

26.5.2026

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**Title**

Modernizing research training-education and science policy between profession, discipline and academic institution / Ivar Bleiklie ; Roar Hostaker

**Publication year**

2004

**Source/Footnote**

In: Higher education policy. - 17 (2004) 2, S. 221 - 236

**Inventory number**

17811

**Keywords**

Promotion : allgemein ; Ausland : USA : Studenten, Studium, Lehre

**Abstract**

This article argues that the way in which research training is affected by national policies aiming at modernizing graduate education is shaped by the way in which national characteristics of state policies, academic institutions and disciplines interact. The argument is applied in an analysis of the consequences of policy changes and higher education reform in England, Norway and Sweden, focusing on how research training was shaped by reforms during the 1980s and 1990s. The article first presents the status before the reform period with an emphasis on the salient characteristics that affect research training and graduate education. Secondly, we briefly present the main lines of the reform policies and how they affected the higher education systems and careers to which researchers are supposedly trained. Finally, we focus on changes in research education and how the introduction of PhD training affected and was shaped by national system characteristics. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)