



## Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation in Higher Education and Research

### Regional Conference on Practice and Standards in Doctoral Studies and Quality of Doctoral Degrees

26-27 October 2015,  
University of Zagreb, Trg Maršala Tita 14, Zagreb, Croatia

This was two days event comprising Regional Conference and collocated Meeting of the Platform Council.

The Invited attendees included university leadership and senior representatives of authorities having responsibilities for science and higher education from the Region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo\*, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia).

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#### In attendance

Husein Nanić, Director, Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Djordje Markez, Secretary General, University of Banja Luka, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Ivan Pejić, Assistant Minister for Science and Technology, Ministry of Science, Education, and Sport, *Croatia*

Damir Boras, Rector, University of Zagreb, *Croatia*

Ivana Čukovic Bagic, Vice-Rector, University of Zagreb, *Croatia*

Miloš Judaš, Vice-Rector, University of Zagreb, *Croatia*

Marina Matešić, Agency for Science and Higher Education, *Croatia*

Mirjana Gopić, Agency for Science and Higher Education, *Croatia*

Karmela Barišić, President of Accreditation Council, Agency for Science and Higher Education, *Croatia*

Elizabeta Bahtovska, Vice-Rector, St. Clement of Ohrid University, Bitola, *Macedonia*

Emilija Janevik, Vice-Rector, Goce Delcev University, Stip, *Macedonia*

Radmila Vojvodić, Rector, University of Montenegro, *Montenegro*

Zdravko Krivokapić, Head, Centre for Doctoral Studies, University of Montenegro, *Montenegro*

Živoslav Tešić, Vice-Rector for Science, University of Belgrade, *Serbia*

Stojan Sorčan, Acting Director General, Higher Education Directorate, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, *Slovenia*

Martin Čopič, Vice-Rector, University of Ljubljana, *Slovenia*

Aleksandra Kanjuo Mrčela, Director of Doctoral School, University of Ljubljana, *Slovenia*

Stanislav Pejovnik, *President of the Platform Council*

Ladislav Novak, *Platform Coordinator*

## Apologies

Dhori Kule, Rector, University of Tirana, *Albania*

Mit'hat Mema, Rector, Aleksander Moisiu University, *Albania*

Arbjan Mazniku, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education and Sport, *Albania*

Fetah Podvorica, Vice Rector, University of Prishtina, *Kosovo\**

Mubera Kurpejović, Director General for Higher Education, Ministry of Education, *Montenegro*

Viktor Nedović, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, *Serbia*

## Agenda

Day One: Monday 26 October

**Morning:** Arrival of participants

**Afternoon:** 15:30-19:00 Practice and Standards in Doctoral Studies

**Coffee Break 17:00 – 17:30**

Focus on the comparative analysis of the practice and standards in doctoral studies in the course of promoting quality of doctoral studies and doctoral degree beyond the existing thresholds.

Input materials: “Comparative Analysis of the Practice in Doctoral Studies in the Region” and “Quality Code for the Doctoral Degree”

Chairpersons:

Mr. Damir Boras, Rector, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Mr. Ivan Pejić, Assistant Minister for Science and Technology, Ministry of Science, Education, and Sport, Croatia

**Evening 20:00 Official Diner**

Day Two: Tuesday 27 October

**Morning:** 10:00 – 11:00 Closing Session

Focus on the participants' reflections related to the outcomes of the previous session and fine tuning of the final versions of the Platform strategic documents: *Platform Action Plan 2015-2018* and *Quality Code for the Doctoral Degrees*.

Chairpersons: Mr. Ladislav Novak, Platform Coordinator

**11:00 – 11:30 Coffee Break**

### 11:30 – 12:30 Platform Council meeting collocated to the Zagreb Conference

Focus on some organisational, logistical and funding aspects related to the further development of the Regional Platform.

Chairpersons: Mr. Stanislav Pejovnik, President of the Council of the Regional Platform

### 12:30 – 13:30 Light Lunch

Afternoon: Departure of participants

## Minutes of the Zagreb events

Day one: Conference on Practice and Standards in Doctoral Studies

### Introductory Part

Prof. Damir Boras, Rector, University of Zagreb and prof. Ivan Pejić, Assistant Minister for Science and Technology, Ministry of Science, Education, and Sport, Croatia welcomed everybody to this Conference. They expressed their satisfaction of having senior participants of regional HEIs and HEAs in Zagreb, representing a variety of countries, institutions, experiences and responsibilities. They emphasized the importance of maintaining a strategic level debate on higher education and research issues in the Region.

