to the European University Institute in an ongoing process.

The high quality of the research and teaching programmes follows from the recruitment of the best scholars from Europe and abroad. The extensive visitors programmes bring leading scholars and policy-makers to Florence to participate in numerous conferences, symposia and workshops, open to all members of the Institute. For research students this provides excellent opportunities to access international networks in their disciplines.



European University Institute

Fact sheet

- Doctoral /Research University without the baccalaureate programme in the Social Sciences (History & Civilisation, Economics, Law and Social and Political Science)

600 PhD Students, 100 Post Docs, 50 FT Professors
150 Logistical & Administrative staff

- Budget 40.000.000 Euro
- All our students are doctoral students
- Approx 150 in each discipline