

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES: EUROPEAN PHD STUDENTS RESEARCHING CITIZENSHIP

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this article we discuss issues arising from work in a Thematic Network Project (Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe, CiCe) with PhD students. As part of that work a small-scale research project was established to investigate the opportunities and challenges experienced by PhD students whose interests focus on citizenship. We suggest that there are very significant constraints in evidence in a process that is designed to lead to the creation of new knowledge.

The context that has led to our working for and with PhD students has 4 important aspects: an increasingly explicit focus on citizenship with a concomitant lack of clarity about the parameters of that field of study; large and increasing numbers of doctoral candidates; a recognition of the high profile assertions of the need for PhD research; and an increasingly common framework for standards for PhD research that may lead to a relative lack of emphasis being placed on the creation of new knowledge.

First, citizenship is a field of academic interest with an increasingly high profile but without common agreement as to its nature. Many have argued (e.g. Heater 1999) that there is some sort of compound of a legal status (together with the formal rights and responsibilities associated with that status), a sense of identity in which one's attachments to a geographical or political or cultural group are emphasised and, finally, a willingness and ability to act in or for the achievement of a democratic public context. This three-part framework, however, refers only superficially to the very many debates concerning the characterisation of citizenship and the ways in which it can be researched. The backgrounds of the authors in psychology and education allow us dynamically to consider the substance and the process of PhD research in citizenship studies.

Second, PhD supervision and examination is a very significant part of higher education across Europe. Full time study is normally 3 years (with an additional year for writing up) while part time work normally extends over 6 years. The PhD or in a small number of cases DPhil is the most common form of qualification awarded with a 3 year (full time) or 6 year (part time) registration. International bodies such as the British Council and the OECD are producing statistical overviews and forecasts that suggest rapid - if uneven - growth. This unevenness is shown in relation to a variety of factors including mobility upon graduation with flows from Europe to the US, increasing proportions of female PhD students and greater growths in PhD registrations in arts and social sciences rather than natural sciences. Simply, there are many more PhD students than ever before and with significant expansion during the last 10-15 years in the numbers of undergraduate students these numbers are likely to increase still further. In Denmark the number of doctoral students is expected to double in the next few years; in Finland doctoral awards increased by 50% in the 1980s and by 120% in the 1990s; in Brazil doctoral awards have increased by 10-15% each year during the last 5 years and in Japan there are now 75000 students studying at doctoral level (Powell, 2006). Over a five year period (1999-

2003) there has been a 31% increase in the number of PhD students expected to graduate in the UK during the calendar year.¹

Third, this level of growth has significant potential for society. We wish to contribute to understanding developments that will benefit staff and students and perhaps others beyond the immediate confines of university campuses. High levels of education are normally associated with understanding of and involvement in society (Verba, Lehman Scholozman and Brady, 1995). Although we need to be cautious about accepting this commonly made assertion too easily at a time of simultaneous rising involvement in higher education and supposed decline of civic engagement (Putnam, 2000) it seems that there are simple grounds for assuming that we can be positive about higher levels of educational achievement. Similarly although there are debates about the value of education in relation to the growth of the economy (with some claiming that schools and universities are examples of consumption rather than investment) there is no uncertainty on the part of those who are promoting the latest increases in PhD registrations: the modernisation of European universities “is fundamentally important ... to make their contribution to the EU’s objective to become a leading global and knowledge-based economy. European universities have enormous potential”².

Fourth, we wish to contribute to developing understandings of PhD research in a changing situation. We notice the current very diverse range of practice in universities but feel that it is likely that common practice will be increasingly evident. We assert this increasing consensus in a cautious manner. The current diversity in methods of study and qualification award are easily demonstrated (Powell, 2006; Stewart 2006) and we are aware of new qualifications. There are, in addition to longer established routes to the PhD, professional doctorates (EdD, DClinPsych, DMedEth, etc.) which first appeared in the late 1980s and have been developed as a response to an identified need, whether of industry and commerce, or the public sector to focus primarily on professional rather than academic matters (Park, 2007:33). They would normally have a strong taught element and declare precise learning outcomes. Other new routes include PhD by practice (PhD, DPhil, Dmus, AMusD, etc.) which occurs normally in the creative arts and relies for performance of a creative piece of work as well as an evaluation of it. The PhD by publication is available for those who have authored a substantial amount of published work and additionally provide an analytical commentary. Many European countries effectively have a PhD by publication in that papers are expected or required to be published before the PhD examination.

