

UK Council *for* **Graduate Education**

European Conference Report

2003





European conference 2003

Summary

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European Conference Report

The Council held its first European conference in March. The conference held in Cophthorne Tara Hotel in London was attended by over 70 delegates and speakers from across the World. Forty five percent of the delegates were from non UK countries. The event was sponsored by EPSRC, ESRC and Research Fortnight. The purposes of the conference were to share understanding of developments in postgraduate education in Europe, share practices of individual countries and begin to build a network of those involved in postgraduate education in Europe.

Thursday 13th March Plenary Address

*Professor Enric Banda,
Secretary General, European Science
Foundation
(write up to be added soon)*

Parallel Sessions Session A1

Broadening postgraduate horizons - European opportunities for Tomorrow's researchers,

Dr Ramon Noguera, UKRO

Human Resources and Mobility in FP6 - the 'Marie Curie' Programme

Ramon led a session on Human Resources and Mobility in FP6 - the 'Marie Curie' Programme. Ramon, who is based in the UK Research Office (UKRO), outlined the Marie Curie Fellowships Scheme noting that it is open to all areas of science and technology and is supported by a 1,680 million EURO budget. He also described the Scheme as open to 3rd country nationals and as being without age limit. Importantly, the Scheme does include a 'reintegration measure' - incentives to return to country of origin. Interestingly, the UK has been the most successful country in terms of receiving successful recipients of Fellowships under Framework 5 but much less successful (below all countries except Liechtenstein) at sending people to other countries under the Scheme.

Ramon then outlined the eligibility criteria in terms of experience (different criteria for early stage researchers as opposed to experienced researchers) and mobility (with some exceptions, candidates must not be nationals of the State in which they plan to be appointed and carry out their research). He then listed the range of activities that could be funded under the scheme: research training networks, early stage research training, transfer of knowledge, conferences and training courses, individual fellowships, re-integration grants, excellence grants and finally 'Marie Curie Chairs'. He ended his talk by describing the ambitious plan for the 'Mobility Portal' which will provide links to advice, support and funding opportunities either on-line (the portal) or in person at the national and/or regional level. The kinds of advice dispensed will include that relating to employment and social security regulations, visas, tax, health insurance etc. This portal is to be fully established in mid-2003 (and may already be established by the time this article goes to press). Further details of all the above can be found at - <http://www.ukro.ac.uk/mobility>.

His presentation was very well received and was followed by a range of questions. He was asked about a number of technical issues, e.g. salaries and the nature of consumables. As the answers to these questions were relative it is perhaps best to refer to the website noted above. He was also asked about the imbalance in favour of successful applicants to study in the UK as opposed to UK citizens applying to conduct research abroad. The answer was both cultural and economic - applicants come to the UK in part at least because of the English language situation (either because they are already fluent or to improve their English) - at the same time applicants within the UK have more funding sources available to them than is the case in many other EU countries and also may be more likely to see the USA as an option for their research futures. Finally, he was asked about the Marie Curie fellowships as part of the 6th Framework. In his answer he made it clear that while the Scheme is part of this framework it is wider in its brief and not restricted to the thematic priorities.



Ramon was thanked for his clarity and the informative and encouraging nature of the session.

Professor Stuart Powell
UKCGE Executive

Session A2

Network of European Universities in the Life Sciences (EUROLIFE)

Professor Stephen Hillier, University of Edinburgh

In this session Professor Stephen Hillier gave a very interesting and full account of the way in which he and his research group at Edinburgh had collaborated with colleagues in Sweden and other European universities to develop an integrated research training and doctoral programme in the Life Sciences. He described and evaluated how they had succeeded in getting European funding specifically through the Marie Curie fund for doctorates to develop their approach. Their students are attached to a group of departments across Europe who have developed EUROLIFE as a programme of research activities and their doctoral students then spend time in both their own institutions and also are enabled to work in other ones, such as the most famous research institute in Sweden. It appeared to us to be a model development of integrated and excellent research training in the life sciences.

Miriam David
UKCGE Executive

Session A3

The future of young researchers' mobility and career paths - A European context,

Ms Alex Lewis, President, The Council for Postgraduate Students and Junior Researchers in Europe

(Write up coming soon)

Plenary Address

*Dr Christian Tauch,
German Rectors' Conference HRK*

European Developments in Graduate Education

This talk focused on the developments post Bologna in postgraduate studies. It first emphasized the movement towards a European Higher Education Area and the importance within that of the postgraduate sector particularly for students outside the EU.

The importance of moving from an input plus time model to an output driven model was emphasized with the development of learning outcomes offering a potential for a more harmonized framework. The emphasis is now moving to the second cycle - the Master degree. Outlining the draft outcomes of the TRENDS survey of over 800 HEIs across Europe, it was evident that there was a large variability in provision and the characteristics of provision, although some common threads could be discerned. Joint programmes are being developed and are particularly appealing to overseas students. Medicine was generally treated differently in most countries.

Progress at doctoral level is slower and work is just emerging to address the issues of doctoral study. The Bologna agreement considered only the two cycles and there is a need to add a third to accommodate doctoral study.

