

Eurodoc 2005 Questionnaire – Response by the National Postgraduate Committee of the United Kingdom

General questions and Discussion

1. Are there significant changes in the situation of PhD candidates in your country as compared to last year? And in the situation of junior researchers? Please specify if your association considers those changes an improvement or a deterioration.

Within England, Wales and Northern Ireland, there has been significant pressure from the higher education funding councils to implement a new code of practice for research degrees. Failure to sufficiently meet the detailed requirements set out in the code will have implications on the funding of higher education institutions in terms of support and provisions to recruit postgraduate researchers. This follows a government initiative to be developing and training skilled researchers from our higher education institutions. The National Postgraduate Committee welcomes this move as it will significantly reform the delivery of postgraduate research degrees, and our involvement has been taken on all the way.

2. What main improvement would your association like to see in the situation of PhD candidates? And in the situation of post-docs and other junior researchers?

At present, within the current developments we would like to see better and improved support and representation for postgraduate students, including those who are PhD candidates. This is essential in enabling institutions to engage properly with the interests of researchers and develop improved quality. Further to this, we are keen to ensure more transparent supervision processes along with effective complaints mechanisms to deal with problems that arise. It should also be noted that in all aspects of early stage researchers, those who are part time research students will require increased attention as the population of such students is ever increasing and they are easily overlooked.

3. In general, what are the hottest topics (in Higher Education and Research & Development) under discussion in your country, in particular affecting young researchers? Specify at least two of these.

The largest topic over the last year has been whether too much funding of research is being concentrated into more research intensive institutions, and whether the funding being concentrated into certain regions of the UK as a result would be an unwise move. The NPC is concerned that the lack of accessibility to research in certain regions will have implications on encouraging participation in such activity from those who could be potential leading researchers. The marketisation of higher education is also a huge concern where tuition fees being charged in large quantities to all students could lead to the closure of departments offering courses that are unlikely to be marketable. This likewise could lead to the loss of much research without the teaching infrastructure to compliment it.

4. Which actions or activities has your national association been involved in this year? What are your association's future planned activities?

The most significant involvements our organisation has had for the development of early stage researchers is as follows:

- The Code of practice for research degrees is a new publication that has been put together by a workgroup that involved NPC and other key stakeholders in the higher education sector for postgraduate research students. NPC's main input has had significant impact on induction of research students, complaints/appeals mechanisms and also it was involved in lengthy discussion with regards to having a transparent process in supervision of research students. The code can be viewed here: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section1/default.asp>
- The other major NPC has had on matters of research and teaching links has been its active involvement in the Department for Education and Skills Higher Education Research Forum. This forum was to act as a springboard to the government for investigating the links between teaching and research. This has likewise had the purpose to influence policy in the future on matters of how to distribute research funding. More information is available online at the following website: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/hereform/heresearchforum/index.cfm>
- The NPC has also worked closely with the UK GRAD Programme, www.grad.ac.uk. They are a centre for excellence in training and developing postgraduate researchers. This past year NPC carried out a national survey jointly with UK GRAD and the Centre for Recording Achievement, www.recordingachievement.org, to determine the research students' perceptions about how personal development planning is useful to the student trying to identify and build on their training needs. The purpose of the research along with other information has been to try and identify best practice in this area and develop it further. More information is available from a joint report that was published at: <http://www.npc.org.uk/page/1098797810.pdf>. NPC would encourage Eurodoc to use some of this evidence in terms of how a European researcher could monitor their progress as they are mobilised in their research.

5. How does your national association define its area of activities? Following which procedure does your association get to establish its official positions (if any)?

Four times a year the NPC holds a general meeting, one of which is the annual general meeting and the other three are ordinary general meetings. Delegate members from affiliated institutions and also executive members will attend these meetings through which policy motions can be tabled and voted upon. The executive is then mandated to implement policy that is passed.