However, what is increasingly obvious is a clearer indication of what a PhD is supposed to be. Accountability, equivalence and quality assurance are now the key influences. New MA programmes are being developed that will be validated by several universities as opposed to the usual isolation of single institutions³ and there is the potential for a similar emerging congruency in PhD recruitment, supervision and examining. Any problems with PhD research are discussed largely in the form of calls for more standardised practice. There are perceptions of significant problems with completion rates with one country (England) finding that: “after five years, 57 per cent of PhD students who began their studies on a full-time course, and 19 per cent starting on a part-time course had completed”⁴.

¹ http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Resources/What_Do_PhDs_Do/ It will become the norm for almost all members of staff in universities to supervise PhD students (Floud, 2006).

² <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/592&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr> accessed 10 May 2007.

³ See <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/index.cfm?B0B18EDE-EE94-5250-13F3-510E105EF878>, accessed 10 May 2007.

⁴ http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/HEFCE/2005/05_02/#exec accessed 10 May 2007

Recognition of this data leads to calls for common solutions. Guides for supervisors and supervisees are produced to ensure higher rates of completion and cross national agreements are being developed to reduce differences. The legal status of European citizenship provides a framework within which beginning researchers are increasingly mobile across national boundaries. The Bologna process may allow for greater equivalence in higher education qualifications. The Lisbon Strategy demands much from European universities and in May 2006 the need for 'modernisation' was again emphasised⁵. Recognition of the differences in national take up of PhD opportunities are now closely monitored with solutions proposed to equalise matters⁶. A European Charter for Researchers was agreed in 2005 (see details of this produced by the European Universities Association at and Eurodoc a council of doctoral candidates and young researchers have been formally established since 2005⁷. Individual European countries are arguing for a greater emphasis on explicitly agreed standards especially in relation to transferable skills (e.g. see Roberts 2002) and so contribute to a growing sense of convergence.

We wish to investigate the meaning of this emerging consensus in relation to the constraints and opportunities that are experienced by students. A fine line is walked when governments and others claim that quality will be enhanced by greater standardisation in the processes and outcomes related to the creation of new knowledge. Perhaps if the consensus is too strong there is the potential not to recognise or accept the creation of new knowledge; if the emphasis is put too heavily on innovation we may lack the capacity to judge what is valuable. We wish to ask about the nature of PhD research, enquiring whether students are pushing back the boundaries of knowledge or being socialised to become 'stewards' and not innovators (Golde and Walker 2007).

2. THE CICE PROJECT

The impact of the globalisation of knowledge means that there is a need for academics to work together to find more efficient and effective ways in the creation and dissemination of research. Our work is both an example of that international collaboration and a means of strengthening it still further. The opportunities to achieve higher standards through collaboration should be seized in a project that is international but is also peculiar to the European context. Our work with and for PhD students is taking place within a European Thematic Network Project titled Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe (CiCe). As it is explained in the article of Alistair Ross (in this issue), this network has existed since 1998⁸. Members of staff from approximately 100 universities in 29 European countries are collaborating to organise conferences and write and publish resources for the purpose of clarifying and developing issues about citizenship. The aim is not so much to promote European citizenship but to understand it and use opportunities to enhance the performance and experiences of people who work within universities. A wide variety of activities are taking place across the network but the focus of this article is the work generated by the research student group. That group has been deliberately put together to allow for a range of expertise across 5 countries (Hungary, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK) and different academic disciplines and professional

⁵ See <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/592&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr> accessed 10 May 2007.

