

## About Doctoral Schools: Questionnaire results

### 9<sup>th</sup> UNICA PhD MASTER CLASS

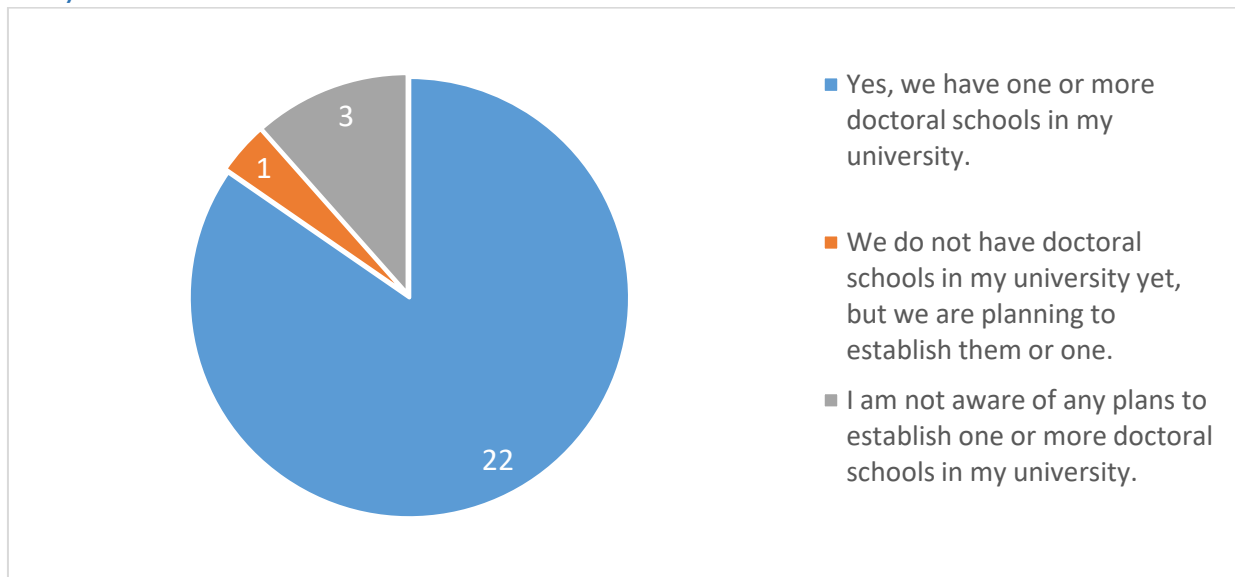
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The 2018 UNICA PhD MASTER CLASS will focus on Doctoral Schools. Many universities have now established structures that operate under the title "Doctoral Schools". In order to prepare for the 9<sup>th</sup> UNICA PhD MASTER CLASS, a short questionnaire was distributed among the participants prior to the meeting. The aim of the questionnaire was to learn more about the function of Doctoral School(s) and the distribution of doctoral education tasks within universities.

**This is a short overview of the responses received. The survey was answered by 31 colleagues from 26 different Higher Education Institutions from 17 countries in Europe.**

