

# Doctoral Programmes in Europe

Nice 7/9 december 2006



## **WG2: Master- PhD link (The role of Master in preparation for doctoral education)**

### **I. Topic**

The working group will explore the role of the Master degree in relation to doctoral education.

### **II. Starting Point**

For those European countries that traditionally offered long first degree courses followed by doctoral education the introduction of the second cycle and its precise definition is proving to be a particular challenge. Initially the second cycle in the Bologna process was considered in relation to its link to the first cycle whereas increasingly the master level is being viewed also from the perspective of its relationship to graduate or doctoral education. Thus, there is a wide variety of master degrees emerging across Europe that serve different purposes. According to the Dublin Descriptors, the level descriptors used in relation to the three Bologna cycles “the Master provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing or applying ideas often in a research context” and demonstrates “problem solving abilities [applied] in new or unfamiliar environments within a broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts.”

### **III. Issues for Discussion**

Discussions over the last year, especially in the context of more general discussions on “graduate education” or on access requirements to doctoral education in different countries, confirm that the Master degree is the main entry point for doctoral education. At the same it is also clear that in some countries (e.g. UK, Germany; Turkey) a “fast track” to doctoral education from Bachelor level is possible for excellent students. Master degrees providing access to doctoral programmes tend to be of one to two years duration. The general agreement at European level is that the Master level requires 90-120 ECTS credits although some Masters that are of one year duration only require 60 ECTS credits.

The research content of Master programmes offered as a preliminary requirement to entering doctoral education differs not only from country to country, but from university to university. In most countries Master studies include a comprehensive scholarly thesis, but it is not the case everywhere. Several countries have introduced special Research Masters (MSc or MPhil) in addition to other Masters and consider them as the main entry

point for doctoral education. The recruitment for the Research Master programmes is highly competitive and selective which may lead to the phenomenon of creating “elite stream” Master graduates separated from other Master graduates entering into doctoral education. The implications of this for the progression from one Bologna cycle to another will have to be considered.

With the growing mobility of students, internationalisation of studies at all levels and the establishment of more and more joint Master and joint doctoral programmes there is a need to be aware of the importance of transparency and being able to compare the quality/outcomes of Master programmes (especially given the different level of research elements in Master programmes) as the entry point for research training. This can be achieved by offering a variety of courses, seminars and workshops which are tailored for specific needs of doctoral candidates. Such flexibility in doctoral programmes is important and has to allow doctoral candidates to choose what is best for their progress.

#### **IV. Workshop Outcomes**

- Points of consensus
- Topics for further discussion