Discussion of lifelong learning suggested that it was still not formally recognized in many parts of Europe and that appropriate structures were absent. This would be a challenge for the next period with the development of credit frameworks to allow awards to be built up.

Professor Howard Green
UKCGE Chair



Parallel Sessions

Session B1

HEFCE - 'Assessing Research'

Professor Malcolm McCrae

For further details please contact Malcolm McCrae (M.A.McCrae@warwick.ac.uk)

Session B2

Developing International markets

Professor, Dr Soottiporn Chittmittrapap, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.

The gist of this presentation was that developing countries need help from more developed countries in developing sustainable HE. In Thailand, 90% population now receives primary/secondary education paid by the government, and there is increasing demand for HE. Colleges have been converted to universities to accommodate expansion and an increasing percentage of the population is being enrolled into HE. In China, with a population of 1200m population, over 8 yrs the proportion of the population enrolled in HE has increased from 1% (1m) to 3% (3m!). This trend is seen to be in response to a complex amalgam of social/industrial/business needs. Above all, graduate education translates into prestige at a personal level. There is a developing market for knowledge all over the world: education is a major drive for HE development. Therefore there are opportunities for developed countries to help less developed ones meet this need. Owing to financial constraints for students to study full-time in developed countries, HE needs to be internationalised at a local level. Development of internationalisation requires mobility of students and staff, forging of international links and fundamental change in concepts of graduate education curricula. The history of this development from the 1980's onwards has been one of AID (from developed overseas institutions) leading to TRADE (with developed overseas institutions) culminating in internationalisation at a local (less developed) national level. Institutions are becoming linked through educational exchanges involving student and staff exchanges and flexible credit transfers. 'Common tools' for education are being created through developed partners

helping less developed ones to address the issues of QA, cost-effectiveness, administration and student support. The key to success is selectivity, focusing on mutual strengths of the collaborating institutions leading to gradual expansion.

Professor Stephen Hillier
UKCGE Executive

Session B3

Models of PhD

Professor Stuart Powell, University of Hertfordshire and European guest panellists

Guest Panellists:

Dr Nilza Costa, Associated Professor, Universidade de Aveiro, Portugal

Mr Bernhard Lippert, Head of Department, HRK, Germany

Mrs Anita Karner, Head of Office for Postgraduate Study, University of Tartu

Dr Helen Dryler, Project Manager Statistics and Analysis, National Agency for HE, Stockholm, Sweden

The aim of this workshop was to share experiences of doctoral study across Europe. Firstly there was a presentation given by Stuart Powell outlining the variations in the models of doctoral study in the UK, secondly there was a discussion session addressing specific questions, with assistance from a panel of European guests and delegates. The models, outlined in the presentation, were used as a starting point for discussion and to assist in making the comparisons between countries. It was stressed that the models were not intended to be set out in any sense as 'standards' and it was noted that no other country represented at the workshop had the variety of doctoral study as exists in the UK - particularly perhaps in relation to professional doctorates.



Discussion began on the initial kinds of qualifications on offer. Germany has doctorate-granting Universities in which the faculty states what kind of degree is to be offered. One faculty offers one degree with slight variations. Sweden: Has two kinds of doctoral study, PhD duration 4 years full time and a second of a duration of 2 years full time, 4 years part time. Both are defended by a public viva. Portugal: Have academic research degrees although not called a PhD. These can be in the following specific areas: Maths, Engineering and Arts and Humanities. The University approves the research project, which can be taken over a 5 year period. Estonia: Has 1 doctoral degree - PhD with the exceptions of Medicine, Law and Theology.

All panellists confirmed that their Universities have the authority to award doctorates although in Sweden only some Universities Colleges have awarding power in areas of medicine.

The issue of supervision arrangements was raised; Germany traditionally has a one to one approach student - professor. This was deemed perfectly satisfactory if it works. Now there is a move towards the American model of institution not individual. A problem noted was that each faculty can offer very different supervision which might lead to either exploitation or isolation. The other panellists stated that it was common to have one supervisor although now it is more frequent for students to have a maximum of two supervisors particularly in Humanities.

With respect to the Inclusion of Taught Courses, Germany - it exists and students do have to pass certain taught elements. Sweden - has some different kinds of taught elements of which are compulsory depending on which department the student belongs to. Portugal/Estonia - both have elements of taught courses which students have to pass. It was stated that in Ireland there were some taught elements with modules taken from parts of University courses although not compulsory.

Duration of Study was raised and it was stated that most had a minimum of 3years but in Germany it could be done very quickly even within one year if the work was acceptable and of the right quality.

The workshop ended with a general thanks to all participants. It was felt that the workshop had been extremely useful and had highlighted the differences and also the commonalities of institutions across Europe. It had also raised issues of the quality of the student experience and had enabled attendees to reflect on their own practices and principles in the light of alternative approaches.