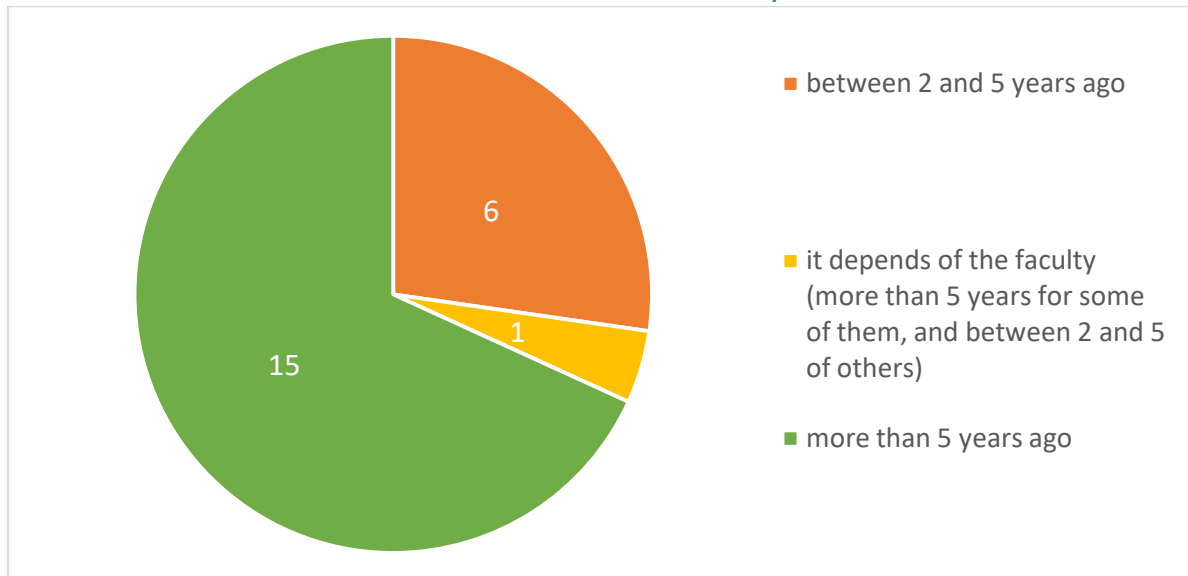
With 2 exceptions, all respondents replied that they "have a central website which provides information on Doctoral Education in your institution". Some of the websites are listed at the end of this document.

#### Do you have a doctoral school/doctoral schools?



*In total we received answers from 26 different institutions.*

### When has the doctoral school structure as of today been established?



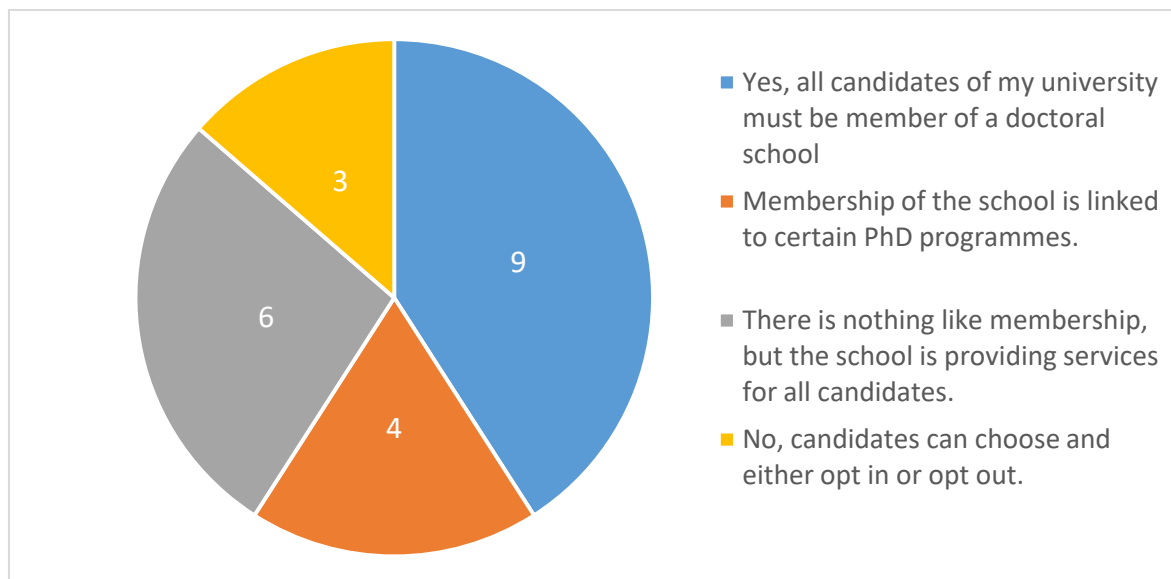
*Out of 22 institutions which have one or more schools, 14 replied that they established more than 5 years ago.*

### How many doctoral schools do you have?

The answers to this question illustrate again the diversity when it comes to Doctoral Schools. The answers vary between 1 (10 times), from 3 to 5 (7 times) or 9 to 10 (5 times). In general, the fact of having more schools was usually justified by their focus on disciplines, focus on clusters of/aligned with faculties or a balance between critical mass and disciplinary focus.