6. Did your national association ever make a PhD survey or plans to make one? On which topics? Do you think these surveys would profit from data of other countries being included? How do you imagine Eurodoc contributing to that?

The above survey mentioned on personal development planning has been undertaken in the past year. A fuller report of this survey has been written and is currently waiting final administration to be published at the time of writing this questionnaire and will be downloadable from <http://www.npc.org.uk/essentials/publications>. It is certain that this report will assist to inform Eurodoc of good practice in this area, where it potentially could help to inform good practice on such a topic in a European context.

7. Which are the ideas your association would like to put forward for EURODOC policy in 2005?

The following ideas NPC would like to put forward to Eurodoc this year are as follows:

1. Following recent policy NPC has passed to retain the status of students for PhD candidates, we are keen to work closely with the labour conditions workgroup in order to derive good practice and minimum conditions for doctoral candidates around Europe. This we believe will be achieved by researching labour conditions across Europe and to deriving policy on good practice in this area. NPC is keen to investigate how suitable labour conditions can be met while still retaining student status, which NPC believes is the best option for UK doctoral candidates and also a possibility.
2. We would like to see strong recognition of diversity in the Bologna process in terms of how each country including the UK can implement a European researchers charter and also the requirements of Bologna in the most suitable way.
3. We would encourage more policy on conditions for teaching as a number of European researchers are undertaking such tasks but have little to protect their rights as contracted employees.

Bologna Process and Lisbon Strategy

1. How would the application of the "Bologna Process rules", like comparability of structures, ECTS systems, Diploma Supplement, affect the Doctoral Level in your country?

We already have a variety of routes to doctoral qualifications including the traditional PhD, New Route PhD, professional doctorates (e.g. EngD, PsychD etc.) some of which already contain modules through which credits such as ECTS are awarded. The traditional PhD is probably the key difference where there is a need to find a system by which a student's training and progress is recorded and accredited. There are wide questions currently in debate about whether this will mean extra qualifications on top of the PhD, or as part of it or to be recorded more informally in a progress file.

2. What is the position of your national association on the insertion of the Doctoral level as the 3rd cycle of the Bologna Process? What are your expectations or fears, if any, related to this?

Some possible fear has been expressed as separating taught postgraduates from research postgraduate students, as both are largely treated under the same umbrella within the UK. On the other side there is support for recognition of a research degree and the different stage in education that it is for many.

3. Is the Lisbon Strategy [http://europa.eu.int/comm/lisbon_strategy/index_en.html] affecting the policy of your country as what regards the recruitment of young researchers?

Our input to the European Researchers Charter has meant that European policy has largely been under our influence in many applications. We are very supportive of the actions come out from the Lisbon strategy in this regard and believe that current policy already does have a great deal of support for the Lisbon strategy.

Labour Conditions

1. What are in your country the advantages and disadvantages of the PhD candidates' status (student/employee/mixed status/external)?

PhD candidates are seen as students, and registered likewise. To NPC, this is accepted as it is considered that student benefits including finance, tax and loan repayment exemption outweigh the disadvantages such as no pension contributions, social security that could be compensated in other ways in the UK. Further to this, it is of concern to NPC that intellectual property for doctoral candidates in the future could have implications if employee status was used and their interaction with their supervisor as an employer could have serious implications.

2. What status does your association prefer for PhD candidates and why?

By quoting a recent motion passed by NPC, our reasoning for the retention of student status in the UK is as follows:

“Financial benefits, academic freedom, opportunities and other benefits as a student outweigh the benefits of employee status”

and also

“The status of an employee has implications on international students entering the UK both in terms of cost and immigration.”

NPC is of the belief that labour conditions can be appropriately reset so as to support the needs of PhD candidates as students as if they were employees elsewhere. A further point to note is that healthcare and social security is already available to students and employees in the UK. The main disadvantage financially speaking for PhD candidates in the UK is the lack of pension contributions, which we believe can be easily compensated for by other means.