⁶ http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home-page/Resources/What_Do-PhDs_Do/, accessed 10 May 2007.

⁷ See <http://www.eurodoc.net/>, accessed 10 May 2007.

⁸ See <http://cice.londonmet.ac.uk>

contexts (psychology, sociology, history and education). This group will over the course of the current three year CiCe project organise an annual conference for PhD research students and produce handbooks on the nature of citizenship and key issues in how it can be researched.

Under the title 'new researchers for the new Europe' the first of those conferences for PhD students took place at the CiCe conference in Riga in May 2006 with the second in Montpellier in 2007 and the third planned for Istanbul in 2008. The conferences provide a range of opportunities for the students who present posters and academic papers, join 2 workshops in each conference focussing on topics such as methods, ethics and presentation skills. There is a sense in which these conferences and initiatives are explicitly part of a wider agenda in which, positively, standards are being recognised and diversity is reduced. There would be few complaints arising from an enhanced awareness of higher standards and the creation of a community of good practice. But we feel that it would be helpful to ask questions about the consequences of such a process. Is it possible that a drive for higher standards actually reduces creativity and the PhD becomes not a way to create new knowledge but rather a way to enter an established community through a clear route by means of achieving the sorts of knowledge that we already know to have value. Thus the potential contradiction of claiming to recognise the value of the new while using existing standards to do so is resolved by changing the purpose of PhD research. Instead of becoming a force for new knowledge it becomes a means of socialising new researchers into established communities. Discussions about these matters led three of the CiCe PhD research student group (the authors of this article) to establish a small scale project to investigate the perceptions of PhD students and their supervisors on opportunities and challenges related to research.

3. METHOD

A small group of 3 colleagues reflected on their own experiences of PhD work (as former students, current supervisors and external examiners) in Hungary, Spain and the UK. We discussed some of the issues from the growing literature about PhD students (e.g. Allan and Skinner 1991; Delamont, Atkinson and Parry 2004; Fell, 2006; Floud, 2006; Gilbert, 2004; Graves and Varma 1997; Leonard, Becker and Coate, 2005; Park, 2007; Phillips and Pugh 2000; Tinkler and Jackson, 2004) and prepared and circulated written overviews of developments in relation to PhD research. We knew that there is a pattern to successful completion. Students receiving funding, who are under 25 and research science rather than the arts or social sciences are more likely than others to complete on time. The small-scale nature of the data gathering process means that we cannot make any grand claims about what is happening as PhD research occurs. Indeed we are principally using our data as a springboard for our own reflections. We focussed our attention on research related to citizenship and decided to gather data from a small sample of supervisors and students. 1 supervisor and 2 students from Hungary; 2 supervisors and 2 students from Spain; 4 supervisors and 2 students from the UK discussed issues with us. The principal form of data collection was a semi-structured interview that lasted in individual cases between 30 minutes and 1 hour. We asked supervisors and supervisees about 3 broad areas: the opportunities and constraints that are experienced in relation generally to research in citizenship; whether their personal situations affected their work; and if academic matters (the practices and expectations associated with individual institutions and academic communities) were significant for what they did and how and when they did it.

Ethical procedures were followed that closely related to those advised by BERA (2004) principally allowing for informed consent and anonymity. The data from interviews were translated into English (the common language of the team) and passed to one member of the team who carried out an initial analysis using the common practice of identifying, saturating and collapsing categories with judgement used to develop an argument that makes use of issues about the impact of the law, ethics, practical circumstances and academic regulation (institutional and personal). The processes of that analysis, the overarching argument and its constituent elements were then passed to the 2 members of the team who independently developed questions which were discussed face to face by the full team and led to the final version of the argument that is presented here.

