

Report and Commentary on the Eurodoc Statement
of Standards in the Assessment, Expectations and
Outcomes of Doctoral Programmes in Europe



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Introduction

The purpose of this short report is to provide a background commentary on the agreed policy within Eurodoc on standards and expectations of doctorates within Europe. This policy has come together based on the developments within the Bologna Process and also closely linked with that, the European Qualifications Framework. In both circumstances, there are aims to define doctoral standards at a European level based on the Dublin Descriptors developed in 2004 by a consortium of academic standards organisations from several countries. The statement from Eurodoc, "Eurodoc Statement of Standards in the Assessment, Expectations and Outcomes of Doctoral Programmes in Europe", sets Eurodoc's position on the Dublin Descriptors, as well as stating expected outcomes and procedure for those obtaining a doctorate and those mobilising once they have obtained a doctorate. This is seen as vital in Eurodoc's opinion to successful implementation of doctoral standards across Europe in order that there are common expectations of mobilised researchers. This report first explains Eurodoc's position on the Dublin Descriptors, with other comment and supporting evidence behind other positions in the statement. The statement itself is placed in an appendix to this report. It is hoped that the information presented here will provide useful input to those working on implementation of the doctoral cycle of education in the Bologna process as well as other relevant initiatives concerning standards of doctoral degrees.

Eurodoc's position on the Dublin Descriptors

The Dublin Descriptors were set by a consortium of academic standards organisations in 2004 [1] as a means towards developing European wide recognised standards of a doctorate. Eurodoc widely welcomes these descriptors, though has two specific differences with their aims that are reflected in Eurodoc's own set of descriptors (which are extended from the Dublin descriptors). These two positions on the descriptors are as follows:

- **Publications** – The third line of the Dublin Descriptors implies an expectation that doctoral research should be worthy of publishing in an internationally recognised peer reviewed journal. Eurodoc recognises first that there is a clear difference between successfully defending a thesis that demonstrates research process and successfully publishing results that others will be interested in reading within a Journal. Further to this, there can be exceptional cases where successful PhDs do not reach journal publication for several good reasons, and more commonly they may not have any accepted manuscripts at the time of examining the thesis. This issue has therefore made an amendment to line 3 of Eurodoc's statement, where it states that doctoral work is potentially worthy of submission to a journal, rather than any indication that it is expected or required.
- **Defence** – In line 5 of the Dublin Descriptors, it covers the expectation of doctoral graduates to communicate their newly found knowledge to the scholarly community, peers and other interested parties. While this is supported, Eurodoc also sees the need for defending such research in the process of communicating it.

At the time of writing this report, the Dublin Descriptors have been accepted into the European Qualifications Framework [3] and the Bologna Process [2]. Therefore there is at this stage little expectation that they will change in any significant way, though the above comments will have a purpose in assisting the use and implementation of

such standards. There are no other differences Eurodoc has added to these descriptors.

Background Discussion to the Outcomes and Expectations Statement

The second half of the statement covers some key expectations of what will be output from a doctoral examination and also some key aspects of how the examination is conducted with respect to the interests of the researcher. These have been discussed and decided at European level with the view that they are suitable minimum standards that are, though reasonable, still not too heavily detailed that they become beyond useful purpose for some countries to implement.

Thesis publishing - The purpose of this point was to ensure that theses are made publicly available and are considered an officially recognised resource that allow the wider research community to use their newly found knowledge. Some countries were against the idea of theses becoming a freely available online resource since they have theses published as a book which are for sale. Also not all theses are officially published with an ISBN number as shown in some questionnaire results in the Appendix. However, having theses available from a recognised public source that can be reached through central library catalogues or equivalent was considered a necessity.

Transparency in examination – This point is important to Eurodoc in light of the need to ensure there is an independent witness involved in the examination process. This could take place through an independent chair, a supervisor or a voluntary observer. In some countries this has little problem since the defence is a public event, where as in other cases the actual audience is restricted to the examiners and possibly only one person extra. However, this is not always mandatory and without the presence of witnesses, evidence to appeal against an unfair examination can be near to impossible.

Entry level – Most of the questionnaire responses indicate that master level qualification is the general entry requirement, though some would allow exceptions of equivalent qualifications or experience. More importantly, Eurodoc is supportive of a comprehensive admissions system that ensures ad hoc admissions between a prospective early stage researcher or supervisor are avoided, where an impartial third person will ensure a fair and properly conducted admissions system.

