

Doctoral Studies in Romania: Challenges and Opportunities

Authors: Simona Iftimescu, Delia Lupescu and Mihaela Stîngu

Presenter: Simona Iftimescu

Graphic design by Diana Iftodi

The study was part of the project `Quality in Higher Education: internationalization and databases for the development of Romanian education`, financed through the Social European Fund – Operational Program Human Capital, Code SMIS 126766, implemented by the Executive Unit for the Financing of Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation`.

www.pocu-intl.uefiscdi.ro

The contents of this study do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Union or of the Romanian Government.

1. Introduction and methodology
2. Background – international and national contexts
3. Doctoral studies – access, progression, graduation & students' wellbeing
4. **Today's focus: Challenges and Opportunities**

Methodological aspects

- Analysis of available official documents (i.e. reports, studies, previous analyses etc.)
- Analysis of data collected through three focus-groups with relevant stakeholders (March 2021)
- Analysis of data collected through the National Students' Questionnaire (2019/2020)



uefiscdi

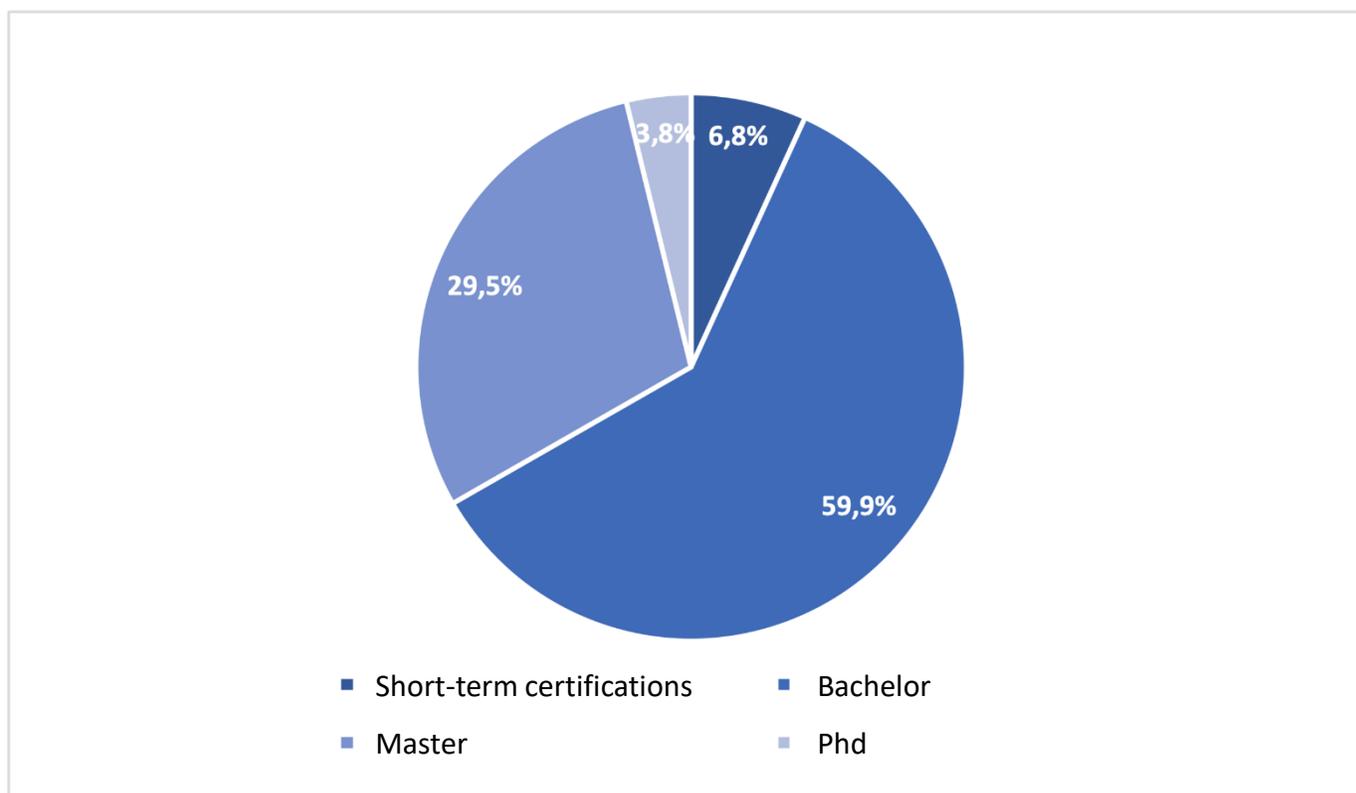
Unitatea Executivă pentru
Finanțarea Învățământului Superior,
a Cercetării, Dezvoltării și Inovării