The participants introduced themselves and their respective institutions and expressed commitment to the benchmarking and cooperation under the Platform scheme.

Prof. Ladislav Novak, the Coordinator of the Platform provided an introduction to the Conference themes: code of practice in doctoral studies and quality code of doctoral degree.

### Main Conference Sessions

Main Conference sessions, chaired by prof. Damir Boras Rector, University of Zagreb and prof. Ivan Pejić, Assistant Minister for Science and Technology, Ministry of Science, Education and Sport, Croatia, took place after the introductory part.

At the first session participants widely discussed various aspects of practice and standards related to doctoral studies in the Region. They also provided some clarifications concerning the data included in “Comparative Analysis of the Practice in Doctoral Studies in the Region”, prepared by the Platform Working Group as an input materials for the Conference.

Second session has been focused on the quality of doctoral degree including fruitful discussion on the standards for the quality of research environment, quality of supervision, quality of research outputs of doctoral candidate and quality of assessment procedure. Participants agreed with all points stated in the “Quality Code for the Doctoral Degree”, also provided by the Platform Working Group as input materials.

Day two: Closing Session and Meeting of the Platform Council

### Closing Conference Session

At the closing Conference session, chaired by prof. Ladislav Novak, the Coordinator of the Platform, participants provided reflections on the outcomes of the previous two sessions and reached consensus on two strategic Platform documents: *Platform Action Plan 2015-2018* and *Quality Code for the Doctoral Degrees*.

Conference participants also discussed and adopted the *Executive Summary of the Quality Code for the Doctoral Degrees* as a manifesto for the further substantial advances in quality of doctoral studies and doctoral degree in the Region, beyond the existing thresholds.

## Meeting of the Platform Council

This meeting of the Platform Council has been organised as an event collocated to the Zagreb Conference 2015 and has been chaired by prof. Stanislav Pejovnik, the President of the Platform Council. At this meeting the representatives of the Platform members:

- adopted Minutes of the Andrevlje Meeting 15 – 17 June 2015 and the amendments to the Articles of Association agreed on the Andrevlje meeting;
- agreed to include position of the *past president of the Council* in the Articles of Association;
- adopted "Platform Action Plan 2015-2018" and "Quality Code for the Doctoral Degrees" as strategic Platform documents;
- acknowledged resignation of the Chair Person of the Platform Executive Board, prof. Aleksa Bjelis and elected prof. Damir Boras, rector of the University of Zagreb as new Chair Person of the Executive Board;

## Conclusions of the Conference

The participants of the Zagreb Conference 2015 at its closing session reached consensus on two strategic Platform documents: *Platform Action Plan 2015-2018* and *Quality Code for the Doctoral Degrees* (full versions of these two documents are enclosed).

They also discussed and agreed on the *Executive Summary of the Quality Code for the Doctoral Degrees*, which provides a brief account of the definition and general competencies for doctoral degree, emerging models of improving and sharing research capacities, quality of doctoral degree, quality of the research environment, quality of supervision and quality of assessment (this executive summary is also enclosed).

## Conclusions of the Meeting of the Platform Council

Representatives of the Platform members at the meeting of the Platform Council which followed the closing Conference session, have formally adopted Minutes of the Andrevlje Meeting 15 – 17 June 2015, Platform Action Plan 2015-2018 and the document on the Quality Code for the Doctoral Degrees.

They also recommended the "Executive Summary of Quality Code for the Doctoral Degrees" to serve as the main manifesto for the further development related to the quality of doctoral studies and doctoral degree.

Representatives of the Platform members also formally adopted amendments to the *Articles of Association* agreed on the Andrevlje meeting on 15-17 June 2015 and have proposed position of the *Past President of the Council* to be included in the Articles of Association (revised version of the Articles of Association is also enclosed).

Representatives of members of the Platform acknowledged the resignation of professor Aleksa Bjelis from the position of the Chair Person of the Platform Executive Board, and unanimously elected professor Damir Boras, rector of the University of Zagreb, to act as new Chair Person.

They also acknowledged a vital role which professor Bjelis and the University of Zagreb played in the course of establishment of the Platform and its development.

Professor Boras expressed his determination, as the new Chairperson of the Platform Executive Board and the rector of the University of Zagreb, to contribute to the implementation of the envisaged Platform activities. He also expressed the commitment of the University of Zagreb to contribute in further development of the Regional Platform and reassured the Platform members that University of Zagreb will resume with making available premises for the Platform Office in the Centre for Advanced Academic Studies (CAAS) in Dubrovnik along with necessary administrative support.

