

After a PhD, what's next?


How employable are doctorate holders? Do the skills they acquire match the skills needed for employment? How valuable is their degree? An EU-funded survey has the answers.



SOCIETY



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What comes after the hard-earned PhD? [Findings](#)  from a new survey supported by the EU-funded DocEnhance project paint an enlightening picture of doctorate holders' job situation and skills match and the value of their PhD degrees.

Expanding on a 2017 survey on doctorate holders, the current survey asked respondents a series of questions exploring the impact they believed their doctorate had on their career. It focused on transferable skills training,

satisfaction with PhD courses, collaboration with external organisations during the PhD and intersectoral mobility in the course of their career. The survey included participants from nine universities across Europe.

Overall, the survey showed that doctorate holders are mostly satisfied with their PhD programmes, with over 60 % willing to do the same doctoral training programme at the same institution if they were to go back in time. Additionally, PhD graduates quickly find jobs both in and outside academia, “although temporary contracts persist as a common (and unwelcome) situation,” according to the survey report.

Universities and research organisations are the largest source of employment for doctorate holders, more than two thirds of whom are engaged in research in their current jobs. However, for those working in non-academic sectors, only 31 % do research as part of their work. Interestingly, almost half of the survey respondents said that they work in jobs that do not require a PhD. “The requirement for a PhD was markedly higher for those engaged in research for their work, where it was required for a majority of respondents, compared to those that were not, where it was required by a small minority,” the study states.

Interestingly, although most PhD programmes offer transferable skills training, they tend to focus on research and other academic skills, according to the respondents, who rated critical-analytical thinking and problem-solving as the most important competences gained. Fortunately, doctorate holders' skills upon graduation match the skills needed for employment, although skills (mis)matches vary across different employment sectors.

Recommendations to improve doctoral training programmes

The survey findings yielded some recommendations for doctoral training institutions. Universities should diversify their training to cover more than just research and academic skills, and they should encourage skills development through different routes. In addition to formal skills training, skills could be fostered through collaboration and mobility during the PhD, as well as on-the-job training. Universities should also collect information on their PhD graduates' career destinations and skills usage through career tracking surveys. Additionally, information should be collected on the skills needed in the various employment sectors and in various types of jobs.

“The findings from this report indicate that those heading for non-academic careers feel overall less prepared for the job transition than those who remain in academia and are also less positive about the added value of the doctorate to their career,” the DocEnhance (Enhancing skills intelligence and integration into existing PhD programmes by providing transferable skills training through an open online platform) report states. Providing informed career advice targeted at PhD researchers early in their doctoral training would therefore give them insight on possible career paths.

Transferable skills training should also depend on PhD researchers' career plans and be accompanied with support for building their skills portfolios. Lastly, universities should encourage collaborations with non-academic partners during their PhD to develop skills and increase candidates' employability prospects.

For more information, please see:

[DocEnhance project website](#) 

Keywords

DocEnhance, skills, PhD, training, doctorate, research, academic, university, employment, career

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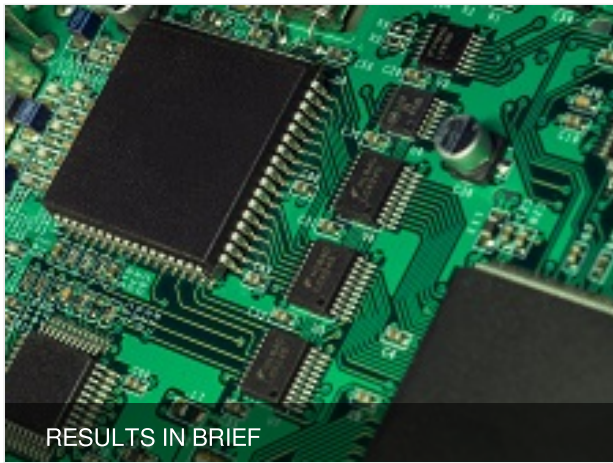
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