Internal and external examiners – It was seen as essential that there was at least one examiner internal to the institution and one external present, though it is not necessarily required that the external examiner be from a different country. This is required in some countries, which largely depends on the country's population which may or may not have enough capacity to facilitate its own examiners. It is however, essential that all examiners have the appropriate expertise regardless of their origin.

The need for supervisors to critique – Before submission of a final thesis, it is considered an essential requirement that the supervisors are involved in the review and critique of the thesis. This is seen as essential for the early stage researcher in developing their ability to understand and defend their new found knowledge.

Essential need for building general skills – From other presentations and discussions within Eurodoc, the specified generic skills and abilities were agreed and are taken at abstract level suitable for all disciplines. Though there is certainly the

need for specific training for each subject area and indeed each individual, there is certainly the need that the training received should include these qualities.

References

1. Shared 'Dublin' descriptors for the Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral awards, *Joint Quality Initiative*, March 2004,
<http://www.jointquality.org/content/ierland/Result%20Draft%20Dublin%20Descriptors%203%20cycles.doc>.
2. Announcement from Bologna Bergen Summit, 2005, on the Qualifications Framework,
http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/BASIC/Framework_Qualifications.HTM
3. European Qualifications Framework official website of current information,
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html

Eurodoc Statement of Standards in the Assessment, Expectations and Outcomes of Doctoral Programmes in Europe



This statement has been brought together with the purpose of identifying common goals that should be met in the assessment and outcomes of doctoral programmes in Europe. Though there are different methods of implementing such goals, it is important to both the researcher and the research community that doctoral candidates hold a comparable level of scholarly standards, the opportunity to disseminate their research widely and undergo fair assessment. Such requirements will ensure that they are not disadvantaged in such ways due to the locations in which they research during and after their doctorate.

Assessment of a Doctorate

The following 6 guidelines built upon the Dublin Descriptors¹ are agreed by Eurodoc as appropriate indicators that are achieved by a candidate in a doctoral examination:

1. Have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field.
2. Have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity.
3. Have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which potentially is worthy of submission to refereed publication.
4. Are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas.
5. Can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise and defend their contributions to knowledge.
6. Can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.

Outcomes and Expectations of Doctorates

To ensure that there are common expectations of a researcher, it is necessary that the following minimum outcomes and expectations from their doctorate are maintained:

- That the thesis or equivalent documentation becomes a publicly accessible resource with the exception of withholding any information that is subject to intellectual property rights. Details of such published documents must be readily accessible via appropriate electronic search engines as would be expected for other publications.
- That there are means to ensure transparency and fairness in the examination procedure in order that there is a witness present to testify to their achievements or whom can act as a backup should the outcome of the examination be challenged in an appeal.
- That a Master level qualification in the majority of cases is the entry requirement to a doctorate although equivalent experience or qualifications are also a valid, while also all applications should be subject to a systematic admissions procedure involving people in addition to the prospective supervisor(s).
- That the thesis has been defended against examiners both internal and external to the institution with suitable expertise in the subject area, ensuring that these examiners are chosen fairly.
- That there is opportunity for critical review, first from the supervisor and then the examiners to allow minor corrections if the thesis contains errors, though is worthy of a doctorate. Where the thesis is not successful, examiners should be expected to clearly recommend necessary major corrections subject to re-submission.
- That the doctoral candidate will have had experience and opportunities to continually develop their transferable skills including ability to independently take on and complete a task, increased leadership roles, publications, experience in original thought, competence in research methodologies, transfer of knowledge, economy and job market.

¹Shared 'Dublin' descriptors for the Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral awards, *Joint Quality Initiative*, March 2004
<http://www.jointquality.org/content/ierland/Result%20Draft%20Dublin%20Descriptors%203%20cycles.doc>

