

Doctoral Final Examinations: (Ir) Relevance to new skills and future challenges



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Doctoral Programmes

- » Started from a base of diversity: disciplinary, institutionally, nationally
- » Rapid evolution to respond to society's needs
- » Incorporate new elements (but largely 'added on'):
 - Generic, transferable skills
 - Need for demonstrable impact
 - Public Engagement
 - Knowledge Exchange
- » Supervisor teams rather than sole supervisors
- » Must be completed 'in a timely manner'
- » Increase in monitoring / progress reviews which, in turn, differ between institutions and countries.

Diversity allows for:

- » A wide range of research foci and questions
- » Diversity of researchers' backgrounds
- » Variation in society's needs for knowledge and skills

A Basic Requirement

While all doctorates should NOT be
THE SAME

There is a need for them to be
EQUIVALENT

In the final analysis
there should be a threshold level achieved that
denotes **DOCTORATENESS**

What is Doctorateness?

Dublin Descriptors (2002)

Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who:

- » have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;
- » have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;
- » have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication;
- » are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;
- » can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;
- » can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society;

How do we access 'Doctorateness'?

The Final Examination 1

Differences in examination processes have remained 'consistently diverse' in some respects:

- » Examiners all external vs all internal
- » Supervisors allowed vs not allowed as final assessors
- » Thesis only vs thesis + presentation/viva
- » Viva public vs private
- » Range of potential feedback from examiners to reach a 'pass' level
- » Straight pass vs graded system

The Final Examination 2

- »The thesis remains pre-eminent
- »New skills not formally assessed at end point
- »Required outcomes very broad: contribution to knowledge; publishability
- »No detailed public criteria
- »Sparse examiner training
- »No equivalence monitoring except for peer –review by external examiners (with potential for ‘quid pro quo’/’tit for tat’, etc)

**What skills are we really accessing?
What level are we expecting**

The System

- » Lacks transparency and intelligibility not only for potential employers and the public that funds research
- » But also for those engaged in making it work: supervisors, internal reviewers, examiners and the doctoral researchers themselves.

Urgent Quality Assurance Questions

- » What skills/knowledge, in what combinations, must be present to demonstrate **threshold achievement criteria** for doctorateness?
 - This must include transferable skills
 - Not add-ons, but essential and equally important

- » How could these criteria be conveyed to researchers/supervisors/assessors/examiners to **guide practice**?
 - Need to create a culture that is adaptable and open to change.
 - Explicit academic participation in developing and continual evaluation of doctoral education. Academic, not administrative ownership

- » How could these be made **recognisable/ transparent** to the public/employers?
 - Until we make Doctorateness explicit, how can we expect other sectors to appreciate and value the expertise?

Questions?

Shameless advertisement

Tomorrow's session

11:00 – 12:30

Parallel Session II: B. Intersectoral mobility

Doctoral Graduates in Society: Case Studies of Enterprising Researchers.

Dawn Duke, Clare Wunderly and James Armstrong

- » Pam Denicolo, Dawn C Duke & Julie Reeves (2020) Success in Research: Supervising to Inspire Doctoral Researchers. London: Sage. **Available Dec 2019**

- » Pam Denicolo, Dawn C Duke and Julie Reeves (2020) Success in Research: Delivering Inspirational Doctoral Assessment. London: Sage. **Available Dec 2019**

- » Pam Denicolo, Julie Reeves, Dawn C Duke. (2018) Success in Research: Fulfilling the Potential of Your Doctoral Experience. London: Sage.
<https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/fulfilling-the-potential-of-your-doctoral-experience/book251742>

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Discussion

- » What are potential ways of developing the transferable skills of doctoral candidates, taking into account the changing labour market? (And ensure they are embedded, as part of what it means to be a doctorate)
- » How do current challenges of our societies- climate change, digitalisation- influence the skills of doctoral candidates needed inside and outside academia?
- » To what extent do institutions need to develop new strategies to ensure an adequate training in future skills?
- » How can we ensure we are able to adequately assess all the skills that encompass doctorateness, preserving valuable diversity, but retaining equality?