Supervision and Training

1. Referring to the Eurodoc supervision and training Charter (to be found as Appendix 2 at : <http://www.eurodoc.net/workgroups/supervision/Eurodocsuptrain.pdf>) : is there any concern or action in your country at present to implement standards that would accommodate the standards outlined here? If this is not the case do you see a need to implement a charter of your own or another suitable document?

The UK has already implemented the charter to a great extent through the UK code of practice for research degrees. As already discussed earlier, NPC has had a great deal of involvement in the development of this code and fully supports its implementation. The largest challenge ahead for NPC and representatives within higher education institutions is to take on the code to an extent that they will develop their own codes and suitably implement effective supervision and training procedures along with effective complaints mechanisms and effective inductions which NPC is concerned for.

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section1/default.asp>

2. How are doctoral examinations conducted in your country (number of examiners and other people involved, length and format of examination, any specific guidelines on criteria you are given on how PhDs are passed/failed...)? Do examinations vary in style or length in different subject areas or institutions? Are your theses an official publication?

The traditional approach is through a viva voce examination. This will normally consist of an external examiner, internal examiner and either a chair of the viva or the supervisor as an observer. The examiners are not allowed to have had any involvement in the process of the research conducted by the PhD candidate.

3. What are the different routes you have to a doctoral qualification (for example this may be full time research, part of a teaching fellowship or be a longer doctorate with taught elements)? Also give details of any doctorates ("professional doctorates" or "taught doctorates") other than the research doctorate (PhD), such as EngD -doctor of engineering- or PsychD -doctor of psychology- : specify their length, entry requirements and any difference in level they may have.

Within the UK there is still the traditional PhD, normally intended to be carried out within three years full time or five years part time, though completion times do vary. It is also now possible to obtain a doctorate either through the new route PhD, <http://www.newroutephd.ac.uk/>, the professional doctorates such as EngD, PsyhD etc. or the taught doctorate, EdD. Information about such doctorates can be searched from links on our website at www.npc.org.uk/links/Postgraduate_Courses. The new route PhD is designed to take four years where the graduate will gain a PhD as with the traditional PhD but also 120 credits of training that they will undertake throughout the four years. Such training will be tailored to their individual needs.

4. Are you aware of any means by which standards on research degrees in your country are monitored? For example, is there an outside agency that will audit institutions on their performance, or are there forums to evaluate performance? Please give any details you have on the above that will measure quality assurance in your institution.

At present all institutions are audited by the UK Quality Assurance Agency, www.qaa.ac.uk. The auditing process does also now involve a submission sent in by students on their perspective of the academic quality. It is intended that this will be extended further to research degrees with greater detail after a survey has been carried out in the coming year. More details about the auditing processes can be found at the following two links:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/default.asp>

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/postgraduate/postgraduateengland.asp>

International mobility

1. Which are the main opportunities (institutional agreements and exchange programmes) for the mobility of researchers offered in your country? Which of them are the most popular?

At present researchers in the UK have the opportunity to apply to the EU 6th Framework Programme and also in some cases Socrates and Erasmus. Such links are made through the UK Research Office in Brussels, www.ukro.ac.uk, through which applications can be made to the commission. Other opportunities for short term and long term internships exist in a variety of institutions around the UK, which students are encouraged to undertake.

2. What is the awareness of young researchers about the possibilities of the various exchange programmes? How could this be improved?

Publicity is generally not that wide, with few official advertising ports to seek such opportunities. NPC would encourage more data sources provided from the recruitment networks of which some are linked via our own website at the following link:

http://www.npc.org.uk/links/Graduate_Recruitment_Networks

3. Which grants and scholarships are offered to enhance mobility of national researchers to go abroad? (list in order of their popularity)

Availability is rare in this situation, and indeed individual institutions will often arrange these internally via sponsors or other sources. Other options are as follows that we are aware of:

- UK Research Office in Brussels - <http://www.ukro.ac.uk> for information on Early Stage Researcher funding
- European Social Fund - <http://www.esf.gov.uk>
- UK Socrates/Erasmus Council - <http://www.erasmus.ac.uk> for European study

4. Which grants and scholarships are offered to enhance mobility of foreign researchers to come to your country? (list in order of their popularity) Can foreign students and/or students from EU member states get a grant for PhD programmes in your country?