## Appendix:

### Executive Summary of the Quality Code of Doctoral Degree

Material of this summary is compiled from the following sources:

EUA: [Principles and Practices for International Doctoral Education](#), 2015  
QAA: [The Quality Code: A Brief Guide](#), 2015  
QAA: [UK Quality Code, Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality, Chapter B11: Research Degrees](#), 2015  
ORPHEUS: [Standards for PhD Education in Biomedicine and Health Sciences in Europe](#), 2012  
EC DGRI: [EU Report of Mapping Exercise on Doctoral Training in Europe "Towards a common approach"](#), 2011  
QAA: [Doctoral Degree Characteristics](#), 2011  
EUA: [Salzburg II Recommendations](#), 2010  
LERU (League of European Research Universities): [Doctoral degrees beyond 2010](#), 2010  
ENQA: [ENQA Workshop Report: Quality Assurance in Postgraduate Education](#), 2010  
EUA: [Achievements and Challenges Doctoral Programmes](#), 2007  
CG (Coimbra Group): [Doctoral Studies Position Paper](#), 2007  
EUA: [Salzburg Principles](#), 2005  
EC DGR (Marie Curie Actions): [The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers](#), 2005  
BP (Bologna Process): [Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA](#), 2004  
JQI (Joint Quality Initiative): [Dublin Descriptors](#), 2004  
BP (Bologna Process): [Realising the European Higher Education Area](#), 2003

#### Definition of quality code

By definition, *quality code of a group of doctoral degree providers is a shared starting point for setting and maintaining the academic standards of their doctoral programmes and doctoral awards and assuring the quality of the learning opportunities they provide for students.*

#### What is doctoral degree?

Doctoral degree is a qualification *rooted in original research*. It presumes that can be made publicly *available in the form of assessable research outputs* and effectively shared. The doctorate is therefore unique in the array of qualifications offered by higher education providers.

There are many facets of the doctoral degree (for example PhD, DPhil, professional doctorates, PhD by practice, PhD by publication). Such diversity has created some confusion with regard to the purpose of the doctorate. Still, at least concerning the traditional doctorate (e.g., doctorate in science and engineering), it seems that 'publishability' remains as an important criterion, supported by different definitions of 'originality'.

#### To whom doctoral degree can be awarded?

Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle can be awarded to those 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 and 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.

#### Emerging models for improving and sharing research capacities

Being on an open research market and competing for best students, researchers and funds, universities increasingly move towards a more professional management of research strategies, including research infrastructure, recruitment and selection of candidates, human resources, training, quality assurance and assessment.

Universities also increasingly engage in collaborative research with other institutions including joint programmes and sharing capital research capacities which may lead to joint or double degrees or with research institutes. Among other aspects, this includes genuine collaboration in doctoral training and shared supervision of the work of the doctoral candidate.

## Quality of doctoral degree

Quality of doctoral degree normally has to live up to the requirements and expectations related to: quality of the research environment, quality of supervision and quality of assessment.

### Quality of the research environment

Research degree has to be awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

### Quality of supervision

Doctoral education is dependent on active researchers to supervise doctoral candidates and bring them into excellent and inclusive research environments. The role of supervisors is critical in maintaining quality standards when supporting research students' research.

To ensure that supervisors possess the expertise required for their role, higher education providers use criteria for eligibility in appointing supervisors, whose performance in the role is kept under review. Normally it is expected that supervisor is active in publishing scientific papers in peer-refereed academic journal(s) with impact factor.

### Quality of Assessment

Assessment process reflects the distinctive nature of for doctoral degree. It involves review process of assessable research outputs and an oral examination. Research degree-awarding bodies safeguard the academic integrity and consistency of doctoral qualification internally and externally.

Although there are some variations between higher education providers, common features of quality of assessment procedures presumes: (a) involvement of competent examiners appointed to the assessment committee who submit separate, independent written reports before the oral examination and a joint report after it; (b) involvement of external reviewers (not being members of the assessment committee) also before the oral examination and (c) separation of the contribution of the candidate from the contribution of other co-authors, except from the supervisor(s);

Positive reports from at least two external prominent reviewers in the respective field and positive reports of majority of members of the assessment committee are the prerequisites for the oral examination. Publishing main result of the doctoral thesis in a peer-review journal(s) with impact factor is normal way for the provision of positive external reviews of the research output leading to doctoral degree.

To ensure transparency it is strongly recommended that at least one member of the assessment committee is from outside the higher education provider and the research degree-awarding body. As the supervisors are substantial co-authors of the doctoral thesis it is also recommended that they do not take part in the assessment process.

\*) This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence