

## **EURODOC: Doctoral candidates meet in Vienna**

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14 March 2010

Issue: 115

The young European researchers of today long for an active role in the reform process of the higher education and research area in Europe, now rather than complain afterwards, said Zaza Nadja Lee Hansen, a board member of Eurodoc, the international umbrella organisation of associations of doctoral students and post-docs in Europe. Hansen underlined this while summarising the ambitious programme at the annual EURODOC 2010 conference.

The number of applicants hoping to attend event, which occurred in parallel with the 10-year anniversary celebrations of the Bologna process, reflected the importance of debate among young European scientists. Registration had to be closed early even with a significant increase in participants compared with the 95 attending last year's session.

More than 200 young researchers from the 32 EURODOC member states gathered to discuss critical issues of the last decade's developments since the creation of the European Research Area in 2000. This made the five-day meeting the centre of debate on doctoral studies throughout Europe, with numerous workshops, panels and presentations of key policy makers from all the member states.

The meeting was hosted by doktorat.at (an open platform for doctoral candidates and junior researchers, research and education policy-makers and media) at the Vienna University of Technology. The aim was to establish a close link with the ministerial meeting itself and with other representatives of the academic community as well as research institutions and other stakeholders.

While the ministers met rather symbolically to celebrate a decade of higher education reform in Europe, the young scientists' aimed for much more, evaluating and debating collected data of the past decade and the findings of the first survey among European doctoral candidates.

The Eurodoc survey was conducted between December 2008 and May 2009 and gathered information about the financial and legal situation of 8,900 young scientists as well as training aspects and common obstacles to mobility and international job opportunities.

It found the European Charter for Researchers, released and adopted by the European Commission in 2005 and setting up principles of good practice for the European research sector, including institutional administration and funding bodies, had only been implemented by 9% of the institutions and most survey responders did not even know of it.

The inclusion of doctoral programmes in the Bologna process in the Berlin Declaration of 2003 led to a negative definition of young researchers as "students in the third cycle of education", rather than a full-fledged recognition of them as scientists at the start. This definition was criticised by Esther Hutfless, President of doktorat.at and Eurodoc President Nikola Macharová.

This double position of early stage researchers as "doctoral students" and professional researchers also leads to difficulties regarding funding for young researchers and to complications in transferability of social security.

Until last year, doctoral candidates with employment contracts and full social security for mobility only amounted to 20% of the total, while only a third of mobile researchers were able to obtain total coverage of their expenses. The survey also found a gap between Eastern and Western European countries regarding mobility of doctoral candidates.

After the opening plenary and a daylong debate about the problems and achievements of the doctoral programmes as part of the Bologna process and the European Research Area, the junior researchers dedicated a day to discussing their aim of achieving greater coherence in international research policy with key stakeholders of the sector.

The results of the debates were gathered late on Sunday and were included in the Eurodoc goals for the coming year. For next year's annual Eurodoc conference, which will presumably take place in Vilnius, plans are to increase capacity to provide the opportunity for more young researchers to meet with decision-makers and

make the young researchers' voice heard in Europe.

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