It is possible for EU members to have a grant for tuition fees from the UK Research councils, www.rcuk.ac.uk. This does not, however, cover maintenance costs that they must find otherwise. Other sources of information as to how to find scholarships etc. from individual institutions (as is often the only way) can be found from the following links:

- <http://www.educationuk.org> - Education UK, a useful website for international students set up by the British Council.
- <http://www.britishcouncil.org/education/funding/> - Information from the British Council on Postgraduate Scholarships.
- <http://ukscholarshipsdatabase.britishcouncil.org/> - a directory of UK Scholarships.
- <http://www.ukcosa.org.uk> - The Council for International Education, which contains useful guidance notes for international students.
- <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/ors/> - Overseas Research Scholarship Scheme, grants to allow international students to undertake research degrees.
- <http://www.acu.ac.uk> - Association of Commonwealth Universities with funding opportunities for postgraduates resident in The Commonwealth.
- http://www.support4learning.org.uk/money/funds_internat.htm - Other information for international students.
- <http://www.studyoverseas.com/uk/uked/funding.htm> - Helpful tips on applying for funding in the UK.

5. Do you have any examples of institutionalized “joint degree programmes” for European or international PhDs? (if any, indicate number of programmes, their locations and concerned academic disciplines as well as number of participants and their origin/destination country)

There are no official figures on the joint degree programmes available, and only a few examples are advertised through search engines such as the European PhD programme in Socio Economic and Statistical Studies where the University of Southampton in the UK is a partner institution:

<http://w3.uniroma1.it/sess.euophd/>

6. *What are the requirements to get this label (whatever it is called)?*

Should an institution wish to undertake a collaborative programme, there are requirements on collaborative provision that they should abide by as listed in the QAA code of practice on collaborative provision and flexible distributed learning.

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section2/default.asp>

Professional Future

1. Are you aware that the European Commission is about to release a European Researchers' Charter and a Code of Conduct for the recruitment of researchers? Does your association have any opinion on these documents?

We are fully aware and supportive of the charter, much of this has already been covered by our code of practice for research degrees. However, we are keen to see further points raised in the charter about mobilising researchers are fully taken on board and we are keen to continue working with organisations such as the UK GRAD programme, www.grad.ac.uk, the Department for Trade and Industry and Office of Science and Technology, www.dti.gov.uk and the Quality Assurance Agency, www.qaa.ac.uk who all have interest in the charter. A conference will be held in the UK this coming autumn on the subject which will be of great interest to us.

2. Which way can these European recommendations be better promoted and implemented at the national and institutional level?

Already the code of practice for research degrees is bringing in a framework for institutions to implement a better code themselves and from that it will develop suitable implementation. Due to funding implications for higher education institutions it is hoped that they will be pushed to extend these provisions.

3. Does your association have any opinion on intriguing issues like the duration of contracts, the assessment of the scientific production, the different career paths and their comparability in academia and industry (or other)?

At present there is no official NPC policy on career paths and their benefits. However, the closest policy on such matters of career development of researchers etc. would be our response to the Roberts Review, which NPC has great support for. Details of the review and our response can be found at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/documents/enterprise_and_productivity/research_and_enterprise/ent_res_roberts.cfm

<http://www.npc.org.uk/page/1031850235>

Gender Equality

1. Are there any initiatives in your country that you estimate to have been at least partially successful in reducing gender imbalances existing at the PhD level or at later academic stages? If yes, please give details. If not, please identify the probable reasons for this and

indicate what the most important steps would be towards a programme that really has a practical impact.