4. RESULTS

4.1. The Law: significant contextual consideration

PhD students and their supervisors unanimously were explicit in denying that the law influenced their precise thinking and practice in research but acknowledged, generally, the influence of a legal framework. When interviewees were asked explicitly about the law their response was very clear:

I don't know if there is a [legal] policy in Spain (Spanish student)

To be honest I am not at all familiar with it [the law] (Hungarian student)

I don't know enough [about the law] to answer your question (UK student)

Supervisors agreed with the above reactions. And yet despite these denials it was common for an interviewee to mention in passing several expressions of the law of which all researchers must be aware and which would in practice influence their work. Prior to the beginning of the data collection phase we were aware of the legal framework that impacts on research. In the UK it is necessary for people in schools who have individual and potentially unsupervised contact with children to undergo a criminal records bureau check (CRB). In Spain there is legal protection for children (Ley Orgánica 1/1996) and regarding equality between the sexes (Ley Orgánica 3/2007). Aspects of Spanish legislation are directly concerned with data protection issues (Ley Orgánica 15/1999). The UK Data Protection Act was referred to by 3 people in the UK. In Hungary the 1992 LXIII law on data protection was not referred to explicitly by respondents but is clearly an important part of the context within which people work. Three mentioned *those laws which pertain to racial discrimination and libel*” (UK student) and another referred to some studies that might have “restraints with very controversial issues or very sensitive issues (UK student). A supervisor from the UK said that as a backdrop ... *I alert students to the fact that they are working within a legal framework.*

Another UK supervisor said that when he was a research student

my supervisor talked about a PhD study where he videoed lessons and the lesson had a fixed video camera in the corner of the room –science lesson–fire alarm–everyone left the room. Later –the camera had been left running– one of the pupils as he passed the bench stole a thermometer. So the supervisor is faced with a dilemma. The evidence is available but he'd given an assurance that all the data would only be used for research purposes. The supervisor played the video to a teacher to ask about various issues. The teacher saw the incident and then dealt with it as he saw appropriate.

While denying the importance of the detail of the law as a constraint on their work all students and supervisors then talked about how, obviously, they operated within the law. While all agree, in the words of one, “I didn’t feel restrained” there was acknowledgement of a set of rules that guided their work. As such we are regarding the law not as a restraint but as a significant contextual consideration that may shape PhD studies.

4.2. Ethics

There was widespread agreement about the significance of ethics and many referred to the increasingly explicit way in which policies and procedures relevant to ethics impact on PhD studies. The existence of guidelines produced by academic and professional associations and the establishment of university committees to review students’ and supervisors’ work were commonly referred to. In Spain researchers observe the ethical codes established by international associations such as that produced by the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD). In Hungary while there is significant variation in practice various frameworks have been published including the Psychologists Ethics Code (first produced in 1981 and accepted in 2004 by the Ethical Committee of the Hungarian Psychological association). In the UK the guidelines produced by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) are commonly referred to in theses. The need to shape PhD studies was accepted in order “to avoid conducting research in a way that could cause harm or damage to people involved in the research” (UK supervisor). One UK supervisor spoke of a:

student looking at parental bereavement – he wanted to look at the experiences of a pupil whose father or mother had died. He wanted to interview pupils and also talk to the surviving mother or father. We changed the research design for ethical reasons. We decided it was too painful to ask school age children about these experiences. Instead we decided that the student would interview adults who had this experience when they were a child.

The impact of considering ethics was seen as very strong: *Do ethical matters determine investigations? -Yes, I believe they are the base [...] I investigate to transform the reality, and I try my best to adjust to the ethical conditions* (Spanish student). Some felt that there was confusion developing over the nature of what constituted ethics and that so called debates about ethics were actually more about good practice than more precisely about avoiding harm to participants in the research process. Similarly there was a feeling by a minority of the supervisors that the nature of the research would be damaged by what they thought would be an inappropriately strong influence of ethical matters.