Background International & national contexts



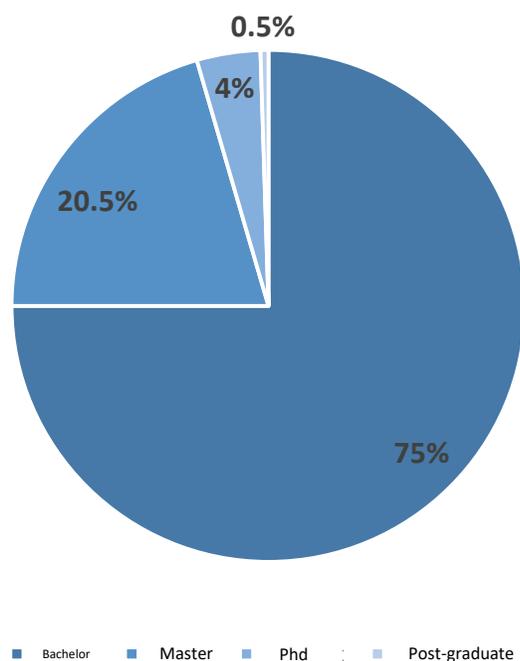
International context

In Europe - 2018 ---->17.5 million students (s. EUROSTAT)



National context

Total 2019/2020: 543,3 thousands



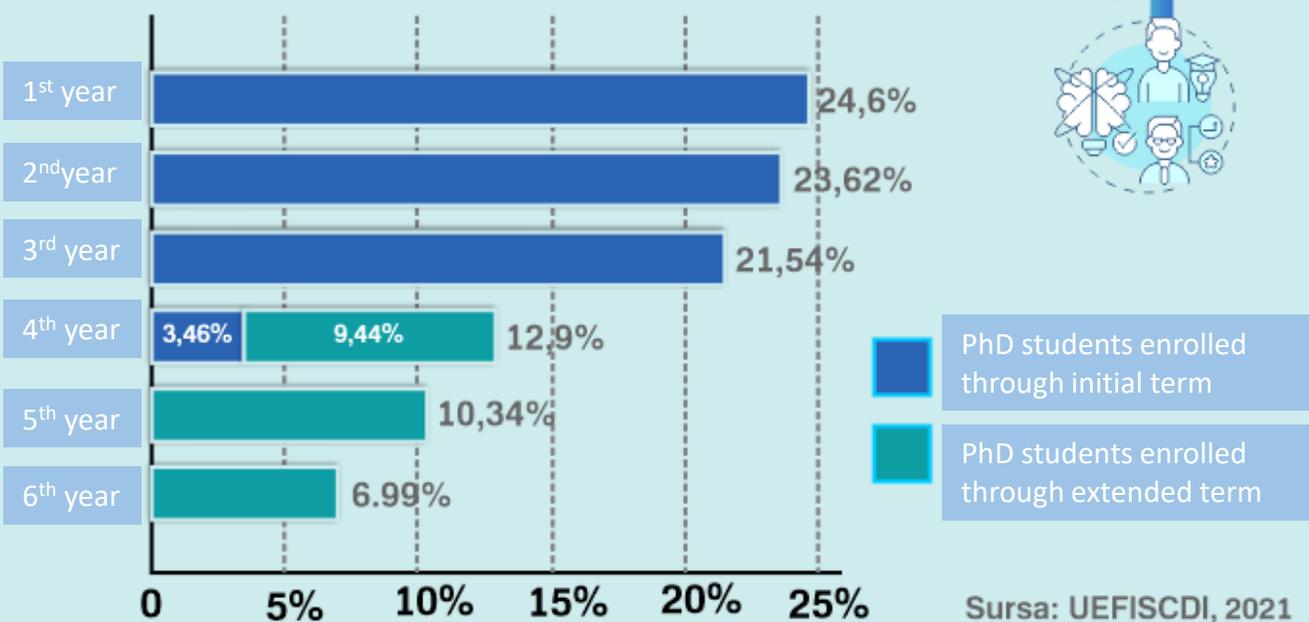
Field	Number
Medicine (6 years)	2924
Languages & literature	1297
Industrial engineering	787
Mechanical engineering	731
History	691
Theology	661
Civil engineering	641
Management	551