### Is your doctoral school inclusive and mandatory?

When it comes to the question whether or not the school is inclusive, we could again observe a big diversity. And there does not seem to be a link between the number of schools and whether or not their participation is mandatory. The only observation possible is that if the “Membership of the school is linked to certain PhD programmes” then there was only one school in place.



### Central PhD office

We also asked about the existence of a central PhD office. All but 4 confirmed that there is a central office established and these offices are usually in place (17 answers) for more than 5 years already. The answer regarding the tasks description vary from briefly “Administrative supporting tasks” to detailed descriptions such as:

- provides transferable skills training,
- financial, administrative and student support,
- (as an umbrella structure) promotes excellence of doctoral degree; fosters the development of interdisciplinary programmes,
- coordinates activities of the doctoral schools and programmes to ensure the highest scientific level to doctoral candidates,
- relies on inner dedicated structures to provide complementary training sessions to doctoral candidates in addition to the scientific ones delivered by doctoral schools,
- exposes doctoral candidates to other social and economical sectors through meetings and business days; follows up on the professional development of doctoral candidates through surveys,
- provides doctoral candidates with dedicated facilities to organise seminars promoting interdisciplinarity,
- promotes mobility and organizes co-tutelles,
- administrative work related to accreditation of new PhD programme,
- general data collection for statistical purposes,
- strategy, support and monitoring,
- proposing and managing the PhD education programming,
- preparing and managing the calls for admission to PhD Programmes,
- managing the funding for PhD programmes (i.e. scholarships, agreements with academic and non-academic bodies, etc)
- managing PhD students doctoral education path (from enrolment to the final thesis defense),
- managing data related to Doctoral Education,

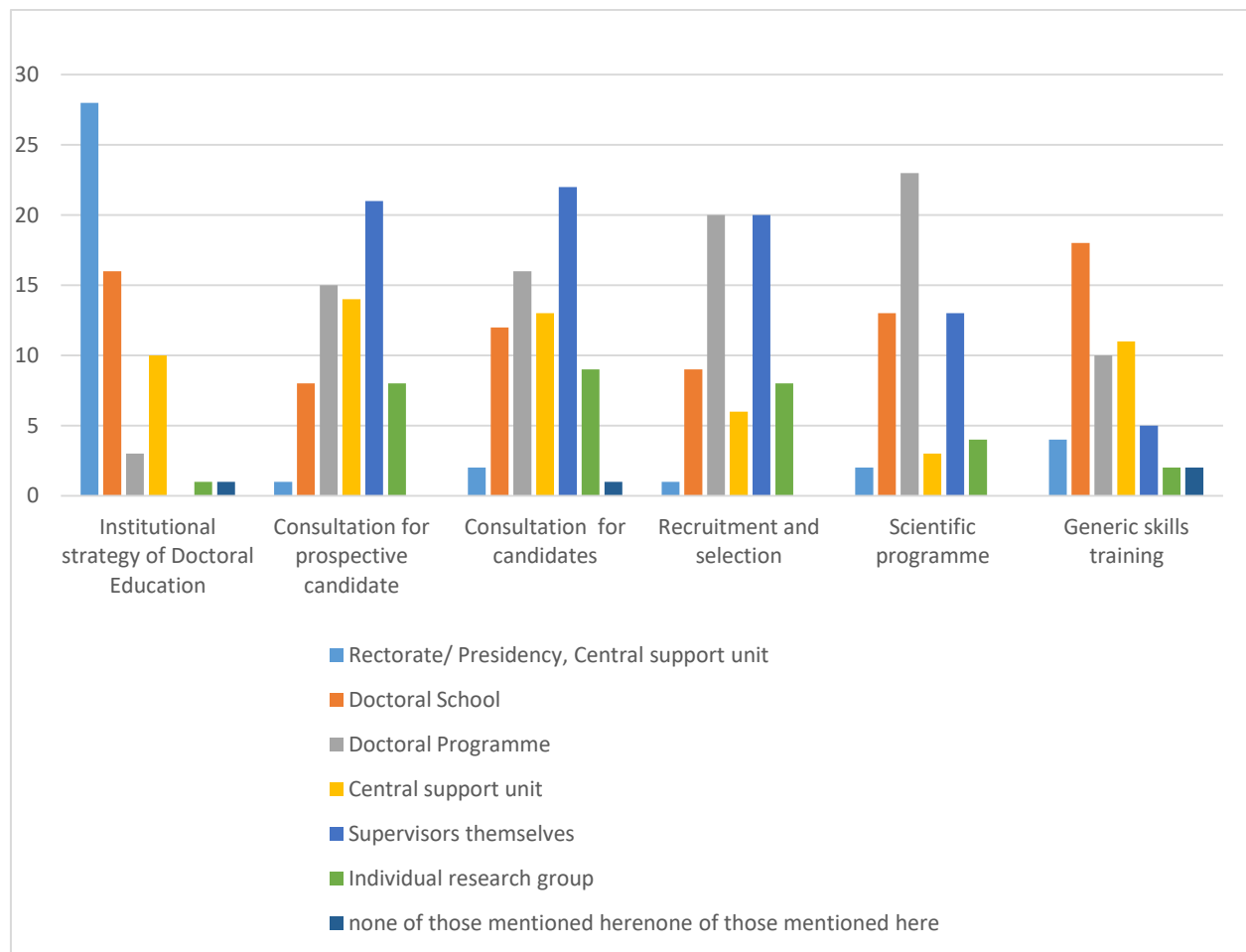
- supporting the submission of H2020 proposals related to Doctoral Education (ITN) and managing funded projects.