They explained this by discussing the question of informed consent. Some suggested that it was not at all clear for most subjects of research what would constitute informed consent (is it agreement to be observed, be interviewed, have their words published in a journal that may or may not be seen by others and must this be given directly or by a person in a position of responsibility such as a teacher?) Some suggested that for much research it would be important not to declare the question that was being investigated as this would influence people’s responses too greatly. For example, one suggested that if wanted to investigate the ways in which teachers taught to tell them in advance would influence their behaviour too greatly to allow for the achievement of meaningful results. There are very many debates about ethics and research but what we noticed in our responses that there was a feeling that ethical matters must be treated very seriously and that this would have a significant and increasing influence on the conduct of research. Students and supervisors are very far from a position in which they can simply engage, without constraint, in research.

It is interesting to add that in Hungary there is a view that after the political changes in fact it is less free to collect data on certain matters due to personality rights (that were not there before) and this is looked upon with certain nostalgia. You could choose a part of the following transcript for illustration.

We take these into consideration to an increasing extent. At the time of the one-party state it was quite nice; after a research had the necessary financial and legal conditions settled you had open doors to wherever you wanted to do research. And people were happy, too, because it was the first time someone asked their opinion about anything – as far as the area of research on attitudes etc. is concerned. It really worked that way. And given those circumstances you could control even the pettiest “sneeze” if you wanted, which can make a huge difference in the data. It did work that way. You can’t do it any more. You can’t just put any question. Earlier you could ask anything from his salary to his father’s occupation ... anything! Nowadays people are more and more aware of their rights as citizens of a constitutional state, so they would likely chase you away...

4.3. Practical Circumstances

It is clear that certain sorts of people complete PhD theses more frequently than others. The young, full time research students who have support obviously have a more straightforward route than others. Money was referred to by almost every respondent.

When you are part of an investigation group, I imagine the task are well distributed, there is financing and even the access to the institutions can be easier because you are endorsed by the team and the prestige of an institution that finances your study is also a good point (Spanish student)

Gender was seen as being significant both in access to data in certain countries but also in relation to deliberate decisions, as one Hungarian student told us, to postpone childbirth until PhD work had been completed. In case of female students the decision when to have a child is taken taking into consideration its potential effect on the research work. However, one Hungarian student told us, that she would not postpone childbirth until PhD work had been completed.

For sure even if I have a child that will not hinder me in completing my PhD. And I just can’t think of anything that would hinder me in it.

Personal context was seen as vital:

I think personal circumstances are perhaps the major factor influencing the likelihood of success. For example I have supervised some students who are academics at another institution and doing research is part of their job. Generally speaking success for them has been much more straightforward. At the other extreme are teachers doing research part time whose personal circumstances become very difficult and most of these withdraw from the programme (UK supervisor).

In terms of my job I have time, I’ve got a car, I’m [physically] able, I haven’t got a family. All the standard things that people moan about, I’m OK. (UK student).

Personal circumstances were referred to on many occasions by our sample and the following quotation from a supervisor based in the UK is a typical outline of the qualities that are needed:

Stamina. Intellectual stamina. Physical stamina. Organisational capabilities, motivation and English language comprehension, intellectual clarity and verve

This did not mean that supervisors were inappropriately intrusive or willing to provide very many safety nets. There was a feeling that personal space would be respected, or, to put it another way, students had to realise that they are responsible for their own research and all that entailed:

Although I'm sensitive to personal issues as a professor I don't spend time on the personal. I'm not impersonal, it's just, how can I put it, I have a disinterested interest in their education as people ...If they say they are hard up I say 'look at the hardship fund, consider taking a break', but I'm not going to take them into my home and put them up. (UK supervisor)

But what we can see from a consideration of personal matters is that the matter of studying for and achieving a PhD is constrained. We are not suggesting that academic freedom does not exist but it is available to some much more easily than others.

4.4. Academic Opportunities and Constraints

It is in our view obviously necessary for standards to be specified both in relation to beginning PhD registration and for procedures to be in place to ensure academically appropriate guidance. Currently, if we were to focus on only the established PhD and not the professional doctorate or other newer routes, the ways in which that guidance is stated suggests a great deal of flexibility. A 'good' first degree or master's qualification is required for registration; and completion by means of a thesis of between 80-100,000 words and an oral defence in which the author makes an original and significant contribution to knowledge. Normally it would be expected that the research would be worthy of publication in an outlet refereed by academics. However, we wish to argue that a student is guided very significantly by a supervisor and by a higher education institution and we should ask about the implications for the opportunities that are in practice available. We refer below to 5 areas where constraint seems in evidence: developing a research interest; developing a research topic; choosing research methods; choosing a sample; deciding on how to present the work.