Source: UEFISCDI, 2021

Progression

National context

Distribution of Phd students per year of study
2019/2020



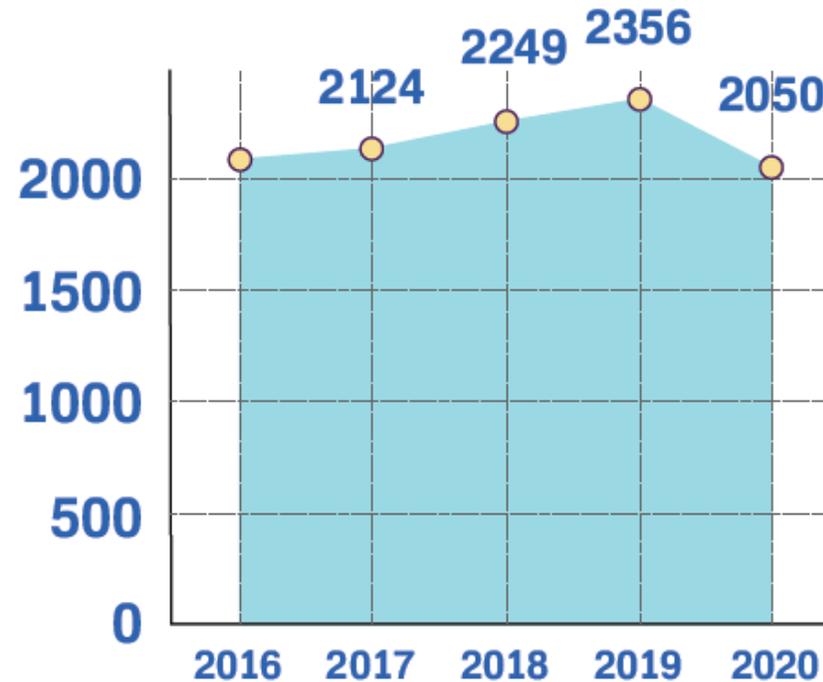
Graduation

National context

uefiscdi

Unitatea Executivă pentru
Finanțarea Învățământului Superior,
a Cercetării, Dezvoltării și Inovării

Total number of PhD titles between 2016 – 2020 = 10.857



Source: UEFISCDI, 2021

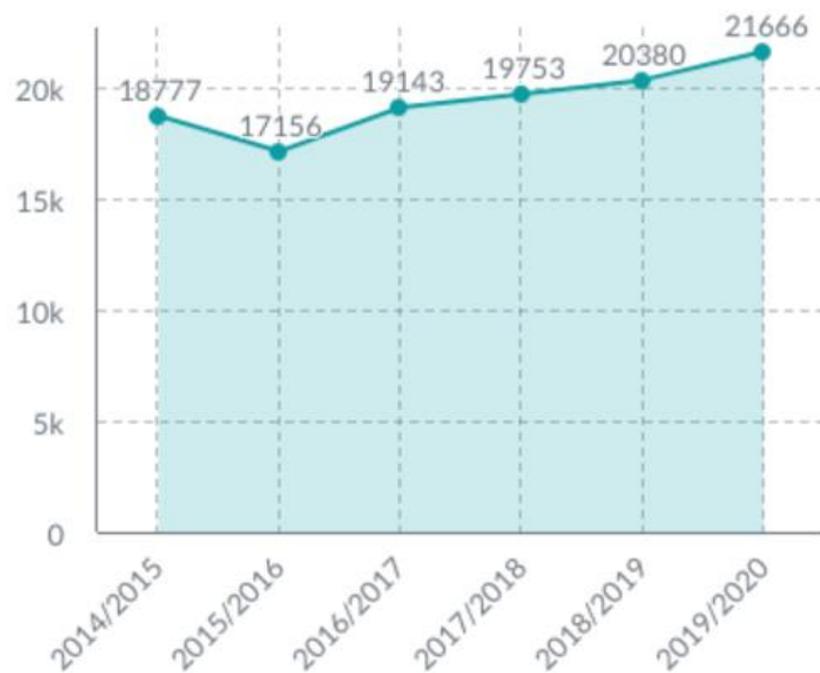
Graduation

National context

uefiscdi

Unitatea Executivă pentru
Finanțarea Învățământului Superior,
a Cercetării, Dezvoltării și Inovării