Professor Stuart Powell
Kathryn Brown
March 2003

Friday 14th March Plenary Address

*Professor Sir Alan Wilson, Vice-Chancellor,
University of Leeds*

Priorities for the European Postgraduate

Professor Wilson's presentation focused on three themes, the development of what he referred to as the research front line, the development of the European research agenda and the postgraduate in the context of European development.

In his initial discussion, he outlined the importance of the wider horizon in the strategic development of research agendas. In science, the scale of development was such that international cooperation was an essential element and this fitted well within the framework of the recent European Research Area. To take full opportunity of this new emerging concept, research groups would need to be focussed and well managed. Professor Wilson identified key areas of science where developments at this scale would be essential.



In his discussion of the merging research agenda, Professor Wilson referred to the development of the framework programmes and frameworks in particular, noting their importance to British science.

In the third part of his talk, Professor Wilson dealt with postgraduate matters. Framing his comments in the context of the Bologna agreement and subsequent developments, he noted the tensions which were likely to emerge as we move to a more consistent pattern of two cycles with the higher education system. In terms of taking full advantage of the wider European horizons, he outlined some of the difficulties of fully participating in truly European initiatives. In this context mobility was a key problem and both the barriers to mobility and some of the potential solutions to these barriers were outlined. Professor Wilson noted that in initiatives such as the Marie Curie scholarships, mobility could be achieved. Looking forward he identified the European doctorate as an initiative worthy of further development and one which could be seen as a real European-wide initiative.

Howard Green
Chair: UKCGE

Parallel Sessions

Session C1

Improving Standards in the UK

Professor Howard Green, UKCGE

Howard Green's presentation was devoted to the Joint Funding Council document 'Improving Standards in Research Graduate Degree Programmes'. Initially he outlined the context for the concern with quality of research degree provision in the UK in terms of the growth of student numbers, submission rates, diversity of the student population, growing diversity of awards themselves, and an increasing interest in research training within the doctoral programme. This led him to question whether there indeed was a problem with quality. Key here is the diversity of provision both with and between institutions and the need for the Funding Councils to be assured that their funds are well invested.

The presentation then outlined the framework which the document proposed, relating to the four key elements of the process, academic environment, supervisory arrangements, student/institution relationships and administrative arrangements. He then went on to explore the development of minimum standards using the example of student supervision.

The presentation concluded by raising questions about the appropriateness of using minimum standards, the indicators which were proposed to measure these standards and the ability of a single framework to deal with the different subject traditions and the diversity of the student population. Subsequent discussion focussed on these questions and the problems of developing a quality framework which would have applicability across Europe.

Session C2

The ESRC - internationalising publicly funded postgraduate Training.

Dr Paul Rouse, ESRC, Professor Linda Hantrais, Loughborough University.

The speakers presented the experiences of the ESRC's Training Board in attempting to develop an explicitly international dimension to postgraduate training for UK social science research students. Comparable organisations in European partner countries have similar goals: internationalising research students is regarded as a positive benefit for the individual student in terms of completion rates and career development, and positive for organisations in supporting the development of graduate schools of international quality. Currently a few ESRC-funded students, mainly in social anthropology, undertook overseas fieldwork (53 out of 1650 students in 2001), but otherwise very few students were taking advantage of EU funding opportunities to enhance their postgraduate experience. The experience of AHRB is similar. An extensive questionnaire survey had identified major negative factors as limited language skills, the costs of studying abroad, and variable levels of exposure to the international dimension in institutional graduate programmes. The



international dimension to postgraduate study could range from in-depth study of another society (necessarily based on the acquisition of good language skills) to interaction with the international research community through workshops, seminars and so on. The Training Board is developing an International Training Blueprint. Mechanisms for support will include additional language training where appropriate, working with partner organisations in Europe to develop joint policies on access to funding for students, and developing new guidance to those providing training in the next edition of ESRC Postgraduate Training Guidelines. From 2004, a commitment to include international or comparative research will be a new criterion in the allocation of awards.

In discussion it was agreed that, whilst the proposals were welcomed, it was important for ESRC (and the other Research Councils) to approach the issue with joined-up policies, not just through Training Board initiatives. For example, the research grants awarded to academic staff commonly offered ideal opportunities for international-level discipline-specific research meetings, whether at home or abroad, to which research students could contribute; the desirability of such a component where appropriate could be made more explicit to research grant applicants. Similarly in awarding grants for international conference and symposium organisation, Research Councils could build in their expectation of the involvement of research students as well as academic staff.

Professor Graeme Barker
UKCGE Executive

Session C3

Training and Careers in Europe: Next Wave Project

Dr Dominique Martin-Rovet, European Science Foundation

ESF developments: Dr Dominique Martin Rouvet gave an absolutely fascinating account of the development of research training and careers in research from the perspective of the European Science Foundation. This built upon the presentation the previous day by the President of ESF. A colleague of hers, based in Cambridge, also gave us a detailed account of the development of a website and web-based materials for accessing careers in and across the sciences in Europe. The use of such up to date techniques in the service of developing interesting and intriguing multi-faceted research careers is to be welcomed and commended. The role of the ESF in funding such developments is also to be applauded.

Miriam David
UKCGE Executive