The choice of supervisor and research topic can be influenced by power issues and future career opportunities.

Secondly – and this is quite clear for everyone – everybody tries to work with teachers who are known to be influential in the department. At our department this professor has the greatest influence. This is particularly important if I would like to apply for Ph.D. and then to do something with it. To him personal relationships count a lot. He appreciates the work of a person with whom he is in personal relationship more than someone who he does not know. (Hungarian student)

The influence of the supervisor is very important from the very beginning. The students in our sample suggested that their work began because of the reputation and area of expertise of the person who became their supervisor. A student from Hungary put this as follows:

I am free to follow my own ideas... It [the topic of research] was my interest, but of course my interest initially was evoked by her course and her interest and positive involvement in my course paper when I was still an MA student

This influence of the supervisor can also be clearly seen in the choice of research topic. Two of our supervisors suggested that all topics could be supervised.

I believe it is my obligation to give a good quality level to the investigations, this means that sometimes we need to go further than what the PhD student wanted. Rather than set requirements, the task of the director is to ensure quality criteria and that means to do more (Spanish supervisor)

It is a bit frustrating when colleagues say 'I can't supervise that'.... I would not want to put a lock on the creation of new knowledge and how they achieve it (UK supervisor)

For this last person it was clear that he was keen to stress openness and emphasised his supervision of a very diverse range of topics including Afro-Caribbean schools, the teaching of Arabic, Japanese. All other respondents however suggested that the supervisor had a very powerful

influence and many represented this positively as the means by which proper academic guidance could be achieved. One went as far as asserting that the supervisor's role was the most significant in PhD completion:

The main constraint on students' performance concerns whether their supervisors have expertise in a) the substantive topic of the PhD and b) the methodological approach adopted by the student (UK supervisor).

This point can be developed more precisely by quoting a Hungarian student's explanation about the development of his research topic:

Actually the professor gave me the first intention because first appearing with my dissertation topic that time I only wanted to examine the political attitudes, some kind of system of the liberal-conservative-socialist and social democrat attitudes. For my dissertation I carried out factor analytical investigations. So this was my primary topic, but when I visited him he immediately recommended for me to integrate the topic of "political stereotypes" in my dissertation. At first I was not really happy about it, because I felt this would narrow down my genuine idea, but then thinking it over I found it an interesting topic (Hungarian student)

Although this influence by an individual supervisor on the choice of topic was mentioned by almost all respondents, there was a perception that disciplinary constraints were not very significant. There was no simple application of ideas within a discipline but instead recognition that PhD research was largely concerned with the exploration of a field of enquiry rather than a discipline.

The strong influence of the supervisor could also be seen when specific research methods were being chosen:

I think students have preferences but they make a representation of what the supervisor wants and they adjust their thought to it They still look to us like a director and they try to adapt to us as they think which our line of work is In our department I promote a particular kind of investigation (Spanish supervisor).

I think most research student propose a research design which is not easily do-able. So I then suggest a research design which is very easy to do and we then negotiate a design that is about half way. I always point out if they want to do something that is very close to the original proposal they must accept the risk they are taking. For example, a research student wished to conduct a questionnaire survey in FE [further education colleges]. I warned her that the response rate may be very low and that an interview approach would be better. However she was very confident about getting a good response rate. Unfortunately she had to withdraw because the response rate was too low. (UK supervisor)

I know that my supervisor prefers those researches that are academic, empirical and quantitative, not so much qualitative. I know that there were some students who wanted to base their MA thesis on focus group interviews and he did not support that and gave them a hard time. There is an evident resistance in him in this respect. So I would not like to bump into such kind of resistance of his (Hungarian student).