Evolution of the number of PhD students



Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2015-2020

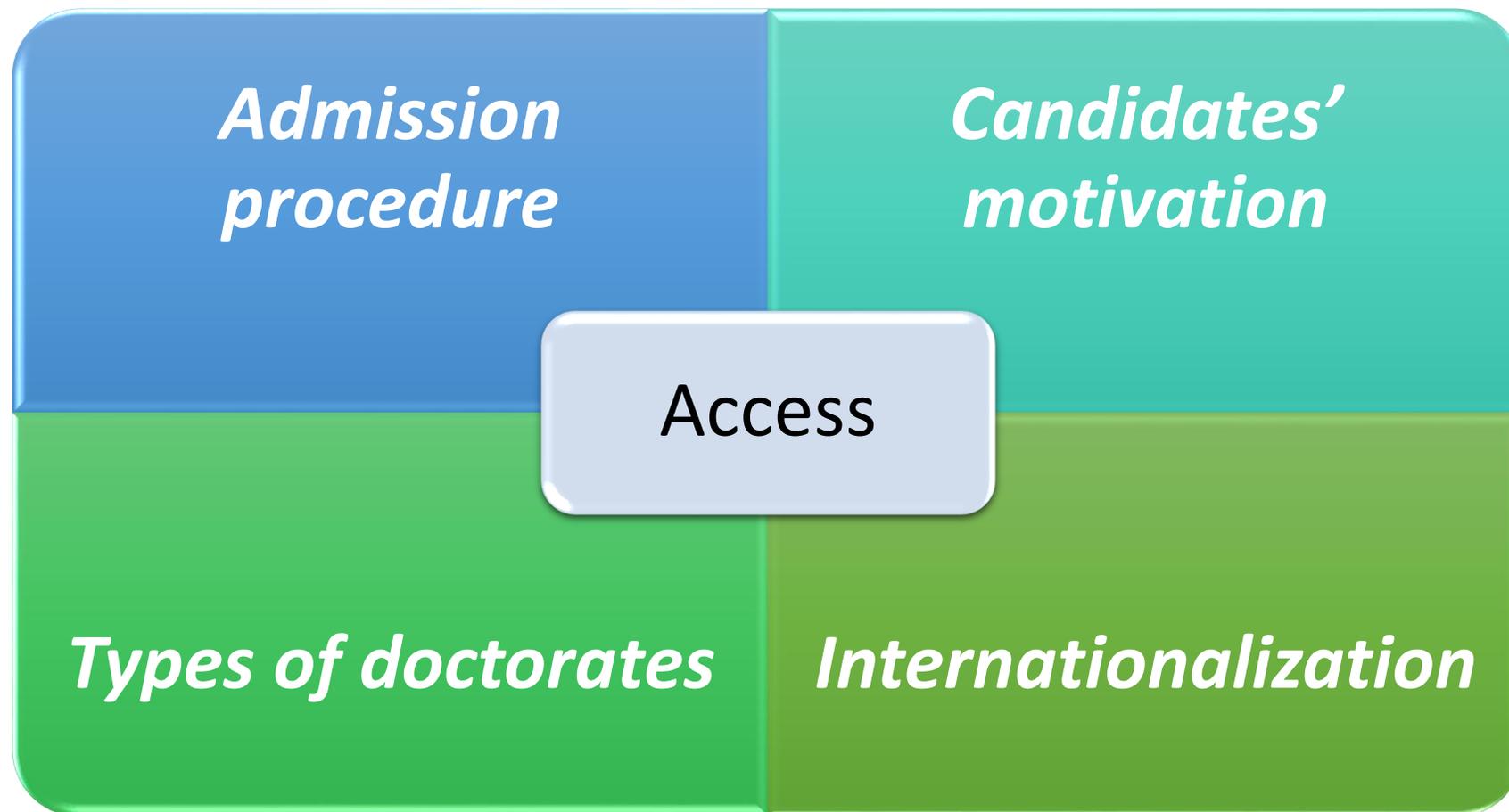


uefiscdi

Unitatea Executivă pentru
Finanțarea Învățământului Superior,
a Cercetării, Dezvoltării și Inovării

Challenges and opportunities

Challenges



Access Opportunities

Admission procedure

- Recognition, in practice, of **skills developed during the master (research)**
- Supervisors or employers (in the case of a professional / industrial doctorate) may propose **research topics**
- **Supplementing the time period / existence of a course module** for doctoral students who graduated from other fields of study

Candidates' motivation

- Gradual, selective and motivational system of **flexible routes** of admission, which can offer entry / re-entry to students coming through the professional route towards the academic doctorate
- Supporting students for **the option to do the thesis in English or other international languages** (for example, the creation of Academic Writing Centers to support students)

