

Authors: Angelika Grabher, Julia Litofcenko, Martin Unger

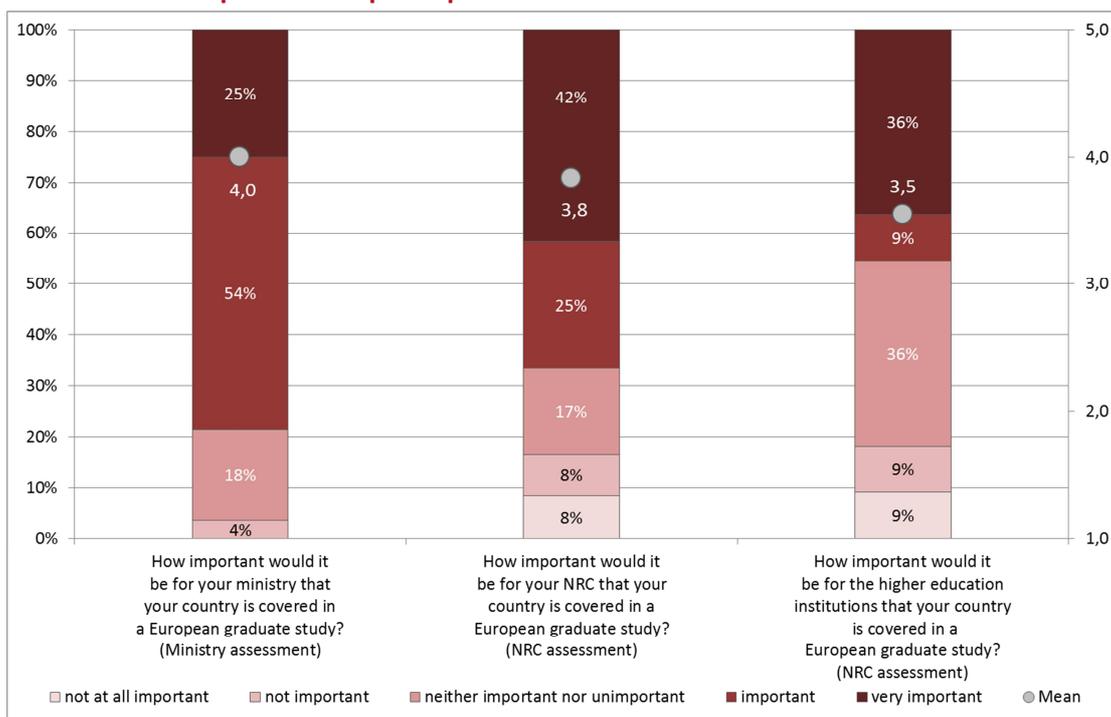
The EUROGRADUATE feasibility study asks if and how a sustainable study on Europe's higher education (HE) graduates could be established. The project involves systematically exploring stakeholders' interest in a European graduate study, their requirements for such a study, the current practice of national-level graduate research, as well as existing international data capacities. The study's goal is presenting options for setting up, organising, and funding a sustainable European graduate study.

Without foreclosing any options or recommendations regarding a European graduate study, this research digest presents a small selection of the project's findings on the stakeholders' interest in European graduate study and their requirements for such a study (see Box 1). A more comprehensive treatment will be provided in the final project report.

High demand for a European graduate study among stakeholders

More than 80% of the national ministries responsible for higher education participating in the feasibility study indicated that it would be important or very important that their country be covered by a European graduate study (EGS). Hence, a European graduate study seems to be a project which is in strong demand by the individual countries, as it might help to gain information the national policy makers require but are not able to get by means of already existing studies on the issue, of which a majority takes solely a single-country perspective. This assessment is additionally supported by the national rectors' conferences. Those that responded for the most part agree with their respective national ministries (for many NRCs, however, no data was available).

Figure 1: Assessment of importance of participation in an EGS



Assessment from 1 "not important at all" to 5 "very important"; number of cases: regional/national ministries: n=27. NRCs, first question ("How important would it be for your NRC..."): n=12. NRCs, second question: n=11. Source: EUROGRADUATE.



The EUROGRADUATE survey of researchers (see Box 1) seems to indicate that many researchers would be willing to actually perform an EGS. In more than two thirds of the countries covered by the survey, there are research teams stating to be interested or very interested to take part in an EGS. But the demand for a European graduate study is not limited to the national level: during the interviews, the international stakeholders for their part showed high interest in comparative data on Europe’s higher education graduates.

Broad coverage wanted: BA, MA, & PhD graduates at all types of HEI

National stakeholders unanimously agreed on the inclusion of all research universities in an EGS. Over 80% also suggest including professional higher education institutions (HEIs). Respondents often expressed their wish to include graduates from all higher education institutions with some specifically mentioning private HEIs or other HEIs which are not named “universities”.

Consistent with this request for a relatively extensive coverage of institutions, national stakeholders argue in favour of a broad definition of who should be considered a graduate: National stakeholders almost unanimously responded that graduates at the level of ISCED 6 (Bachelor or equivalent) and 7 (Master or equivalent) should be included. Covering PhD graduates was also supported by the majority of the respondents though to a somewhat lesser extent (ministries 81%, NRCs 91%, and researchers 72%). Among the international stakeholders, there is also less consent on whether to include PhD graduates. Some stated that students at PhD level should rather be regarded as researchers who have already entered the labour market than as students. Furthermore, experts consulted by the project have commented on the difficulties to obtain addresses of PhD graduates and thus recommended adopting a narrower definition of graduates for a future EGS.

Box 1: The EUROGRADUATE stakeholder surveys and interviews

The purposes of the stakeholder surveys and interviews were to explore the interest in and the requirements for a European graduate study (EGS) according to various stakeholders and potential users or beneficiaries of an EGS and to identify what kind of information they would need to be able to retrieve from an EGS.

To answer these questions, three surveys were carried out addressing 36 national and regional ministries responsible for higher education, 43 national rectors’ conferences (NRCs), and 48 research teams who had already performed national-level graduate studies. The surveys covered all EU countries as well as Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein and were conducted from June to September 2014. 72% of the national and regional ministries, 28% of the NRCs, and 69% of the researchers responded.

These surveys were complemented by expert interviews among key stakeholder groups of a possible European graduate study, i.e. the higher education institutions, the students, the business community, the unions, and political decision makers. Representatives of the following European level organisations were interviewed: EUA, EURASHE, ESU, BUSINESSEUROPE, EUROCHAMBRES, ETUCE, and the EC (DG Education and DG Employment).

As far as the coverage of graduates by citizenship (national vs. foreign) is concerned, a broad majority of stakeholders recommend the inclusion of all graduates regardless of their citizenship.

Coverage of the European Union and beyond

The EU seems to be regarded as the geographical core region to be covered as over 90% of national stakeholders recommend including all EU countries. Around three quarters of the national stakeholders further find including all to most EHEA countries (i.e. members of the Bologna Process) desirable, thus considerably enlarging the geographical scope. While covering the EU or even the EHEA is indeed a desirable objective for an EGS, at least



in the long term, a broad coverage increases the complexity of the task. Specifically, initial rounds of a potential EGS will need to balance covering many countries and keeping the study manageable.

Transition to the labour market and employability are the topics in demand

The stakeholders were asked to specify which topics they would see relevant for an EGS. National and international stakeholders saw ‘transition to the labour market’ and ‘employability’ as the most important issues. ‘Competences acquired during studies’, ‘quality of HE’, and ‘skills mismatch’ are topics considered to be of high relevance as well. Stakeholders highlighted the necessity of properly defining these concepts as well as of taking context conditions into account in the interpretation of results. A topic seen as less important to be dealt with in an EGS is the ‘comparison of individual HEIs’. This was indicated to be of relatively low relevance by most national stakeholders, while at the same time being considered to be a very sensitive topic by various European-level stakeholders. This level of comparison would also entail methodological difficulties, since it would require a drastic increase of the sample sizes.

There is almost unanimous consent among national stakeholders that an EGS should provide insights and results directly relevant to developing policy measures and steering higher education. Moreover, the stakeholders saw it as important that the design of an EGS would allow gathering information about the middle- and long-term developments of graduates beyond the immediate transition into the labour market.

Further results of the EUROGRADUATE study

The EUROGRADUATE feasibility project aims at taking substantial steps towards setting up a European graduate study and will work as a platform for people and organisations interested in such a study. This research digest presents insights into the results of the study’s work package 2, in which surveys were carried out among national ministries responsible for higher education as well as among rectors’ conferences. Research digests on the topics “National-level capacities for studying HE graduates in Europe” and “Mapping international data capacities for studying HE graduates” are available for download free of charge at www.eurograduate.eu. The final project report, expected at the end of 2015, will bring together the project results and provide a comprehensive overview on the feasibility of setting up a sustainable European graduate study.

Contact

Please contact the project coordinator for any questions:
Kai Mühleck
Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung (DZHW)
Goseriede 9
30159 Hannover, Germany
eurograduate@dzhw.eu
www.eurograduate.eu

With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This communication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