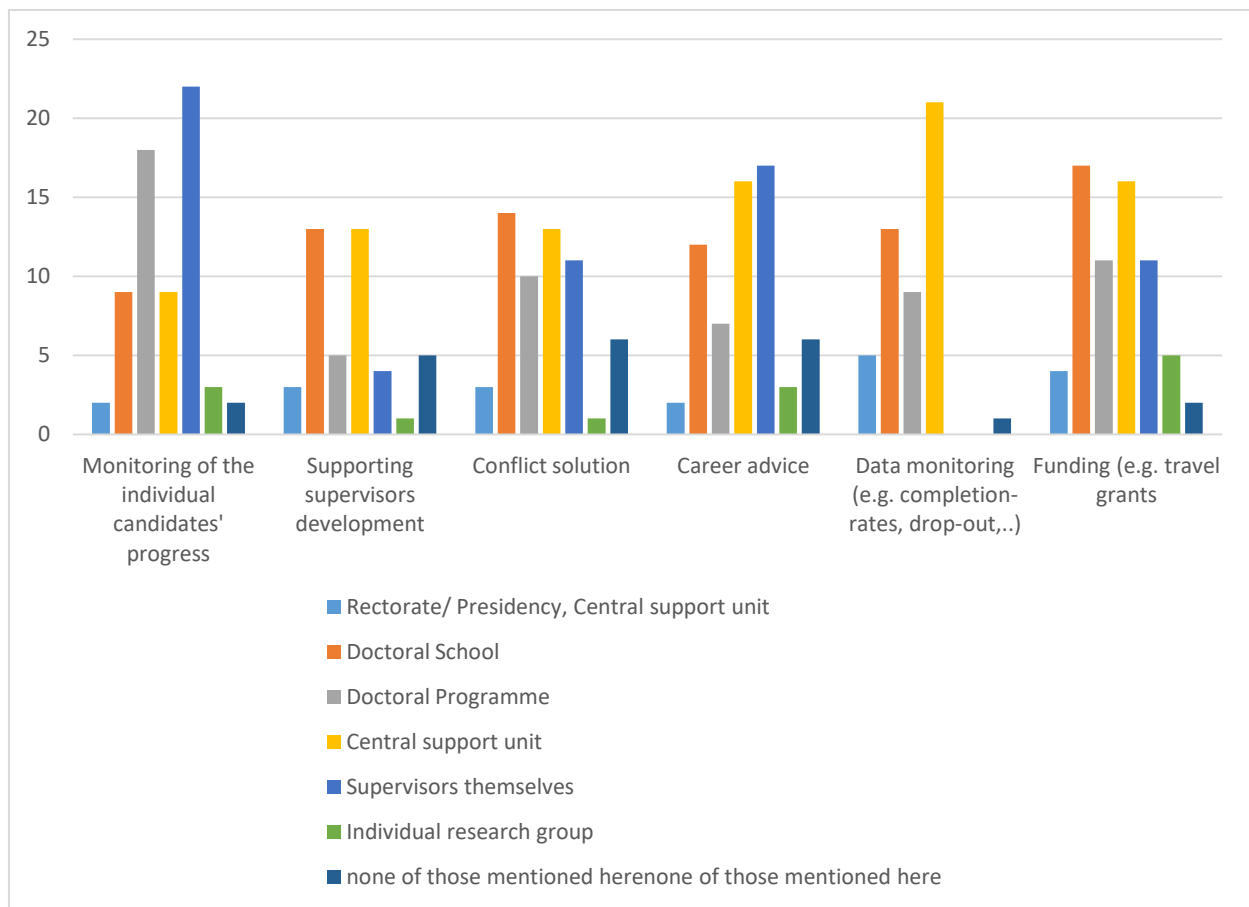
Implicitly, it is also interesting to see where these units are sometimes located within the organisation, be it independent, part of the Development Services at the University, the Research Services or the Knowledge Transfer Office.