Within the past year, the government Department of Trade and Industry has set up a Women and Equality Unit, <http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/>. The intention of this is to bring more initiatives on gender equality into all spheres of society including PhD researchers. At present though NPC has not undertaken any work with the unit.

2. Are there notable differences in the gender distribution between comparable positions in academia and other sectors? What are the reasons for this? What is the tendency?

It has not been raised in the past that academia and industry have as such differences. It is generally more the case that concern is raised where there is less involvement of women across the board in science and technology as well as leadership.

Statistics

It is first noted that the following information sources have been used to deduce the statistics asked of in the questions below:

www.hero.ac.uk – Online directory of higher education institutions and other websites in the UK.

www.hesa.ac.uk – The Higher Education Statistics Agency

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05_02/05_02.pdf - PhDs in the UK, entry and completion, W. Naylor

<http://www.hepi.ac.uk/downloads/14PostgraduateEducation-FullReport.pdf> - Postgraduate Education in the United Kingdom, T. Sastry

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/statistics/fees/> - Survey of Tuition Fees for International Students by Universities UK.

<http://www.grad.ac.uk/downloads/wdpc.pdf> - What do PhDs do? Produced by UK GRAD.

1. How many institutions in your country offer PhD degrees? Specify the different types of institutions with PhD awarding powers (research only institutions / universities / colleges / other), and their ratio.

There are over 165 institutions in the UK who can award research degrees. If the institution is not a University, it will have a partner University through which a degree is awarded, though the research will be undertaken in that institution.

2. What is an approximate total number of PhD candidates in your country? What has been the trend in the past five years?

The approximate number is around 18,000 full time research students in the UK with a rise in 2000 overseas research students over the past 5 years. The number of home research students has remained steady around 10,000. For part time students, the total number has dropped over the past 5 years from around 9,500 to 7,500 with the main decrease being that of home students. The number of part time overseas research students has remained steady around 1500.

3. What is the average age of students entering doctoral programmes in your country? What is/are the entry qualifications for getting into a PhD programme (Bachelor's/Honours /Master's degree)?

The average age of students entering doctoral programmes for part time study can be estimated as later on in life as over 70% of part time students are beyond age 30. For full time students, the age range is quite uniformly distributed between age 22 and 30 and less than 30% are beyond that age. It can be estimated therefore that the average age of entering a full time doctoral programme is between 22 and 25 years of age. The normal entry requirements are either a Bachelors or Masters degree qualification in the right subject area although in some circumstances, only masters qualification or equivalent is allowed. It is also possible that a person's professional experience or learning can be taken into account so they have what is called Applied Prior Learning (APL) or Applied Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

4. How many candidates defended their PhD last year? What has been the trend in the past five years? What is the average age of the PhD candidates at the time of completion of their doctorate?

Over 15,000 PhDs were defended last year and this trend has been reasonably constant. The average age of completion can be assumed to be between 25 and 30 for full time candidates.

5. What is the nominal length of PhD programmes? What is the average time from start to finish? What is the average active time spent to complete the PhD programme? Are there official part-time modes for PhD programmes?

The nominal length of PhD programmes is 3 years full time and about 5 years part time. However, completion is often later than this with the vast majority completing within 4 years full time and 7 years part time according to the statistics if the time between submission and viva examination is considered.

6. What is the percentage of PhD candidates who complete their PhD? Among those, what is the proportion of those who complete it within the allotted time period?

For full time the completion rate is 82% and part time it is 62%. However, for full time only 71% complete within the allotted time and for part time only 34%.

7. What is the percentage of PhD candidates who withdraw? Are there interim qualifications for those who do not complete their doctorates (Mphil degree or other)?

It is possible to be awarded an MPhil if a PhD is not awarded for whatever reason and the work is sufficient. From the above statistics the drop out rate will be around 25% of all research students.

8. Are PhD candidates registered as such in any place (e.g. at a university or a ministry)?

All PhD candidates have to be registered as students with a higher education institution and also enrolled. They may not be enrolled anywhere else unless they are undertaking a collaborative programme.