This emphasis on the use of particular methods also led in many cases to the feeling that it was easier or preferable to collect data from specific groups. There were examples in our small sample of research on what could be considered as elite groups but for most there was a recognition in the words of one that:

It is more fashionable to research the perceived disempowered in society – those whose voice is not heard, those who are not the elite. Is it a party political thing? I don't know. Is it accessibility? It's more a PC [political correctness] thing (UK student)

Finally, the influence of the university or supervisor could be seen in relation to the presentation of the work:

...beholden to inform the students that there are conventions and practice – if they are submitting a thesis at [X university] there are certain things they have to bear in mind I supervised a student who was working in a distinctive way – historical and semiotic forms of analysis. She said what I want to do is not make clear what my thesis is but to let that emerge inductively almost seductively not telling till the end. That for me goes against the grain as a western PhD supervisor who wants it to be explicit. I haven't tried to force her. There is a cultural issue about ways of arguing ways of presenting. I'm meeting her half way. I'm taking a risk (UK supervisor)

Another commented:

Perhaps a cynical take on the PhD is it's a series of hurdles to see if you can be let into the academic club. How much is academic about writing a book length piece as opposed to writing articles. (UK student)

It would of course be naïve to assume that the supervisor of a PhD study was without influence. But what seems to come through very strongly from the above is that the supervisor is acting as a gatekeeper who will guide the novice.

5. CONCLUSION

A doctorate is the highest academic award available by examination and as such it is widely declared as one of the means by which new knowledge is created. Higher education is experiencing 3 related profound changes: a greater sense of a business environment in which income generation is more commonly practised and in which students pay varying levels of fees according to their status; the generation of more explicit statements about learning outcomes; and, the enhancement of quality assurance procedures. We have asked questions about the nature of PhD research in relation to these changes in order to allow us to think more about the opportunities and constraints that are experienced by PhD students and their supervisors. We have noticed through an analysis of policies and practice as well as some limited data collection in 3 countries that there is a noticeable increase in the number of PhD students and that these people are likely to be of a particular type and to experience practice that is perhaps increasingly common across at least some European countries. Within the context of a dramatically increased number of students and many more formal guidelines and work plans relating to ways to achieve success (e.g. Cryer, 2000; Hart, 2001) we can identify who will be more likely to complete a PhD. We suggest that a legal framework, a concern about ethics, personal circumstances and academic guidance are significant influences upon students' work. In some ways this is obvious but recognition of the influences that exist perhaps takes us beyond asserting that a PhD is simply an expression of best academic practice or an opportunity that is simply open to the best supervisors and students. As with all educational routes, the PhD, and those who study for it, is constrained.

We are unwilling to be simplistically negative about the trends and issues that we have discussed. But we suggest a need to think explicitly about the process that we are engaging in. Efforts to achieve greater clarity about objectives and outcomes are not always seen positively (e.g. MacLure, 2005). One of the students in our sample suggested that the PhD process is about "learning to use the right language, the right codes ... if you want to be cynical you could apply Foucault to the PhD process". When in 1924 the literary critic F. R. Leavis presented his PhD for

examination this was an indication that he was not entirely respected as an academic and had to prove his worth by passing the rather recently developed examination. At other times the PhD has been represented by some as an opportunity to produce a contribution to reshaping academic insights. We need to ask what in the early years of the 21st century is meant by a PhD thesis. Our arguments in this article are similar to those put forward by others including Hill (1995), Ziman (1995) and Allwood (2003) and so we are contributing to a growing sense that the rhetoric of unconstrained academic investigation that is often associated with PhD research is not entirely appropriate. To find these constraints in the field of citizenship studies which one might expect to be informed by an open democratic process is perhaps worthy of further investigation. We hope that by raising these issues we will encourage further work into the sort of PhD that will allow for an appropriate balance between opportunities to create new knowledge and the constraints that are, in fact, expressions of high standards and not a simple socialisation process in a quality assured international business environment.

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