### Who is responsible?

Looking at the answers to the questions concerning responsibilities, the picture is extremely heterogeneous. It is also interesting to note that in those cases where the questionnaire was completed by several people from the same institution, these answers are not always congruent.

It seems clear that strategic decisions are primarily made at the top management level or doctoral school level with the support of the central PhD offices, while for example the scientific programme, the recruitment of doctoral candidates, but also the monitoring of the individual candidates' progress are responsibilities of the programmes and the supervisors themselves. Conversely, it seems clear that general data monitoring is one of the tasks of doctoral schools and central PhD offices.





## What is working well?

- **Scientific Programme:** Doctoral candidates educational meetings (scientific methods, research ethics, statistics, grant application, publishing results, basic soft skills); the courses are very innovative and answer in an interdisciplinary way to the major challenges of research; some of the trainings are really good in supporting PhDs in some aspects of their research.
- **Administration:** The administration of the doctoral candidate from the time they enroll to the time they graduate works well; We have managed to harmonize many procedures; Clear structures, quality assurance, support services, selection processes; in the graduate school we are unifying the processes between different faculties and developing the digitalisation the life-cycle of the doctoral student (from application to dissertation); the Governing Bodies; strengthening the relationships amongst all actors involved in the Doctoral Education - above all PhD programme coordinators and administrative staff - has achieved good results
- **Skills Training:** The organisation of transferable skills works well, transferable skills training is systematic and equally available for all doctoral candidates
- **Staff are committed to their work;** students report high satisfaction with supervision
- **Relationship:** relationship between the Doctoral School and students - questionnaires, feedback etc.; in our small university we have an advantage that we have the time for the doctoral students on individual level. We have the time and offer the opportunity to get personal counselling if needed; PhD students look quite happy: most are passionate about their research, next to self-efficacy they are confident in their belief to successfully complete their

PhD. If any doubts this was related to lack of results or failing experiments. Involvement of supervisor: 80% states that they are very or rather involved. Most are well-surrounded by their guidance network.

