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**Europe must do more to attract and retain best young researchers:  
EUA report highlights challenges for doctoral education in Europe**

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*A report published today (4<sup>th</sup> September) by the European University Association (EUA) gives an important insight into the state of doctoral education in Europe. It highlights the latest trends in this key sector of higher education, such as, the introduction of new organisational structures to manage doctoral education, the increasing focus on learning 'transferable skills' and the growth in new types of doctoral programmes such as "professional doctorates". Equally, it underlines the challenges that Europe faces if it is serious about attracting and retaining the best young research talent. Amongst the findings, EUA's work underlines that stakeholders (universities and public authorities) must do more to widen participation, to improve mechanisms for supervision and assessment, and to promote the international mobility of doctoral candidates. They must also take steps to ensure professional skills development is an integral part of all doctoral training. The report also shows that national funding policies for doctoral education are too often fragmented, with a lack of coordination between government ministries, research councils and other funders. This fragmentation does not create favourable conditions for Europe to attract and retain the best doctoral candidates, who are often held back by inadequate funding and a lack of career opportunities.*

The provision of high quality doctoral programmes and better career opportunities for young researchers have been defined as strategic objectives by European governments to strengthen research capacity and international competitiveness. "Europe needs to increase the number of researchers and doctoral training can be seen as a cornerstone in reaching this goal," says John Smith, Deputy Secretary General, EUA. "Our work has shown that universities are taking a more structured approach towards the organisation of doctoral education." In particular, there has been a rise in the number of institutions setting up independent units (such as doctoral/graduate schools) to manage their doctoral education, which is enabling them to take a more strategic approach to their research mission.

The report also highlights that a range of innovative programmes, including 'professional doctorates', are emerging in Europe in response to the demands of the labour market (professional doctorates are

practice-related degrees that focus on embedding research into another professional practice). Growing university-business collaboration and international cooperation between universities has also acted as a catalyst for the creation of new programmes. Given the increasing diversity of degrees, EUA emphasises that it is important that 'original research' remains the core component of all doctorates.

EUA believes that universities – together with public authorities across Europe - must do more to enhance the career opportunities of talented young researchers. While the study shows there are clear signs that higher education institutions are strengthening their efforts to help the career prospects of young researchers, notably by promoting more interdisciplinary training and the development of more transferable skills, EUA believes that more work is still needed in this area. The report also shows that further efforts are still required to improve supervision and assessment practices in doctoral education.

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The European University Association, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

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EUA's report also highlights new survey results that raise key issues relating to doctoral education funding. In many cases funding does not cover the length of the programme and does not provide doctoral candidates with sufficient means to work and live in decent conditions. EUA asserts that more efforts should be made to make funding attractive to talented candidates from lower income groups, and more flexible to better accommodate those doctoral candidates who follow part-time degrees.

However, EUA argues that it is not simply a question of increasing doctoral funding. The report shows that there is a huge diversity in both the structure of doctoral education (length of programmes, time to degree, study formats, types of institutions offering PhD degrees) but also in the way that these programmes and structures are funded (both nationally and internationally). The report also highlights that governments do not generally collect adequate data on doctoral funding. Thus in order to increase funding in an appropriate manner, EUA believes that national governments need first to examine in more detail precisely how their doctoral candidates and programmes/schools are in fact funded.

EUA is calling for increased coordination and consultation between higher education institutions and all funding bodies (regionally, nationally and internationally). *"The attractiveness of a research career in Europe, whether in the academic or non-academic*

*sectors, starts and is largely determined at the doctoral research level. It is essential, therefore, to improve the status and financial support conditions of doctoral candidates which varies substantially across Europe"* adds John Smith.

The report also underlines that the lack of coordination of funding also creates an additional barrier for mobility. Mobility is seen to be a key for doctoral education as it leads to wider research experience and career development opportunities, in addition to stimulating knowledge transfer between institutions. For some countries, mobility may also be a means of training their own young researchers in disciplinary and transdisciplinary research areas where a critical mass of doctoral candidates, or research infrastructure is lacking.

EUA believes that doctoral education is per se international, and that more opportunities should be provided for young researchers to engage internationally. EUA underlines that universities should step up efforts to collaborate internationally (e.g. joint programmes and co-tutelle agreements, etc), and that public authorities should do more to improve some of the obstacles that currently prevent young researchers from gaining international experience (problems relating to visa, work permit, pension and social security rights).

To read a full copy of the report: <http://www.eua.be>

### **Background**

Doctoral training has gained greater importance in the context of the Bologna Process (European higher education Reforms) since the Berlin Communiqué (2003) which, on a recommendation from EUA, included doctoral studies as the 'third cycle' following the bachelor and masters level. Two EUA projects on doctoral programmes marked an important step in the Association's work on this crucial issue. The main outcome of the first project was the Salzburg Seminar (February 2005) which identified ten basic principles for the future development of doctoral programmes which were fed into the Bergen Communiqué adopted during the Ministerial meeting in May 2005. In Bergen, EUA received a mandate to follow up its work on doctoral programmes over the next two years in the second project and presented a follow-up report to the next Bologna Ministers meeting in London in May 2007. EUA is also working more specifically on doctoral careers through a targeted project, and continues to support members through 'hands on' workshops for universities on priority issues, for example the organisation of doctoral/graduate schools in a European context.