Appendix – Relevant Questionnaire Results from Eurodoc 2005 Questionnaire

Country	How are Doctoral Examinations Conducted? – Length of Viva, Examiners Involved. Are theses published?	What are the normal entry requirements to a doctorate and are there other kinds of doctorates not named a “PhD” in your country?
Armenia		
Austria	Examinations for broader research field, examined by independent external and internal assessors Vivas from 20 mins to half an hour Theses officially published.	Only research doctorates conducted, little taught element. Some may be part time or full time Normally master level entry. All research doctorates are PhD.
Belgium French	No real standards, variable between faculties	All PhD research doctorates, although may not all be consistent in duration and programme.
Belgium Flemish	5-7 examiners with externals included. Around 2.5 hours in length. A public pre-defence also included. Theses published but no ISBN.	Only full time research doctorates. Master degree required.
Bulgaria		
Croatia	Independent examination panel appointed by the faculty council with at least 3 examiners including external Theses are published in the National Library	All research doctorates, master degree or equivalent required (BSc + additional credits for scientific work)
Denmark	Two externals and one internal. What length of time is normal? Theses are published.	PhD research degrees only, although PhD course with 30 ECTS credits are included. Normal entry is master level degree.
Estonia	Around 5-6 examiners with 1-2 internationally known. Will assess presentation, academic discussion and defending of their case. Vary in time, 3-4 hours. Theses are published	Now only research PhD, with 70% of its content as research.
France	Panel for assessment with at least 2 examiners and one internal. Viva length generally 1-3 hours with public defence of 1 hour. Theses are published in the University Library	Only research PhDs exist, with 3 or 4 years duration full time or 5-7 years part time.
Germany	Sometimes not oral examinations, sometimes are. Not clear though, what examiners are involved, what kind of duration, are theses published?	One type of PhD either due to being on contract in the institution, taught in a graduate school or externally connected. Few regulations on the award of a PhD.
Greece	7 member panel of academics with supervisors included. Public defence is also given. Theses are published but not with ISBN.	All research PhD programmes either full time or part time.

Hungary		
Italy		
Lithuania	A selection of examinations, at least 3 must be passed. Are around 1.5-3 hours in duration. Theses are published.	All doctorates are PhD research.
Moldova	Four exams in the philosophy, language, informatics and exam speciality. Must present publications. Then has a public defence with 5 members and 2 opponents. Thesis is kept as a scientific manuscript	Doctor of sciences is obtained and also doctor of habitat following defence. Very combined with learning and research as well as the competition routes to starting a doctorate.
Netherlands	Panel of 5 independent examiners for an academic ceremony of 1 hour. Then to reading committee.	All research PhDs, some incorporate teaching into their programme.
Norway	3 examiners, one external included 1-3 hour examination Thesis is published	Normally master level degree entry. Traditional 3 year PhD but also 4 year PhDs which include a teaching year.
Poland	At least two examiners, three doctoral examinations. Presented to a board for approval.	Master level entry required. Research based only qualifications.
Portugal	Rector, another person and supervisors in the jury and two others that include externals Theses are published.	Typical entry to PhD with a master qualification or higher qualifications from bachelor level, maybe with some added research experience. Only have PhD as an awarded degree, and are often employed full time
Romania	Three examiners including the supervisor and an external.	All research PhDs with full time and part time mode. Requires Masters qualification and other entry examinations
Russia	Must pass philosophy, foreign language and other examinations. Required to produce 3 or more publications and then public presentation to a district council – how many people? Are theses published?	Standard research PhD with full time and part time options.
Serbia and Montenegro	Oral presentation of thesis is given in front of a scientific jury (3-5 members with externals as well as internals, the latter essential) where supervisor must be present. Theses are published	All standard entry requirements – generally masters. Only standard PhD in existence.
Slovakia	Commission of at least 4 members, and also required to have published. Theses is official publication	Doctorates other than PhD exist in specific subject areas such as law, theology etc.
Slovenia	Commission of 3-4 members with a public defence less than one hour Thesis is published.	Standard PhD, sometimes incorporated into other work in an institution.
Spain	5 Examiners including one external.	All research doctorates as PhDs

	Presented within 1 hour and no assessment criteria clearly set out.	
Sweden	Examination board of 3 or 5 people. Public presentation with open questions. Examiners will also ask publicly. Theses are published.	Standard research PhD with inclusion of doctoral courses.
Turkey	Sometimes an examination before or after writing the thesis, which is more like a report. Depends on the supervisor but will have a doctorate jury at the end with 5 academics. Theses stored in the institution library only.	Only standard doctorates exist. Entry normally through a "LES" exam and test for language proficiency.
United Kingdom	Usually 2-3 people, with one external included. Can be from 1-4 hours depending on discipline and a public seminar may be given first. Theses only published in the University library.	The standard PhD but also: New Route PhD with taught element. Professional Doctorates in a discipline Taught Doctorate, doctor of education.

DISCLAIMER: While every effort has been made to support the accuracy of this information, it is purely reliant on the accuracy and clearness of the information presented by delegates at the Eurodoc 2005 conference and there after. Eurodoc therefore accepts no responsibility for the accuracy or reliability of the information presented here.