- **Networking:** The best palpable outcome seems to be fostering a sense of belonging to the University as a whole, and an increase in students' interdisciplinary network and opportunities.
- **Funding** and Transcripts records; Funding, Programme
- [Our] Graduate School is a small unit with 4 administrators and is administered by a Dean and a Vice Dean. Since there is no central administration office, Graduate School administrators are dealing with issues such as the admission of PhD students, the procedures for registration, etc.
- Overall the process is working quite well
- the programme, the interuniversity collaboration can and should be improved
- This is very difficult, because what is working at one faculty or department is not working at other parts. Or what is working with 1 supervisor is not working with other.
- Our institution is relatively new - 18 years (1 faculty is old). It is very dynamic, open to new approach, offer modern infrastructure and it is very well equipped (for experiments, research). Good opportunity for those who want to do science.
- Doctoral candidates have good facilities in the building (offices, computes, labs, etc.)
- Foreign doctoral candidates have (obligatory subject-related) courses in English and have possibility to study the Czech language for free.
- There is a huge possibility of various projects to be involved for doctoral candidates (but sometimes depends on supervisor how he/she helps, because doctoral candidates are not independent).
- Collaborating with industry (private sector) at good level.
- Relatively good organization with everything.
- Internal grants for "students" including doctoral candidates (founding from government) - possibility to cover travel cost, material, conference fee, additional stipends, ect.
- One of the research centre under university is trying to get HR award.
- Possibility to establish a new committee for doctoral degree composed from doctoral candidates from all faculties under rector and vice-rector for research (bottom-up request from doctoral candidates).
- We are improving our approach to supporting the entire needs of the students, rather than focusing too much on just the research
- Trainer's answer: professional development of doctoral candidates even if more resources would be useful
- Structuring of doctoral schools, repartition of tasks and responsibilities between doctoral schools, doctoral college and labs, promotion of doctoral education etc.
- responsibility of the Presidium for the topic
- Our Graduate School is still under development stage. The limited number of students do not lend its self for big investments but lately we've seen great expansion of our educational program portfolio hence expansion of all of our activities and services. We manage to attract European funding through competitive grants which is prestigious and also vital for our existence. The limited number of students enables us to focus more on individual needs and offer a more personalised approach.
- Not much. I guess there are some supervisors and doctoral programmes that are doing better than others in terms of quality of the research, support for doctoral candidates etc. And I am

also sure that some of the researchers are particularly good at supervising their candidates even if the overall system is not doing very well.

- To my knowledge, there are few faculties and doctoral programmes that have raised the level above that which is defined by the university and are doing some things to enhance their doctoral school. For example, supervisors' trainings and generic skills training (on the faculty level), but to what extent and what are the results of this initiatives is anyone's guess.

### What are the urgent issues?

- **Training of supervisors:** Teaching the supervisor newcomers in the area of supervising; Supervisor training needs to be developed, Supervisor training; support the supervisors training and development; sometimes poor quality of supervision; Too high dependence on 1 supervisor and its capacity and generally low personal support from the university. a long life learning/training programme targeted to PhD Programme Coordinators, supervisors and administrative staff
- **How can we create a quality assurance culture in doctoral education and training:** developing quality assurance in terms of monitoring (in addition to having the proper regulations and guidelines in place), How to monitor/ measure/ assess impact on doctoral students; in questions of yearly monitoring (progress review Preventing the drop outs; How should we adopt quality measures for the evaluation of postgraduate studies in order to improve the education, Duration of the PhD, measuring the impact; High drop-out rate, doctorates are prolonged too much, high dependence on supervisor, sometimes poor quality of supervision. Poor monitoring and no analysis what are the reasons; No good quality (tools) of monitoring the progress of individual doctoral candidate; Registration of doctoral candidates and monitoring, lack of quality control of doctoral education on the university level; the quality assurance is low
- **Do we have to impose a common Doctoral Education (transferable skills) on all PhDs?** What is the best model? courses on transferable skills; organize methodology research course to be undertaken by all PhD students; no transferable skills training for early-career researchers (these courses are designed and provided mostly for BA, MA). No training on research integrity.
- **Career support for doctoral candidates:** the awareness for new PhD students, career guidance/advice; Career development and student welfare; What are the current employability prospects? How to enhance them? Do doctoral students get the generic research skills to embark on a research career? Are collaborative degrees useful? Industrial PhDs – connection with Industry. Good or bad?
- **Funding:** travel grants, internships; financial support for mobility;
- **Organizational matters:** How to organize the work of Doctoral schools to help doctoral students achieve their goals in doctoral programs? What are the main functions of the Doctoral School?; Structuration, centrally, programmes; encourage the development of interdepartmental programme; University has all of the required units, however most of them are designed for first 2 cycles (BA, MA). Doctoral candidates as early-career researchers have completely different needs than students of BA and MA; One central unit for doctoral education or research is missing, at least for information flow (European, national and institutional funding/grants, mobility for researchers, new trends like open science, general skills courses, ect.); structures are imperfect and could benefit from some rationalisation; Everything is fragmented, high heterogeneity between departments and faculties. Lack of internal collaboration (between departments, and especially faculties) for doctoral candidates;

