Collaboration in doctoral education: Knowledge sharing and experience building

A workshop on doctoral education, structures and aspirational aspects of collaboration among Aurora partners

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
The Netherlands
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Location: HG-1D12 Forum 4, Main building Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Introduction

The doctoral education landscape has changed dramatically over the last decade as the number of doctoral candidates has increased by about 60% in most European countries since 2000\(^1\). The same period has also seen an increase in the availability of scholarship funds for doctorates, both through national funding agencies e.g. CSC, LPDP, NRF in the Netherlands and others that operate at a European or transnational level such as the EU funded Marie Curie Actions. Alongside these increasing participation rates has been a decrease in the number of opportunities to continue in academia and a recognition by policy makers of the need for increased numbers of doctoral graduates in multiple sectors in order to drive economic growth.

These external drivers have combined to transform doctoral programmes which have become increasingly diverse in terms of the demographic make-up of doctoral candidates as well as the types of programme and award offered. Moreover, these programmes are no long solely focused around formal training and developing research expertise in a specific academic discipline but include a significant component of professional development through courses and training in generic and workplace skills along with the opportunity to undertake short-term placements in professional settings. These changes present a challenge for university and doctoral programme leaders who need to allocate resources and shape research activity in a way that complements these new requirements around doctoral education.

A further challenge for traditional universities is the increasing requirement for interdisciplinary research to address the complex problems of the modern era. This has led to a demand for researchers who can work across disciplines with doctoral candidates often opting for joint supervision by professors from different universities, different departments at the same university or by academic and a practitioner which in turn has led to increased interest in dual registration and jointly awarded degrees. Sometimes these arrangements are incentivised through funding arrangements for example the UK Doctoral Training Partnerships or by collaborative research projects funded by the European Research Council and other research agencies, which more than

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ever, promote collaboration and cohesion between institutions and across national borders. These arrangements have contributed to internationalization of doctoral education an outcome that is no longer a desirable bonus but an institutional imperative. Achieving such goals is not a straightforward task and resource efficiency is increasingly a necessity.

In summary, doctoral education is rapidly evolving from an activity structured around strict disciplinary boundaries towards one delivered through diverse, interdisciplinary, collaborative and increasingly international programmes that prepare doctoral graduates for a variety of positions within and beyond academia. Consequently, it seems a good time for members of the Aurora Network to take stock of the current state of affairs and the structures that support their doctoral programs and consider how we might collaborate to make our doctoral education more relevant and efficient in this changing landscape.

**Aim of the workshop:**

The workshop aims to provide participants with a shared understanding of the doctoral education programmes and related structures of each Aurora partner, and to consider how we might respond to global pressures for change, and foster a discussion on future meaningful and possible long term collaboration efforts in this domain. It is particularly relevant that we meet at this time and speak about doctoral education in light of our newly forged joint membership to the European University Association-Council on Doctoral Education (EUA-CDE).

**Preliminary program**

9:30-10:00  Coffee and welcome reception (Aurora group representative, even perhaps the VU Amsterdam Rector could come and say a few words about the relevance of doctoral education)

10:00-13:00  “Knowledge sharing” Morning session with a coffee/tea break (11:20-11:35)

Chairs: Nick Watmough and/or Frans Snijders

In this session, we wish to clarify the similarities and differences between PhD-trajectories offered by the participants’ universities. These may vary between heavily structured (first years of) a PhD-trajectories (in Anglo-Saxon universities) for PhD-students paying tuition fees and lightly structured individual trajectories for junior researchers in their first job in academia (in most continental European universities). Based on a common understanding of – especially- the similarities we can then discuss which aspects of doctoral education could benefit from joint initiatives by the Aurora-members (Afternoon session). We request that a representative of each participating University gives a short presentation (10-12 minutes plus 8-10 minutes questions) that broadly follows the structure suggested below.

The first part of the presentation should provide essential descriptive information on the doctoral programmes at their institution: Application, admission, funding, tuition fees, type of doctoral candidates-some statistics of how many there are, where they come from etc., doctoral education and training obligations + time to finish, dissertation submission and defence.
The second part should provide an overview of the challenges associated with doctoral education at their university and eventual solutions or best practices to tackle them. This might encompass some or all of the following topics:

- Researcher mobility
- Non-academic services for international PhDs (accommodation, visas, dual careers-for spouses, events etc.)
- Social activities, welcome seminars and induction/orientation events for PhDs
- Career professionalization services
- Alumni events and networks
- Joint and double degree agreements
- Recruitment and marketing of PhDs

These topics are indicative, and we encourage each partner to showcase their own key priorities for doctoral education as well as a basic overview.

13:00-14:00 Lunch

14:00-15:00 **Experience building** Afternoon session part 1
   Chair: Sandra Hasanefendic and Ad Verkleij

In the first part of the afternoon session we select one or two topics of common interest that arise from the morning’s presentation s for further discussion. For instance our priority at VUA is to share experiences around recruiting better qualified and more self-funding PhD candidates from abroad, but also the services we offer to international PhDs. A second priority would be to address concrete collaborative opportunities, for instance to organize pre-Phd-training programs, joint degrees, and participation and collaboration in joint summer or winter schools.

15:00-16:00 **Collaboration** – Wrap up and further actions Afternoon session part 2
   Chair: tbd

In the second part of the afternoon session, we should decide upon any future actions for instance the intention of becoming a thematic group, meeting up in the biannual in Antwerp, other collaborative activities. In the event that we want this group on doctoral education to continue, we will need to identify a project leader.