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EUA publishes new report on quality assurance in doctoral education

A new [report](#) published today (26 February) by the European University Association (EUA) analyses the development of quality assurance processes (internal and external) for doctoral education in European universities.

The report, which is based on quantitative information gathered from a survey of over 100 universities across Europe and qualitative information collected during a series of focus groups and a workshop, is the outcome of a two-year EC-supported [project](#) led by EUA. It will be presented today (26 February) at an event taking place at the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU in Brussels.

The importance of training researchers has been recognised as crucial to the future of the European knowledge society, and the number of doctorate (PhD) holders has risen sharply in recent years. Improving accountability and enhancing quality of doctoral education have therefore become increasingly important.

Entitled “Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education – results of the ARDE project”, the new report underlines that doctoral education is being managed more professionally (in particular with the establishment of doctoral schools) and that institutions are giving more attention to accountability and quality enhancement.

The ARDE project highlighted that for example universities have set up, or are setting up, internal quality processes at doctoral level including mechanisms for monitoring time-to-degree and completion rates, guidelines for admission, supervision and the thesis. These processes also focus on the quality of the research environment and seek to engage different stakeholders. The ARDE project survey highlighted, for example, that almost 90% of respondents had written procedures/regulations for admission of candidates and 91% systematically monitored progress of candidates.

In the key area of doctoral supervision, there is a notable trend towards establishing rules or guidelines as well as using individual contract-type agreements between supervisor and supervisee.

Quality enhancement processes are also prominent in doctoral education. In the area of supervision, for example, universities are establishing training for supervisors as well as creating spaces for exchanging experiences and good practice, though much is still to be done in this area. Career development of doctoral candidates is another area where the report highlights that much has been done, for example, through transferable skills training. Of the responding institutions 79% said they offered career development support, but only around half of these monitored the quality of the career services. By comparison, only 23% of respondents tracked the careers of PhD graduates.

While accountability and quality enhancement are purposes for all three cycles of higher education (bachelor, master and doctorate), the report points out that doctoral education is qualitatively different from the other two cycles. Therefore, QA processes for doctoral education must take as a point of departure the specific needs of this cycle.

In terms of external quality assurance, the report points out that several external stakeholders often monitor doctoral education in parallel (e.g. national QA agencies, research assessment exercises and external funding bodies). The report highlights that a lot could be done by establishing a much higher degree of convergence between the many different evaluations that programmes are submitted to.

The full report can be downloaded [here](#).

The Accountable Research Environments for Doctoral Education (ARDE) project was coordinated by EUA in partnership with University College Cork (UCC), Universities Austria (UNIKO) and the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (CRASP). It was supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission.

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The European University Association, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.