uncoordinated and chaotic development of doctoral education while the limited resources are wasted on sporadic and partial initiatives; overlapping and fragmentation of doctoral programmes is still very high, reducing the possibility of collaborations and interdisciplinarity of the research. Additionally, the fragmentation leads to "little kingdoms" on faculties where different rules apply; the computerisation of most of the administrative services to better support PhD programme coordinators, supervisors and PhD students;

- To ensure support for every doctoral student in several aspects - getting guidance from the supervisor; Offering more information and instructions how to succeed after the defence of the thesis.
- Clarity: Increasing the clarity of responsibilities but also cooperation between different actors (both academic and within the University Services);
- **Diversity of PhD population:** who are the "right persons" for the offered programmes and how to support the specific groups. This also means a clearer communication what are the mutual expectations.
- **Isolation:** Doctoral candidates (and junior researchers) are often isolated from the real world and from others (apart of some exemption for those who are working under the research centres in teams). There are no events, platforms, summer camps for doctoral candidates.
- **Generally lack of user-friendly information, guidelines for doctoral candidates** in (everything is in internal regulation which are linked to national law, university regulation and so on).
- Too much **bureaucracy** (i.e. if doctoral candidates need to buy something for lab, or if they need to travel)
- **Internationalisation:** In some cases **low collaboration at the international level** (this depends on supervisor and his/her network). Lack of the European project involvement; Is there an internationalisation element in the PhD programme?
- **Perception:** Doctoral candidates are considered as students not early-career researchers. However, they are doing research and they are teaching and supervising students - but there is no enough support for them (how to do it).
- To separate between thesis and other kind of works that usually are presented as a thesis
- **Legal obstacles:** "As trainer and career counselor here's the feedback from doctoral candidates and supervisors : the very strict limit of the 3 years considered by both parties as really too short for a research of good quality. No interdisciplinary approach (partially due to accreditation requirements)."
- Different representations of research in terms of engagement, time to spent, work to deliver between doctoral candidates and supervisors
- recognition of the supervision mission, even if not official but effectively done and well
- resources to develop if not to merely maintain the training offer
- funding and national awareness about the PhD role
- lack of institutional strategy for development doctoral education since it is not the priority of the university.

### Useful links:

[www.ulb.be/phd](http://www.ulb.be/phd)

<https://www.lu.lv/eng/istudents/doctoral/>

<https://phd.cuni.cz/>

<http://www.unl.pt/en/study/doctoral-school/nova-doctoral-school>



[www.tlu.ee](http://www.tlu.ee)  
<http://www.helsinki.fi/phd>  
<http://www.unl.pt/ensino/escola-doutoral/nova-escola-doutoral>  
[https://www.en.uni.lu/studies/doctoral\\_education](https://www.en.uni.lu/studies/doctoral_education)  
[https://wwwfr.uni.lu/flshase/doctoral\\_school](https://wwwfr.uni.lu/flshase/doctoral_school)  
<http://www.utu.fi/en/research/utugs/>  
<http://midstodframhaldsnams.hi.is/english>  
<https://student.vub.be/en/doing-a-phd>  
[https://doctorat.upc.edu/en/doctoral-school/doctorate-school?set\\_language=en](https://doctorat.upc.edu/en/doctoral-school/doctorate-school?set_language=en)  
<https://www.utb.cz/en/research-and-development/>  
<https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/postgraduate>  
<http://doktorat.univie.ac.at>  
[www.humboldt-graduate-school.de](http://www.humboldt-graduate-school.de)  
<http://www.ucy.ac.cy/graduateschool/en>  
<http://dottorato.polito.it/en/home>  
<http://unil.ch/graduatecampus/en/home.html>  
<https://en.unito.it/research/phd/phd-programme>