



*EUA-CDE Focus Group report*

# Developing an Ethos of Research Integrity in Doctoral Education

**Hosted by Vrije Universiteit Brussel  
24-25 October 2017 | Brussels, Belgium**

The EUA Council for Doctoral Education (EUA-CDE)<sup>1</sup> conducted a focus group on implementing an ethos of research integrity in doctoral education on 24 and 25 October 2017 in Brussels, Belgium. The event was attended by academic leaders, doctoral education professionals and research ethics and integrity officers from 15 higher education institutions in 11 European countries.<sup>2</sup>

The main objective of the focus group was to bring together universities from different European countries, working on implementing research ethics and integrity as an integral part of doctoral education. The programme allowed participants to exchange views on the current situations in their respective institutions and reflect on ways forward.

The two-day (lunch-to-lunch) focus group was organised around seven broad themes, inspired by the challenges highlighted in “Taking Salzburg Forward”<sup>3</sup> and the recently revised “European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity”.<sup>4</sup> On the first day, participants discussed research ethics and integrity training, supervision and mentoring, focusing on (1) training doctoral candidates, (2) the role of doctoral supervisors and (3) awareness raising measures beyond training.

On the second day, participants discussed developing an ethos of research integrity in doctoral education focusing on (1) building an institution-wide ethos of research integrity, (2) inter-institutional and international research collaboration, (3) collaborative working with non-academic partners and (4) violations and how to deal with them.

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<sup>1</sup> EUA-CDE brings together a community of more than 230 universities from over 30 countries. Together with our members, we are dedicated to further developing doctoral education structures, policies and practices in Europe. For more information, please see <http://www.eua-cde.org/> or contact the EUA-CDE Secretariat on [info@eua-cde.org](mailto:info@eua-cde.org).

<sup>2</sup> Fifteen higher education institutions based in Austria (1), Belgium (4), Denmark (1), France (1), Germany (1), Italy (2), Malta (1), Norway (1), Portugal (1), Spain (1) and the United Kingdom (1).

<sup>3</sup> EUA Council for Doctoral Education (2016). *Doctoral Education – Taking Salzburg Forward. Implementation and new challenges*. Brussels: EUA. Retrieved 30 October 2017, from <http://www.eua-cde.org/reports-publications.html>.

<sup>4</sup> All European Academies (2017). *The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. Revised Edition*. Berlin: ALLEA. Retrieved 30 October 2017, from <http://www.allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ALLEA-European-Code-of-Conduct-for-Research-Integrity-2017.pdf>.



### **European diversity of institutional and national approaches**

The focus group first and foremost highlighted the great diversity in existing practices and policies implemented in the participating universities. Working in different legal, cultural and institutional contexts, participants agreed that no single solution or “silver bullet” would be able to tackle every challenge under every circumstance.

Differences were found between the nature of training courses, i.e. compulsory or voluntary, and their content, i.e. the balance between research ethics and integrity and between theory and practice. Beyond training courses, differences were also seen regarding the extent to which research ethics and integrity are integrated in all parts of the research process, for example the evaluation of doctoral candidates and their work. More broadly, important differences between top-down and bottom-up approaches were discussed, whereby it was agreed that both (and even a mix between them) present specific challenges and benefits.

The differences between policies and practices between universities were not seen as a negative by participants, rather as an opportunity to learn how others working in different contexts adapt their policies and practices to achieve the same goals. The participants therefore highlighted the value of a Europe-wide exchange across institutional and national borders.

### **Common ground**

Regardless of the different and, at times, opposite approaches of the institutions, it was agreed that developing an ethos of research integrity is a central issue to address as part of doctoral education, given that early-stage researchers are likely to take the skills and practices they develop with them throughout the rest of their careers. Any approach would need to go beyond training courses and aim to foster awareness, a culture of caring and a critical attitude on a day-to-day basis among doctoral candidates.

While doctoral candidates are a key target group, it was also agreed that all (research) staff at higher education institutions can and should contribute to a common research ethos. As doctoral supervisors play a central role in passing on good practices to early-stage researchers, it was agreed that tailored training courses and other initiatives targeted at this group help foster an institution-wide discussion between different stakeholders.

### **An open learning culture?**

While the discussion focused on finding common ground between universities implementing a variety of policies and practices, participants also took time to reflect on the broader context of the discussion. It was questioned whether the debate contributes to an open learning culture or, rather, if it inadvertently risks promoting mistrust in academia. There was agreement that in order to avoid the latter, universities implementing ethics and research integrity policies and practices should use care in maintaining an open culture wherein researchers can make mistakes, learn from them and share their experiences with others in a transparent way.