

26.11.2015**No doctorates without independent research work
Rectors' Conferences believe standards in Europe are being jeopardised**

The Rectors' Conferences of five European countries are warning against diluting the essence of doctoral studies as an initial phase of research-based work for young scientists (and academics). In a joint declaration, the French, Polish, German, British and Swiss Rectors' Conferences are appealing to their national Ministers for Research as well as to the EU Commission. In their joint declaration, the Rectors' Conferences demand that independent research work be retained as the core of a doctorate.

The declaration was set up in reaction to considerations by member countries of the Bologna Process (European Study Reform) to externally and structurally align the doctoral phase to become a "third cycle" following the two initial "Bachelor's" and "Master's" degrees. The learning targets of doctoral students would be prescribed, so-called ECTS credits would be awarded, as they are to students, and an outline of the partial skills acquired by doctoral candidates would be generated with a "Diploma Supplement". At the same time, the EU Commission is pressing for additional qualifications geared towards labour market needs to become mandatory components of doctorates.

This would not only represent an infringement of the freedom of research and teaching, but would also jeopardise the international success model that the doctorate has become, explained Prof. Dr. Horst Hippler, President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), one of today's signatories of the declaration in Berlin. "Business and society have always benefited from scientists seeking out their areas of research themselves and working on them independently," continued Prof. Dr. Hippler. "We cannot permit this process to be reshaped by political pressure, seemingly only to meet the needs of the market. Independent research work prepares doctoral candidates for a career in science or academia, as well as for key roles in many other sectors of business and society where creative and critical thinking is called for."

He continued to say that it would be more appropriate to offer doctoral candidates additional services across faculty boundaries to develop their skills in a more targeted way. "However, this should neither be prescribed by statutory regulations nor become the focal point of a doctorate," explained the President of the HRK.

"Research-based doctorates are the standard in all scientific and innovative nations worldwide," stressed Prof. Dr. Hippler. "We regard it as our responsibility to maintain and further develop this standard. We are therefore protesting against making doctorates a third phase of study after Bachelor's and Master's degrees. We call upon politicians to strengthen the success model that the doctorate has become. Our joint declaration defines key aspects in this regard."

Further Information:
Joint Declaration on Doctoral Training in Europe