Access Opportunities

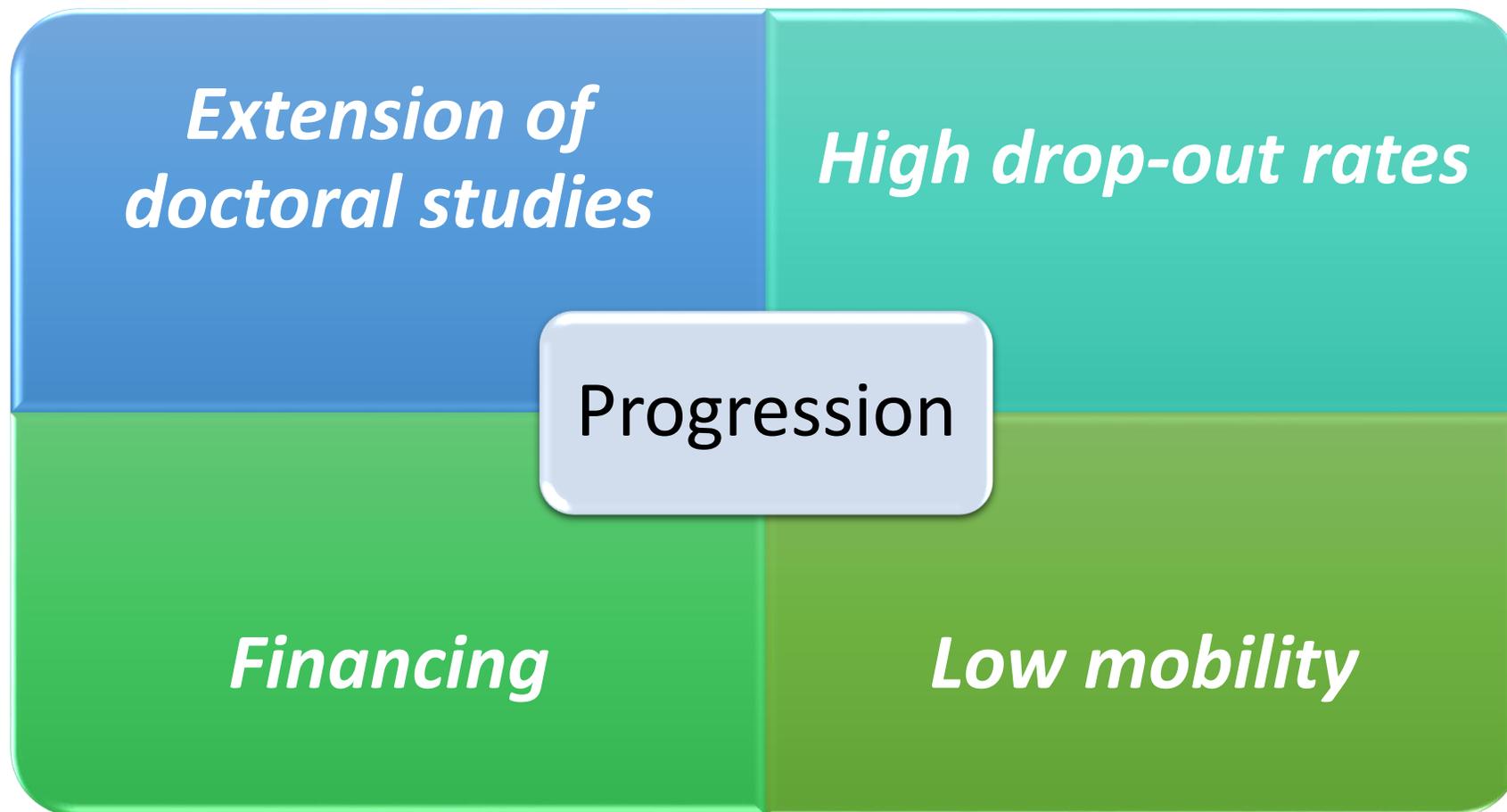
Types of doctorate

- Differentiation between the **academic** doctorate, **professional** doctorate, **industrial** doctorate.
- Clarification and implementation of the differentiation between **professional and research** (academic) **master programs**.

