

## **Excellence in European Doctoral Education (ExEDE)**

A joint project between the University of Edinburgh and Aarhus University (2013-2014)

### **Background and Project Overview**

In 2012, the University of Edinburgh and Aarhus University identified a common desire to unpick and explore the various principles and concepts of excellence in European doctoral education found in many European and national reports. As both institutions already have excellent international reputations for doctoral education and training, the impetus was to identify and share innovative practice in order to reach a common understanding of what is meant by excellence in this area. In December 2012 a high level dialogue was held in Aarhus which identified a number of key themes central to excellence in doctoral education. Underlying all of these was a strong focus on international collaboration and how to create deep and meaningful collaborations between institutions.

From this high level dialogue it was agreed to run a one year scoping project called, Excellence in Doctoral Education (ExEDE) to examine these themes in greater detail. This collaborative project ran from spring 2013 to spring 2014 and had four main objectives:

#### **Main Objectives of the ExEDE Project**

- To identify effective interventions and approaches with potential for extension or expansion
- To explore some of the key issues & challenges around specific recommendations (e.g. joint degrees, doctoral supplements)
- To initiate a series of joint doctorates intended to exemplify and further explore these recommendations
- To consider the potential for developing a proposal for external funding to further develop this work with additional partners

To address the key themes identified by the high level dialogue a series of interrelated work packages were identified. These work packages are detailed below and formed the framework around which the various work activities of ExEDE were based.

#### **Work Packages of the ExEDE Project**

**WP 1:** International dimensions to examination, supervision and the doctoral experience

**WP2:** Encouraging and recording personal and professional development activities undertaken within and alongside a doctorate

**WP3:** Employer engagement, including employers not traditionally associated with the recruitment of doctoral graduates

**WP4:** Approaches to training and support for doctoral candidates and supervisors

## Findings and Outputs

### **Different Perspectives**

The ExEDE pilot project has highlighted the importance of recognising that excellence in European doctoral education can be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the perspective of the given audience. Some of these differences are illustrated below:

#### **The meaning of excellence in European doctoral education from different perspectives**

**PhD Researcher:** Greater access to training and development opportunities. Increased mobility and employment opportunities.

**PhD Supervisor:** Emphasis on research excellence.

**Non-academic employers:** Doctoral graduates equipped to understand and make their significant contribution to the workplace.

**Higher Education Institution:** Increased internationalisation and enhanced reputation.

These different perspectives play an important role, not only in developing and setting up institutional collaborations, but also in helping to recognise how to engage various stakeholders in processes such as implementing new methods to record personal and professional development and enhancing employer engagement. They are also vital to understanding how to effectively evaluate activity. How best to recognise and address these differences is a key element which runs through the various outputs of the project.

### **Key Outputs of the ExEDE Project**

#### **Thematic case studies of practice**

As the project developed it became clear that there were many examples of existing best practice at both institutions. It was therefore decided to organise these into a series of short case studies. These studies are all linked to one or more of the work packages. Each case study is assessed carefully as to how the practice can be made scalable and transferable across institutions. Examples of these case studies are available on the ExEDE webpages.

#### **Work package reports**

A final report has been produced for each work package which details background research, examples of best practice and identifies recommendations for further work. The most comprehensive of these is the report for WP2, *'Encouraging and recording personal and professional development activities undertaken within and alongside a doctorate'* which sets out design principles an indicative framework for a doctoral supplement. The reports are available on the ExEDE webpages.

#### **ExEDE conference**

In November 2013, the two institutions jointly hosted an international conference entitled, *'Excellence in Doctoral Education: Innovation and Enhancement'*. The themes of this conference were based on the ExEDE work packages and were addressed through a series of speeches and interactive workshops. A full conference report is available on the ExEDE webpages.

#### **Joint doctorates**

The setting up of six Joint PhDs across both institutions was central to the scoping project. These studentships are across all disciplines and involve time spent and supervision at both institutions.

## Recommendations

The ExEDE project has identified a number of key overarching recommendations for the sector which are detailed below. These address all four themes set out in the project work packages.

- (i) To build frameworks (for supervisory arrangements, mobility, researcher support and development) which recognise and support the increasing diversity in research and in researchers.
- (ii) For these frameworks to secure the quality of the research and research training environment whilst providing sufficient flexibility to respond to the varied backgrounds, aspirations and motivations of individual doctoral researchers.
- (iii) To address and support the transition stage from completing a PhD to becoming an independent researcher (in academia and a wide range of other careers).
- (iv) To embrace a broader interpretation of industry and employer engagement with doctoral programmes and to build frameworks which make partnerships between academia and employers easier to set up and develop.
- (v) To develop a common understanding of the core value and purpose of the PhD in Europe, for instance based on strengthening the Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training (PIDT).
- (vi) To invest in the process of developing in-depth international partnerships which ensure long term quality and sustainability.
- (vii) To explore examples of best practice to inform and design well-balanced and advanced international partnerships.

## Further Information

More information on the ExEDE pilot project, as well as any follow-up work and downloadable copies of all the key output documents can be found on the project webpages: <http://www.au.dk/en/doctoralexcellenceexede/doctoralexcellence/>