

Press Release

27 January 2014

How to train doctoral researchers for a diverse job market

When it comes to excellence in doctoral education, Europe's leading research universities harbour lots of good practice. In a just published paper by LERU*, they share that experience and ask employers, governments and funders to take note.

The new paper is a practical follow-on to a 2010 LERU position paper on the changing doctorate. In the present paper we document innovative programmes and practices at LERU universities, illustrating the implementation of the principles proposed in the previous paper. The paper aims to promote innovation in doctoral education and formulates recommendations for audiences within and outside of universities.

Doctoral education has changed significantly, not least to adapt to changing demands from a variety of employers. Universities have (re)developed structured programmes and are embedding in them a great choice of professional development training opportunities for doctoral researchers.

For example, under the heading formal research training, there are masterclasses promoting creativity and risk-taking in novel research, toolkits to help doctoral researchers with information management in their research, courses or mentoring to support them to finish their PhD successfully and on time, and individual training plans, just to name a few. Pierre & Marie Curie University in Paris found, for example, that the risk of being unemployed is lower for PhDs who start to plan their professional project and their job search early.

A doctoral candidate's ability to self-initiate and drive activities is part of the process of becoming an independent researcher. LERU universities provide all sorts of training in this area, from online progress logs and self-assessment tools to doctoral networking events or associations and student-led training for conference organising.

To highlight the wide range of career opportunities there are career days and fairs, employer-led career skills workshops and events with specific targets such as less well-known occupational fields for humanities graduates.

(Re)structuring or refreshing of programmes is common at LERU universities and happens in a variety of ways. Some universities go for one overarching graduate school, sometimes also including Masters students and postdoctoral researchers, while others have several or many schools. Much attention is given to develop innovative interdisciplinary structures and international or intersectoral exposure.

While the focus of the paper is primarily on good practice, there are also policy implications for doctoral training. LERU formulates some recommendations for universities, but also for policy makers (e.g. support programmes that encourage intellectual risk-taking and creativity), for funders (e.g. ensure that funded programmes demonstrate their effectiveness in developing skills) and for employers (e.g. engage with universities on training provision). In particular LERU urges the European Commission to take up these recommendations in the further development of the European Research Area and in the deployment of Horizon 2020 and other research-related funding programmes.

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More information

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Launch event

LERU is organising a public launch event to present the paper on 4 February 2014 at the Neth-ER House in Brussels. Registrations are open at

<http://www.leru.org/index.php/public/calendar/launch-event-advice-paper-on-doctoral-training-/>

*About LERU

The League of European Research Universities (LERU) is an association of twenty-one leading research-intensive universities that share the values of high-quality teaching within an environment of internationally competitive research.

Founded in 2002, LERU advocates education through an awareness of the frontiers of human understanding; the creation of new knowledge through basic research, which is the ultimate source of innovation in society; and the promotion of research across a broad front in partnership with industry and society at large.

The purpose of the League is to advocate these values, to influence policy in Europe and to develop best practice through mutual exchange of experience. LERU regularly publishes a variety of papers and reports which make high-level policy statements, provide in-depth analyses and make concrete recommendations for policymakers, universities, researchers and other stakeholders.

The LERU universities are:

- University of Amsterdam
- Universitat de Barcelona
- University of Cambridge
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Freiburg
- Université de Genève
- Universität Heidelberg
- University of Helsinki
- Universiteit Leiden
- KU Leuven
- Imperial College London
- University College London
- Lund University
- University of Milan
- Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
- University of Oxford
- Pierre & Marie Curie University
- Université Paris-Sud
- University of Strasbourg
- Utrecht University
- University of Zurich

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