Internationalization

- Creation of a **systemic legislative framework** to support the efforts of **internationalization**, with a flexible methodology, which guarantees **the autonomy** of universities to make certain decisions related to the design of international programs and recognition of doctoral studies.
- **Elimination** of **preparatory course** (Romanian language course for international students), which limits the attractiveness of doctoral studies for foreign students, extending the time allocated to the process as a whole.
- Developing the mobility mechanisms, the framework for recognizing mobilities and facilitating access to doctoral funding for mobilities in the Erasmus+ context and/or from public funds.
- Better alignment of national criteria and performance indicators for doctoral studies with those at international level (e.g. Hirsch), generating effects on increasing quality of both the process and the outcome of the doctoral studies, as well as on internationalization

Challenges



Progression Opportunities

Extension of doctoral studies

- Revision of the curricular structure of doctoral programs (**flexibility**) – including modularization and/or micro-credits
- Regulation of **cumulative** theses
- Avoidance of **redundancies** between research-based Master programs and doctoral programs
- Developing a **pedagogy of doctoral studies**, to better respond to the specific needs, as to reshape the learning processes as to be better aligned with research

High drop-out rates

- **Organization of training courses for supervisors** (during or at the end of the *enabling* period);
- Conducting doctorates in national/international **co-supervision** (e.g. dyad / group supervision);
- Mechanisms for structured and confidential **feedback**
- Greater **involvement** of the higher education institution.