9. Are PhD candidates considered students? Do they have to pay fees? How much is it? Does this apply equally to foreigners (EU/ non-EU)?

All PhD candidates are registered as students and will pay fees as such. For overseas students the annual fee normally ranges from £6,500 to £15,000 and for home students £1200 to £3000 depending on the subject area and other circumstances like a bench fee.

10. What is the proportion of PhD candidates who get funding for their research activity? Specify the different types of fundings and their ratio.

The proportion of PhD candidates with research funding is those from the UK mainly in the science, engineering and medical fields, although other EU students are also entitled to a grant to cover tuition fees. Less than 30% of all students would be funded this way.

11. What is the average stipend/salary or bursary of the PhD candidates with funding (please give references for comparison : national minimum salary, average salary, salary of people with the same skills)?

The average stipend is up to £12,000. This is calculated on the grounds that the student is getting equivalent non taxed income compared to what potential earning power they have as a graduate after tax. It has been of concern that PhD candidates in the UK must receive comparable income to those in work and also training to justify their reasoning for undertaking a research degree.

12. What is the proportion of PhD candidates having workers rights and duties? Specify the rights and duties provided to these PhD candidates (social, unemployment benefit, taxes etc.).

Such rights do not apply as they are registered students, however, within the UK social security, healthcare, tax exemption and all the benefits they would expect to receive are available to them. The only main benefits not available to PhD students in the UK are pension contributions both state and private that will need to be made voluntarily after completing a PhD.

13. What is the proportion of PhD candidates that practice teaching during their PhD programme? Are they paid separately for their teaching duties?

Often teaching is for those who wish to and in the majority of cases they will be paid separately to their PhD. It is possible, however, that some students may be under a scholarship that does require them to undertake some teaching so other appropriate contractual conditions will be set for such circumstances.

14. What is the amount of time spent on this activity?

It is normally required that not more than 200 hours per year is spent on such teaching, which would include tutoring, lab supervision and possibly small classes.

15. What proportion of PhD candidates are involved in a collaboration between academia and industry during their PhD?

The UK has a Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering (CASE) scheme where there is some additional sponsorship from industry on top of a standard grant received. A small proportion of students would undertake this scheme where they are able to have involvement and influence from industry if they are researching an appropriate topic of direct interest to industry at the time.

16. What are the numbers of incoming and outgoing PhD candidates in your country every year? What are the numbers of incoming and outgoing junior researchers (postdoctoral level)?

This figure is difficult to estimate although it will be around 3000 incoming and outgoing each year looking at the figures available.

17. What is the proportion of PhD candidates who remain working in academia after they defended their PhD?

This figure is gradually reducing, although the latest figure shows 48% remain within academia.

18. What proportion of young researchers go to R&D departments in companies? How many of them are involved in programs provided by the government to support the employment of young researchers in the private sector (if any)?

A further 18% will go into scientific research outside academia although it is unclear how many of these will be employed by government.

19. What is the average salary of young doctors in academic and private sector?

The average salary is hard to predict and statistics have not been published in a recent report due to many open questions influencing the level of salary. Certain salary surveys do, however, indicate that there is some evidence of increase in salary above that of a normal graduate later on in their career and their potential for higher levels of promotion is more likely.

20. How many members (local organisation or individual) does your national organisation have? Specify if they are local organisations (how many of them) or individuals (how many of them). At how many of the PhD awarding institutions do you have members?

Our national association is made up of affiliated student representative bodies across the UK, so far there are about 50 affiliates and we are seeking to build many more as this only consists of membership around 40% of UK institutions. The lack of membership is due to the lack of interest and support for postgraduate students provided in so many institutions. In light of better support and representation being available to PhD candidates as employees, we are anxious that institutions recognise that student representative bodies in their current form are not sufficient for postgraduates and much greater provision beyond this is necessary.