

National doctoral education day
6 October 2022
University of Lapland
Rovaniemi, Finland

Published post-event: Take-home messages of workshop A. What characterizes a good orientation?

Wellbeing and community were crosscutting themes of the workshop. The idea of offering a pre-application orientation and thus tackling poor life/study planning and unrealistic expectations were seen supportive of doctoral researchers' wellbeing. The presentations gave practical overviews of how universities organise their orientations for doctoral researchers and what kind of support materials there are for doctoral researchers and their supervisors.

- ➔ All in all, the workshop participants view that a **pre-application orientation** and **utilisation of wellbeing surveys** to improve orientation guides and events are ideas well worth exploring further.

The support offered to doctoral researchers to connecting with Finnish working life outside academia is also an important part of wellbeing and becoming part of the Finnish society and local community. Universities offer training in transversal skills to their doctoral researchers, which can be a very valuable tool for them to successfully manage the stress and challenges related to their doctoral paths, in addition to building their working life skills.

- ➔ How to support doctoral researchers in reaching their **future career goals** – and how to **encourage them in shaping those goals** – are questions of increasing significance.

Get-togethers by the doctoral researchers' organisations and participatory content in the orientations were mentioned.

- ➔ It would be very interesting to explore more the **agency of doctoral researchers** themselves vis-à-vis a **sense of community**: what kind of associations they have formed, how do they participate in the events and decision-making bodies of their universities and how do they build community? Moreover, how this may best be **facilitated by the universities** in their individual settings.

Description of workshop A. What characterizes a good orientation?

Workshop host: Planning Officer Tiina Kotti, M. Soc. Sc., Aalto University

The beginning of the doctoral path sets the tone and pace for the doctoral researcher's journey towards a doctorate. The ways in which the university community offers support at the beginning has the potential to empower and boost motivation of early-stage researchers. The orientation of doctoral researchers has various aims: in addition to introducing the basics of doctoral studies and the available resources for support, handling practicalities and creating peer connections, the orientation can aspire to create a meaningful and inspiring kick-start for the doctoral path.

Doctoral researchers begin their doctoral studies from various positions, both physical, mental and economical, ranging from full-time researcher employed by the university to part-time enthusiasts located away from the campus. Their academic backgrounds and histories are manifold, and the research practices and traditions may vary even within one doctoral programme. This creates a challenge for the orientation to cater for different kinds of needs and situations. Some of these issues have been addressed by providing self-study packages online, organising scheduled orientation days 100 % online, or organising a day onsite with a remote participation possibility, for instance. Of course, the contexts of universities are different, starting from the question of their different sizes, the variety of their research field and the number of new doctoral researchers granted a doctoral study right each year.

Planning Officer Tiina Kotti from Aalto University invited contributions to this mini-session with an aim to discover good practices for organising orientations for doctoral researchers. When does the orientation stage actually begin – perhaps already in the stage of planning doctoral studies? How could doctoral schools and doctoral education services support this stage optimally? How can we facilitate networking among doctoral researchers from the very beginning? Discussion on this topic in a collegial and supportive atmosphere was carried out, with a keen interest in the advancement and quality of doctoral research projects.

Abstracts of workshop A. What characterizes a good orientation?

When students enter their PhD with their 'eyes-wide-shut': the case for offering pre-application preparation

Presenter:

Nicholas Rowe, PhD, BSc(H), Dip Ed, FSET, FHEA

Accepted PhD students are proven academic performers, who have been judged to be a 'good fit' with their programmes. Yet in Europe, 34% do not complete their studies, few complete in the common 3-year funded period (5 years is average), and many suffer significant harm to their wellbeing (10-times greater incidence of anxiety, depression, and risk of suicide). If we want to maximize student completion and experience, an early orientation to the PhD would help prepare students before they start, so they can make informed decisions, and a timely start to independent study. This may help to improve the student experience, as well as their fiscal, educational, and wellbeing outcomes.

The steps we have taken – Developing the orientation of the new doctoral researchers in the Faculty of Humanities

Presenter: PhD Nina Lehtimäki, Coordinator, Doctoral Programme in Technology (DPT), Research Career Unit, University of Turku

Included in the work: Dr. Meri Heinonen, Coordinator, Doctoral Programmes Juno & Utuling, Research Career Unit / Research Affairs Signum Service Point, University of Turku

The presentation discusses the orientation of doctoral researchers in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Turku. Our two doctoral programmes (Juno and Utuling) accept approx. 40–50 new doctoral researchers every year. The faculty (especially postgraduate studies working group), doctoral programmes and doctoral researchers have during the last couple of years jointly developed the orientation of new doctoral researchers. The presentation describes the different, rather easy and even simple steps we have taken to enhance both the distribution of practical information and the networking among the doctoral researchers. These steps have been the following (1–5):

1. The orientation guide that is sent to all new doctoral researchers after they have been granted the study right.
2. Survey about well-being with questions about orientation and the sense of belonging -> Changes to the orientation guide and the programme of Welcome Day
3. Welcome Day – one day orientation modified. More doctoral researchers and recent PhDs as speakers, new themes such as the first year of doctoral studies

and the ABC of academic practices, enough time for round of introductions, lunch and coffee, supervisors invited, too.

4. Cooperation with the association of doctoral researchers (JUNecto) that organizes get-together events related to the events and courses of doctoral programmes, offers support for international doctoral researchers and sets up writing meetings, lunches and coffee breaks.
5. Orientation guide for supervisors. Helps especially at the beginning of supervision process, encourages supervisors to pay attention to the orientation and actions that improve doctoral researchers' feelings of belonging

Career planning from early on: Career planning from early on: The Uniting Companies and International University Talents (UNICOM) project

Presenter: Eevi Savola, PhD, UNICOM main coordinator, Research Career Unit, University of Turku

In orientating international doctoral and postdoctoral researchers to Finnish working culture, the importance of networking with industry should be highlighted. Here an ESF-funded Uniting Companies and International University Talents project (UNICOM, 01.03.2021–28.02.2023) is presented as an exemplar case of utilising external funding in developing doctoral education. UNICOM aims to bridge the gap between highly educated international talents and Health/Tech/Clean companies in Southwest Finland, e.g. by facilitating industry placements. UNICOM is coordinated by the University of Turku, with Åbo Akademi, Turku Science Park and other partners. The project implements the Talent Boost programme, as part of the Course towards Finland project.

Doctoral School's orientation for new doctoral researchers at ULapland

Presenter: Coordinator Annukka Jakkula, M.A., Doctoral School, University of Lapland

The Doctoral School at the University of Lapland has organized an annual orientation day for doctoral researchers since 2015, developing the event each year. The key idea of the orientation to doctoral researchers is that it is somewhat distinguishable from orientation events to undergraduate students: the DS aims to support the beginning of original research projects while giving a warm welcome to the Arctic academic community.

How we strive to reach this aim is through feedback-based dialogue to deliver as optimally as we can in our context, both in terms of content and pedagogy. The DS is grateful to ULapland doctoral alumni, professors of practice, researchers, teachers, and specialists who contribute to this event.

Orientation for doctoral students at Aalto University (School of Arts, Design and Architecture)

Presenter: Tiina Kotti, M. Soc. Sc., Doctoral Education Services, Aalto University

In my presentation I will present some observations and questions that have emerged from organizing the Aalto Doctoral Orientation Days at university-level and the introductory courses for doctoral researchers at the School of Arts, Design and Architecture. My reflections include the implications of multi-disciplinarity, catering for a cohort or a collection of independent researchers, practical solutions for varying situations and the meaning of community.