Progression Opportunities

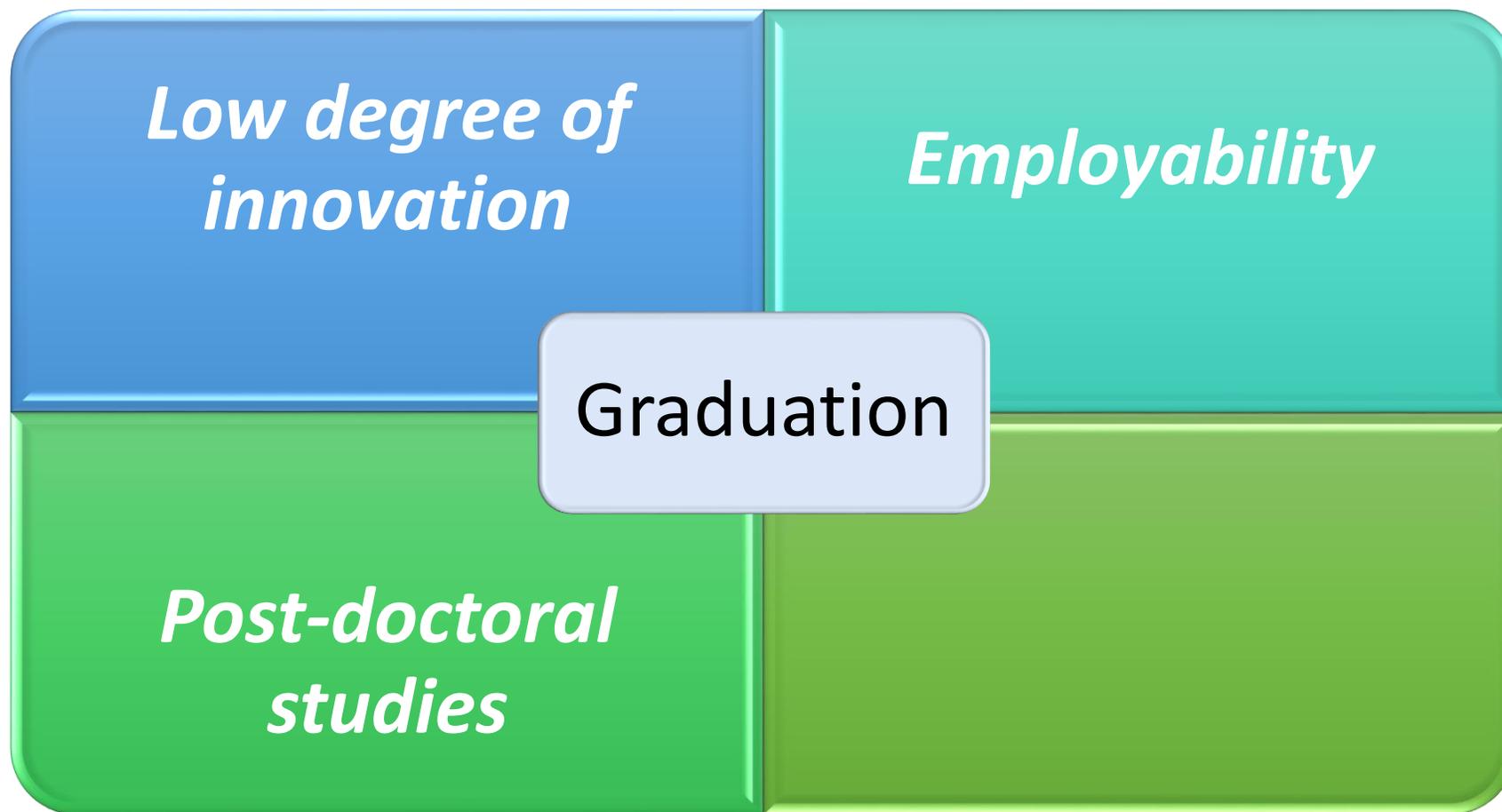
Financing

- **Financial support** for at least 1 year of the grace period through a competitive system
- **Increasing the autonomy of the doctoral student** in managing part of the doctoral grant
- **Increasing the transparency** of spending allocated funds
- **Increasing the number of grants**
- **Including students - PhD students in research projects**

Low mobility

- Inclusion of a **compulsory international component** (doctoral mobility)
- **Revision of the curricular structure of doctoral programs**, so as to provide flexible study routes equivalent to those at international level

Challenges



Graduation Opportunities

Low degree of innovation

- Changing the focus **of the criteria for completing studies** to a dimension of content, reflection, promotion and representation of the field studied (the doctoral student thus becoming an ambassador of the field).
- Clearer definition, at national level, of the way to **award graduation grades**, so that the criteria are defined by field.
- Greater clarity on the benefits that the doctorate brings to graduates, depending on the grade obtained.

Employability (1)

- Development of a **mechanism for monitoring the insertion of graduates on the labor market** (e.g. integrated mechanism at the level of each university for all graduates (Bachelor / Master / Doctorate)
- Analysis / **redefining the routes of entry** into the university environment and ensuring greater predictability
- Clarification of the role of the doctorate in the **professional field outside the academic and research environment**
- Depending on the field of study / research / activity, exploring the possibility of eliminating the obligation of the doctorate for associated teachers in higher education institutions (particularly for fields such as art, theater, music, physical education and sports, etc.)

Graduation Opportunities

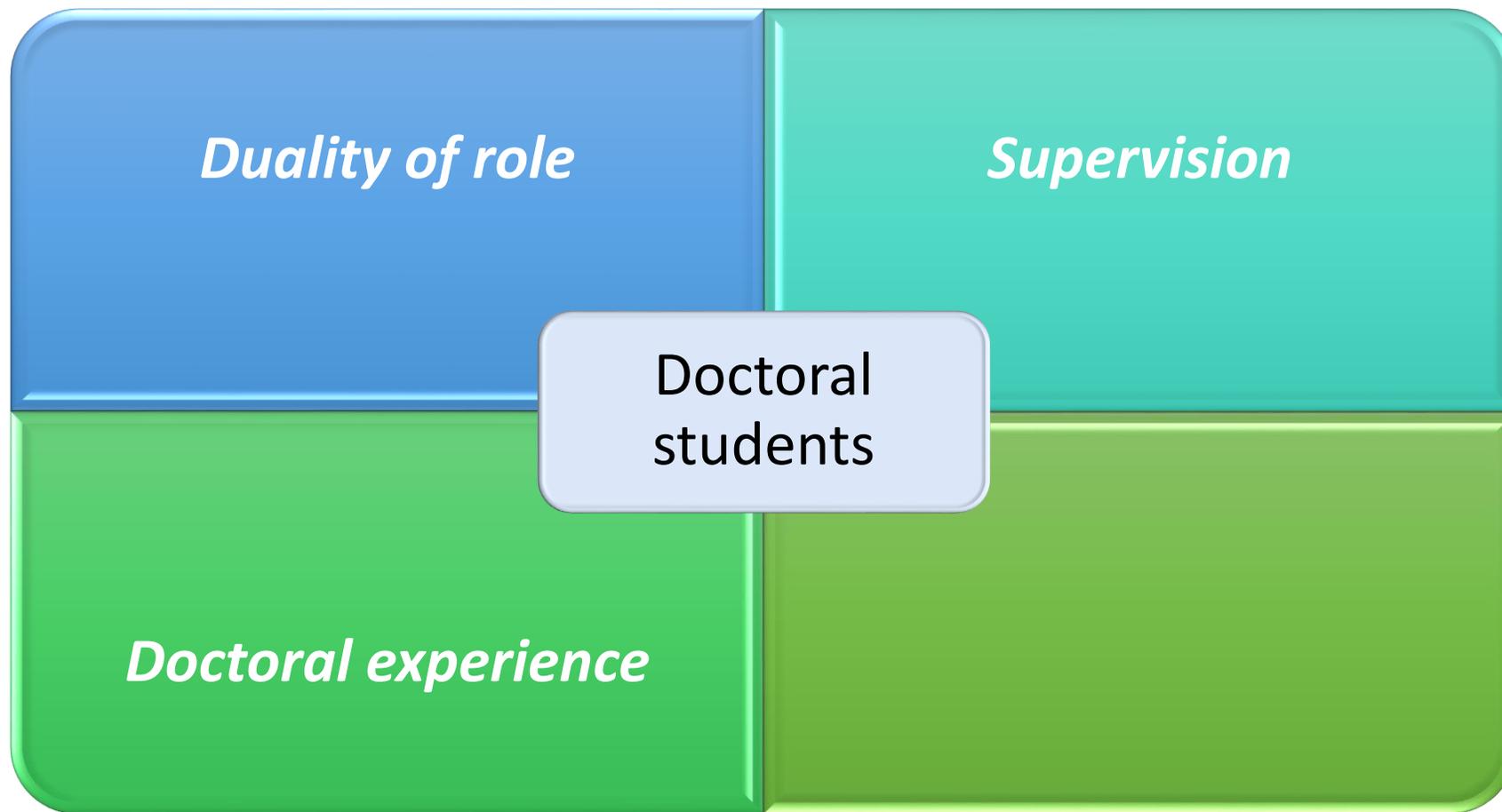
Employability (2)

- Realigning the **National Qualifications Framework** with the Higher Education Qualifications Framework
- Developing and introducing a **career model** in research / the academic environment, to be implemented according to the career objectives of the doctoral student and to support the increase of the quality in the academic / research environment.
- Redesign and regulation of **part-time studies**, in order to better fit the requirements of work / academic and personal life balance.
- Design and regulation of **public-private partnerships in professional / industrial doctorates** (partnerships between higher education institutions and private organizations), thus enabling companies to support through research grants employees / future employees, to address research projects relevant to industry (on specific topics of interest).

Post-doctoral studies

- Allocating **more funding** for this component **and increasing the attractiveness** of postdoctoral programs, correlated with concrete benefits for researchers at this level.
- Funding also provided at **national level**, not exclusively institutional.
- Better definition and regulation of these study programs (with clarification of their role in Romania) and **addressing legislative vulnerabilities in the field**.
- **Diversification of post-doctoral programs** for junior researchers (who obtained a doctorate in science no later than 5 years before admission to the post-doctoral program, according to Art. 172 of LEN no. 1/2011) and for senior researchers (who obtained a doctorate in science more than 5 years before admission to the postdoctoral program), but who have not received a postdoctoral fellowship in the past.

Challenges



Doctoral students Opportunities

Duality of role (1)

- **Clarification of the status of doctoral students** (student vs. emerging researcher vs. teaching assistant)
- Intensification of the **support offered by universities** to doctoral students to encourage their originality.
 - a. Creation of communities of practice
 - b. Involvement of doctoral students in at least one project carried out at the level of doctoral school / faculty / higher education institution
- Increasing the percentage of **transversal disciplines** in the advanced research program, respectively leading to the acquisition or improvement specific research skills.

Duality of role (2)

- **Improving the selection process for PhD students** (e.g. research project, interview (exploring the candidate's motivation) and establishing clear criteria for the admission process)
- Inclusion of a **1-year pre-doctoral/probationary year** allowing either access to a doctoral program (including this period in the three years dedicated to doctoral studies), or exit from the program, with the option of a post-graduate certification / for short-term studies.

Doctoral students Opportunities

Supervision

- **Ensuring the selection of appropriate coordinators** - possibly, following the creation of a profile of competencies for habilitation, targeting both the specialized component and the academic component, respectively the mentoring component.
- Construction of coordination teams (guidance commissions).
- **Training for coordinating teachers** (during or after the habilitation process).

Doctoral experience

- Creation of **Guidance / Coordination Centers** at the level of each IOSUD / each faculty (depending on the number of doctoral students).
- Establishing a role at the level of each IOSUD / each faculty (depending on the number of doctoral students) for a **dedicated academic advisor**.
- Implementing an **integrated institutional plan** for each doctoral student.



uefiscdi

Unitatea Executivă pentru
Finanțarea Învățământului Superior,
a Cercetării, Dezvoltării și Inovării

Final thoughts...



ue fiscdi

Unitatea Executivă pentru
Finanțarea Învățământului Superior,
a Cercetării, Dezvoltării și Inovării

Thank you!

simona.iftimescu@fpse.unibuc.ro